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## Looking at an open classroom : a field study approach.

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LOOKING AT AN OPEN CLASSROOM:  
A FIELD STUDY APPROACH

A Dissertation Presented

By

John Charles Fagan

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

June

1974

Education

LOOKING AT AN OPEN CLASSROOM:

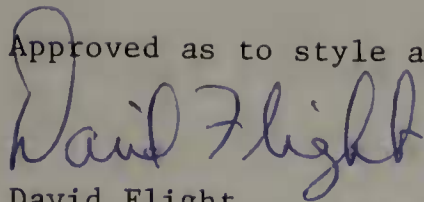
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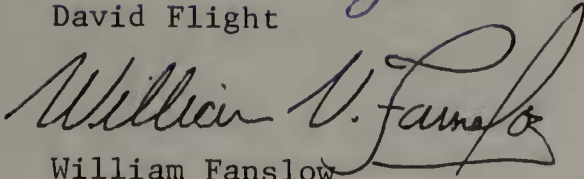
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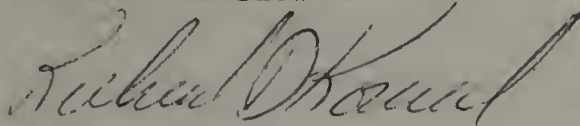
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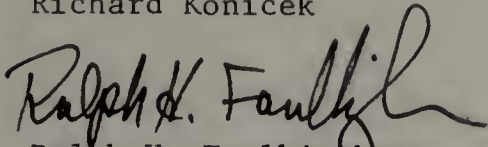
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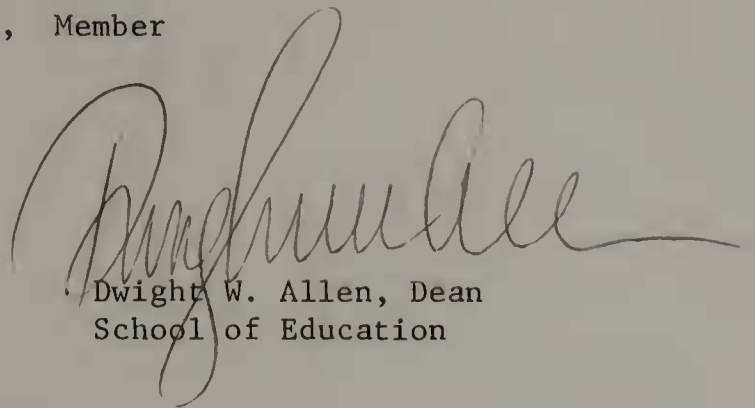
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Dedicated  
to  
Elaine.



Looking at an Open Classroom:

A Field Study Approach (June 1974)

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Directed by: Dr. David S. Flight

This dissertation is both a study of an elementary school open classroom and an application of anthropological field research techniques to an educational setting. An underlying premise of the study is that each classroom has all the elements of a complex social organization, that a school administrator should develop skills which will lead to an understanding of that organization, and that such understanding will be an asset to the administrator's decision making.

Open education classroom practices are based on assumptions about the characteristics of children and teachers. These assumptions, however, are about individuals without regard to their social situations. This study selected several of these assumptions which would appear to result in social interactions and used them as guidelines for observation to assist in the identification of the classroom social organization. The data that were used to define the classroom social structure were also analyzed for the reasons for the development of that particular organization, and for the effects of that organization on the individual members of the class.

In this particular classroom, those individuals who were included in the larger social sphere functioned in an autonomous manner. Those individuals who were excluded from that group had difficulty with their schoolwork and with their classmates. The personality and the expectations of the teacher appeared to be the central force in the development of the social order. Her leadership role was recognized and accepted by most of the students.

Research for this study was done mostly by participant observation, supplemented by interviews and investigation of school records, in one classroom over a period of four months. The anticipated complexities were identified and the feasibility of conducting field studies in classrooms was supported.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Open education is an approach to instruction in schools that is characterized by active participation of the students in a variety of learning experiences that grow out of the students' own ideas about what their educational needs are. In the United States it is an approach that has received considerable attention in recent years. It has been lauded and criticized; books have been written describing successful open classrooms and instructing teachers how to convert their classrooms to open ones; schools have been built with movable walls or no walls to foster open education. This study is not intended to be a testimonial for or a critique against open education; nor is it a blueprint for implementation of open education practices. Rather, it is an attempt to look closely at one open setting, describe some of the events that occur there, and then try to analyze those events in terms of what happens to the people who are a part of that environment.

The methodology for this study is based on the premise that a classroom is a society, and that standard social anthropological field research techniques can be adapted to study the classroom. A field study approach, grounded in the reality of one specific classroom, allows a researcher

to consider the multitude of variables found in that specific situation, rather than control the variables out of the study as research designs often attempt to do. It is my contention that a school administrator, specifically an elementary school principal, should have research skills that will enable him/her to look at his/her specific setting and understand what is happening there. Being able to gather and analyze data from relevant action settings the administrator should add insight to decision making. A major intention of conducting this particular investigation as a field study was to improve my own data gathering and analyzing skills with the hope that these skills will be useful to me as a school administrator.

#### Statement of the Problem

One basic premise of open education is that children will learn better in an environment that allows them to interact with each other while pursuing academic goals. This social interaction is supposed to further the personality development of the children in the direction of autonomy. However, this rationale for open education practices is only an assumption; research on the social learnings of open education is lacking. This study attempts to identify the social structure of one open classroom, account for its development, and monitor its effect on the children in that classroom.

### Significance of This Study

Open education practices are based on a set of assumptions. Although open classroom practices are being elaborated and refined, the assumptions themselves have not been tested. There is a need to look at the validity of the assumptions that are the reasons for the practices. This study focuses on the assumptions that deal with children's social development in an open classroom. Other studies of open classrooms have not emphasized this area. Since open education practices are a reality in many classrooms today, and since some of the premises for those practices have not yet been validated, this research is both timely and necessary.

### Methodology

I used anthropological field research techniques to study one open classroom over a period of four months to discover the social organization of that classroom. I functioned as a participant observer in that setting with the teacher, but not the students, aware of the purpose of my study. The theory was inductively developed from the situation as it existed. Most of the data was anecdotal with observations and interviews as the main types of data elicitation. Conclusions of this study were compared to other social organization studies for possible similarities.



## Anticipations

Although this study did not attempt to elicit data to support or refute any predetermined set of premises about social organizations, some general results were anticipated. I expected the teacher's influence on the social order to be high. I expected students would recognize role expectations and demonstrate role behaviors that conformed to some set of norms. I expected that this teacher influence and this role behavior of the students would affect individual students in different ways which could only be determined by looking closely at the total classroom situation.

## Chapter Organization

In the remainder of this chapter I will highlight the contents of the remaining chapters, then provide a very brief historical and philosophical overview of open education in the United States with some examples of how an open classroom operates.

Some of the writings and research about open education will be reviewed in Chapter II. I will also specifically define the problems with which this study is concerned, will state why a classroom ethnography is an appropriate way to study these problems, and will explain the theory that underlies this study with reference to both the general theoretical system and to its applications to classroom organization.

In Chapter III I will detail the research procedures used in this study. Included will be those assumptions of

open education which I used as guides for the research, the criteria for selection of a site, my role as a researcher in the classroom, and the types of data elicitation used.

A description of the classroom studies, background material on the students and the teacher, and examples of the daily classroom procedures will be found in Chapter IV.

The focus of Chapter V will be on the students and their activities in the classroom with some analysis of the social system in operation there. The activities of the teacher and an analysis of her place in the social structure of the classroom are in Chapter VI.

In Chapter VII are the conclusions of this study with implications for further research that can be done in open classrooms and some reflections on the field study approach to research.

### An Overview of American Open Education

American open education in the seventies is strongly modeled after an educational plan in operation in many of the British primary schools in the sixties. Joseph Featherstone (1971) described the operation of these British informal classrooms in Schools Where Children Learn. The book not only praised the British approach; it was critical of many practices in American schools.

Charles Silberman's extensive study of American schools, Crisis in the Classroom (1970), was written in a style intended to appeal to the general public. This report on practices in American schools did not show those practices to be in line with American ideals.

Because adults take the schools so much for granted, they fail to appreciate what grim, joyless places most American schools are, how oppressive and petty are the rules by which they are governed, how intellectually sterile and esthetically barren the atmosphere, what an appalling lack of civility obtains on the part of teachers and principals, what contempt they unconsciously display for children as children. (p. 10)

In recommending school reforms, Silberman (1970) gave his impressions of what schools could be like after he looked at British primary schools.

Schools can be humane and still educate well. They can be genuinely concerned with gaiety and joy and individual growth and fulfillment without sacrificing concern for intellectual discipline and development. They can be simultaneously child-centered and subject- or knowledge centered. They can stress esthetic and moral education without weakening the three R's. They can do all these things if - but only if - their structure, content, and objectives are transformed. (p. 208)

Although the educational reforms suggested by Featherstone and Silberman were new ideas to many Americans, they were not so new to a small group of American professional educators. Nyquist and Hawes (1972) list several of the American experiments with open education that were going on before the general public was familiar with the concept. In fact, many of the principles and practices of the British primary schools appear to be direct applications of the educational philosophy of John Dewey (1916). However, once public support was achieved, the transformation of many American classrooms was rapid. The British organizational term "integrated day" was changed by Americans to "open education" and the British "informal classroom" became the American "open classroom."

Underlying the open education programs that Featherstone and Silberman advocated are two basic assumptions: (1) students should be active participants in the learning process, and (2) students should be active in planning their own learning experiences. A visitor to an elementary school open classroom might expect to find it organized very unlike a traditional classroom. Missing would be the straight rows of desks and chairs with seats assigned to individual students, each desk containing the same set of textbooks and workbooks, all desks facing the front of the room where the teacher and his/her desk are located. Instead one might find a room organized into work areas with round tables and rectangular tables, places where children might work sitting or standing, areas where one child might work alone or an area where a group might gather on the floor. If there is a teacher's desk in the room it has probably been pushed into a corner or converted into a work or storage area.

Certainly one would find books in an open classroom - books of all kinds on many, many subjects. What one would not find would be thirty copies of the same book. And there would be an abundance of materials besides books - math materials like a balance scale, Cuisenaire rods, geo-blocks, measuring tapes, an abacus; language arts materials like spelling games, records, puppets; a science area with live animals and plants, batteries and bulbs, objects to sort and classify, microscopes and magnifying glasses; and all kinds of other things like tools,

construction paper, paints, a box of hats, cassette tape recorders, rhythm band instruments, road signs, or a cuckoo clock.

The children in the open classroom would have direct access to this variety of materials because open educators believe that the most productive learning occurs when children actively engage their environment. Children would be seen working on different tasks with different materials, talking to each other, helping each other, moving from work area to work area as their tasks change. The busy teacher seems to be everywhere, helping some students get started, assisting others who are having difficulty, probing and provoking thinking as he/she moves about.

All learning is not random in the open classroom. Much learning can be directed by the teacher just by the materials made available to the students. Part of each day is spent by the teacher and students planning what learnings might result during the school hours. The success of these planning sessions depends to a large extent on the mutual trust of the teacher and the students. Each has input to these planning sessions, both to the objectives and to the appropriate activities. The students recognize the expertise of the teacher and teacher respects the interests of the students. Likewise, there is often a time for reflection on the day's activities when students and teacher discuss what was accomplished that day, what might be considered completed, and what needs additional work.

It was classrooms like this that impressed Featherstone and Silberman, and classrooms like this that have been finding their way into many American elementary schools. It is such a classroom that this study will attempt to look at more closely.

## C H A P T E R I I

### THE PROBLEM AND THE THEORY

What social growth actually occurs in an open classroom? What part does the teacher play in the social growth of the students? What part do the other students have? These questions are the basis of this study.

#### Research on Open Classrooms

Throughout the literature of open education runs the theme that the personal growth of each child is of major importance. Balanced against the academic objectives are another set of goals. These goals include "developing independence, self-reliance, autonomy, trust, self-confidence, responsibility, and the like (Rathbone, 1971)." These are noble goals of education for citizens in a democracy. But specifying such goals as objectives of classroom experiences does raise some questions. How does one know when such goals are being achieved? What does a teacher do with students that promotes the development of independence, autonomy, trust, self-confidence, responsibility, and the like? What effect, if any, do pupils have on each other with regard to this type of growth? Research to support or refute the premise that open education practices in the United States actually result in individuals who are independent, autonomous, trusting,

self-confident, and responsible just has not been done. In fact, open classrooms are such a relatively new pattern of organization in the United States that research on any outcomes is just beginning.

The most extensive study of actual operating classrooms was done by Evans (1971) and concentrated on differentiating open classroom practices from those of traditional classrooms to see if an open classroom could be identified as such. Briefly, Evans developed a checklist of classroom practices, some considered to be open and some non-open, and sent observers into a number of classrooms to rate them. The items on the list that were considered to reflect open classroom practices were based on open education literature and were confirmed by recognized proponents of open education. A group of classrooms considered by Evans to be open were compared with a similar group considered to be traditional. Observers using the prepared checklist were able to differentiate between the two kinds of classrooms on many of the items.

As an early effort in research on open education practices the Evans' study is worth noting, particularly because it did look at actual classroom practices. However, the intent of the Evans' study was to show that open education practices were different from traditional practices, not to measure the results of these practices. Even the items on the Evans' checklist only touched lightly on the personal and



social aspects of the open classrooms, those aspects that this study considers primary. Twenty-five of fifty items referred to "provision for learning" (defined as flexibility in the organization of instruction and materials). The categories of "humaneness" (respect for children, openness, warmth) and "assumptions" (ideas about children and the process of learning, including ideas about children's innate curiosity and trust in children's ability to make decisions) were minimally represented on the rating scale because of the difficulty in writing specific items. "Items written for Humaneness or Assumptions about children's learning were often considered platitudes or cliches (p. 7)," again pointing out that some critical open education practices have received little research attention.

#### Social Growth in Open Classrooms

It is inadequate to develop educational practices that are grounded in an educational philosophy that is justified by the practices the philosophy encourages. When a philosophy is used to generate practice and then the practices are used as a defense for the philosophy, the entire process becomes circular and sterile. Henderson (1971) maintains that much of open education is trapped in such a circuit. He would prefer open education practices to be studied in a scientific manner.

The methods of science come into play only when procedures are instituted to demonstrate in a verifiable way that given practices, whatever their genesis, lead to predictable and specifiable outcomes (p. 7).

Evans (1971) has shown that the practices of open education can be identified; what remains is to see what results from these practices.

Positive social growth and the influence on that growth in a student by the teacher and other students is the subject of this study because it appears to be the aspect of development most taken for granted by open education advocates. It is as if they are saying that in a classroom where open education principles are adhered to, positive social growth automatically follows as though it were locked inside each individual and only needed to be released. Rathbone (1971) implies this automatic growth when he says,

Being expected to behave as an independent agent and living in an environment that assumes that every child has the innate capacity and urge to make sense of the world and to make meaningful decisions concerning his own activities in that world - these expectations do have their effects on the child. They teach him to accept himself as a maker of meaning and as someone whose choice count. They teach, however obliquely, a self-respect and self-esteem - and again, a view of himself as an agent (p. 111).

Finally, the point must be made that some of the major objectives of open education are goals for individuals. Words like independence, autonomy, and self-reliance imply individualism. Yet the classroom is a group setting. Children interact with the teacher and with other children throughout the day, but the child is to remain as the focus in the open classroom. Hassett and Weisberg (1972) write:

Each child is unique by virtue of all that makes this child to be what he is . . . . The emphasis must always be placed here. Learning has a social element . . . .

We all learn many things in the social context of home, neighborhood, social gatherings, sports, and play. But ultimately, it is the individual who learns, and the individual child can only learn in accord with his own makeup, stage of development, and ability. Every individual child must be the center of the social group that makes up the classroom. The social life - the interaction of the teacher with the pupils, of the child with other children - must be predicated on that basis (p. 65).

Does this happen? If it does, does each child develop independence, self-reliance, and autonomy? If open education practices do not result in every child being "the center of the social group that makes up the classroom," what then?

Barth (1972) recognizes that open educators have not put much emphasis on the impact of learning in a social context.

Open educators emphasize the individual . . . . There is talk about the interpersonal relation of child with teacher, but very little of the relationship of one child to another; yet children come to school together, eat together, and learn together. Children are seen as individual learners with unique styles, while in fact they are often members of many groups. What role do other children play in an individual's learning? . . . The dynamics among children are essential to any educational rationale. As yet open educators have not either the meaning for the child or the effect on learning that such interaction might have (pp. 30-31).

The effects of open education on children are a significant problem because the results of these ongoing processes in open classrooms are largely undocumented to date. Open education is today a reality in many American schools. The time has come to look closely at open education practices and analyze the outcomes. Refinement of both principles and practices might be the expected logical outgrowth of such a

study, not leading to less open education but to better open education through understanding.

### A Field Study Approach

Identifying an area of open education that needs to be researched defines one part of the problem. A second part of the problem addressed by this study is finding a satisfactory method of obtaining relevant data when the pertinent behaviors of concern have not been clearly delineated by anyone. To find out what social interactions are occurring in an open classroom, a reasonable beginning seems to be documenting the behaviors that do occur in such a setting in preference to trying to imagine what behaviors might be happening and looking only for those. In the latter case, the risk of not noting behaviors that were not listed introduces the possible error of overlooking the most relevant of the actual interactions.

This technique of looking at a total social situation for the purpose of documenting and analyzing what happens in it - referred to in this study as a field study approach and in anthropology as ethnography - has received support as a viable way of developing understandings of classrooms. Lutz (1973) has called the approach "more exciting, more difficult, and more important" than most other types of studies for "it will lead to asking the right questions which will lead to later statistical studies," while Gearing (1973) maintains that the hidden curriculum (value transmission) can only be

seen through such field studies. Henry (1972) has written that if the needs of the school child are to be met, the first step is to start

. . . by investigating with a mind free from preconceptions, the social processes of learning as observable in schools. When this is done a new universe of knowledge opens to us requiring new concepts (p. 40).

Henry (1972) urges the making of a record of children functioning in schools and asking, "What are the values, perceptions, and attitudes of the people in the school? What is the internal structure of the school? What goes on in the classroom?" with the dynamic sum of these questions resulting in classroom descriptions from which can be derived the general answer to what is happening to students in classrooms.

A field study approach seems particularly appropriate to situations such as open classrooms where the behaviors to be studied are complex and somewhat undefined at present. A field study approach allows the researcher the flexibility of incorporating unpredicted data while focusing on a particular area of concern. Malinowski (1922) explains it this way:

Good training in theory and acquaintance with the latest results is not identical with being burdened with 'preconceived ideas.' If a man sets out on an expedition determined to prove certain hypotheses, if he is incapable of changing his views constantly and casting them off ungrudgingly under the pressure of evidence, needless to say his work will be worthless. But the more problems he brings with him into the field, the more he is in the habit of moulding his theories to facts, and of seeing facts in their bearing upon theory, the better he is equipped for his work. Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker (pp. 8-9).

This study has already cited some of the appropriate open education philosophy and the problems that philosophy fore-shadows. Description and analysis of actual classroom behaviors would be a beginning step in the development of generalizations about their effects.

In choosing to employ field techniques to study the social aspects of learning in an open classroom, this research agrees with the recommendations of Smith and Schumacher (1973) and Ben-David (1973). Speculating on the socializing effects of schooling, Smith and Schumacher say,

The vigor and variety of schools and classrooms, reflecting different societal conceptions and ideals, seem an important part of the elementary school scene. In our judgment, the descriptive and analytic realities of such schooling deserve a high priority on the agenda of social scientists concerned with elementary education (p. 323).

Ben-David advocates a reconception of social science research models, urging that more basic studies be done as a first step in theory building.

There is an assumption that social science theory has to have a very high degree of generality, like, presumably, physics theory. Since to aspire to such generality is completely out of tune with the empirical inquiries of social scientists, what actually happens is that social scientists present empirical approaches as if they were general theories . . . But in no case can ( a social scientist) explain the whole situation from his knowledge of basic underlying processes and their interrelationship. He must relate these processes to particular events and to particular conditions of social structure and culture prevailing in a particular place and time. Therefore he must start with a more or less empirically grounded and partly intuitive explanatory model and then check it constantly both against empirical evidence and against his improving knowledge of underlying processes and structural regularities (pp. 39-40).

The initial model used in this study is explained in the next chapter, while the strategies for checking the theory against emerging data are explained in the chapter on research procedures.

### Classroom Field Study

This study is not the first attempt at an elementary classroom field study. Philip Jackson (1968) used some basic field study techniques to develop the ideas he presents in Life in Classrooms. However, the text itself, as Jackson admits, is not a scientific explanation of how he arrived at his opinions, nor is it even clear much of the time which are merely speculations of the author.

Smith and Geoffrey (1968) are more rigorous in their study of a traditional urban elementary classroom. Smith explains his approach as one of selecting and defining problems, checking frequency and distribution of phenomena, constructing social systems models, and making final analyses and presenting results. Even in this traditional setting where pupils were located at separate desks throughout the day and direct communication between pupils was not encouraged, Smith was able to identify the development of a social structure and analyze the effects of it.

After thorough researching I have not been able to locate any field studies of open classrooms. What are appearing more and more frequently are handbooks for organizing open classrooms

or journalistic accounts of some open classroom situations. The first mentioned are not intended to be research studies and the second most often suffer from a lack of any attempt to analyze rigorously what effects are resulting. Children Come First (Murrow and Murrow, 1971), although not based on a U. S. setting, is an example of a well-written description, while Open Education: Alternatives within Our Tradition (Hassett and Weisberg, 1972) is such a confusion of description and opinion it cannot even qualify as good journalism.

The need for a field study of an open classroom exists both because there is still much that is unknown about the effects of open education and because such a study would be the first of this type to be done in an open situation. The problem of what are the realities of open education and how can they be defined and measured, particularly with reference to the social aspects, is a problem that deserves attention.

### Theoretical Framework

Although this study concentrates on one elementary school classroom, the approach employed aims to contribute to general theory development in the social sciences. Parsons and Shils (1951) say such general theory should, first, aid in the codification of existing knowledge; second, serve as a guide to research by providing hypotheses for investigation; and, third, control against biases of observation and interpretation that occur when specialized work is carried out.



The classroom is here viewed as a system,

. . . a rather circumscribed complex of relatively bounded phenomena, which, within those bounds, retains a relatively stationary pattern of structure . . . in spite of a high degree of variability in the details of distribution and interrelations among its constituent units of lower order (Weiss, 1969).

And for the analysis of this system to contribute to general theory, the complexity of it must be described as something more than a sum of its parts.

The more . . . does not at all refer to any measurable quantity in the observed systems themselves; it refers solely to the necessity for the observer to supplement the sum of the statements that can be made about separate parts by such additional statements as will be needed to describe the collective behavior of the parts, when in an organized group. In carrying out this upgrading process, he (the observer) is in effect doing no more than restoring information content that has been lost on the way down in the progressive analysis of the unitary universe in abstracted elements (Weiss, 1969, p. 11).

Thus, the theory here is inductively developed. It attempts to account for specific units of data and develop them into generalizations while not neglecting the total setting from which the data was gathered. Smith (1968) was describing this process of reasoning when he told why he chose to do a field study of an urban classroom.

The purpose of this investigator was twofold. He wanted to look at the 'real world' and describe it carefully. Then he wanted to back away and conceptualize this 'real world' in broader, more abstract terms that would be applicable to any classroom (p. 5.)

Smith likened his analysis to that of putting together a jigsaw puzzle.

The pieces are strewn about. One has faith that order exists. Simple fits occur with struggling. Later sections of green merge with the sections of reds and browns and blues. In time, the whole is there (p. 15).

While a classroom can be classified as a micro-society because it has relatively stable membership operating within relatively defined boundaries to achieve some common goals, it also is an open system with inputs from and outputs to the larger macro-society. The personalities, the social behaviors, and the cultural backgrounds of the members of the classroom society cannot be accounted for in a general theory without regard for the influences of the macro-society. Likewise, when focusing on a classroom setting as the source of empirical data that will be used for theory building, it will often be convenient to refer to phenomena as being part of the personality systems, social systems, and cultural systems of the members, divisions suggested by Parsons and Shils (1951). These divisions are proposed as an aid to conceptualization; understanding of the total system requires that the interrelationships of these divisions be understood.

In the present context, cultural systems is intended to be synonymous with Harris' (1971) term ideology.

Ideology embraces the entire realm of socially patterned thought. It includes the explicit and implicit knowledge, opinions, values, plans and goals that people have about their ecological circumstances: their understanding of nature, technology, production, and reproduction; their reasons for living, working, and reproducing. Ideology also embraces all thoughts and patterned expression of thoughts that describe, explain, and justify the parts of social structure; that give meaning

and purpose to domestic and political economy and to the maintenance of law and order in domestic and political relations; that describe, justify, and plan the delegation of authority, the division of labor, the exchange of products, the sharing or non-sharing of resources (p. 146).

Personality systems have as foci the individuals themselves. They are here used to refer to individual motives, needs, drives, and satisfactions. Included in these systems would be behaviors that appear to be motivated by the needs of a particular individual in the sense that the motivation is intrinsic rather than only extrinsically expected.

Social systems are a product of interactions. These interactions result in expectations that lead to the formation of roles.

For most purposes the conceptual unit of the social system is the role. The role is a sector of the individual actor's total system of action. It is the point of contact between the system of action of the individual actor and the social system . . . The primary ingredient of the role is the role-expectation . . . What an actor is expected to do in a given situation both by himself and by others constitutes the expectations of that role (Parsons and Shils, 1951, p. 192).

Social systems are also characterized by a variety of behaviors which result in many members of that system interacting with each other to achieve shared or collective goals.

By collective goals we mean (1) those which are either prescribed by persons acting in a legitimate position of authority and in which the goal is expected to involve gratification for members other than but including the particular actor, or (2) those goals which, without being specifically prescribed by authority, have the same content as regards the recipients of their gratifications (Parsons and Shils, 1951, p. 192).

Finally, role expectations and shared goals give a social system boundaries.

The boundry . . . is that criterion whereby some persons are included as members and others are excluded as non-members. The inclusion or exclusion of a person depends on whether or not he has a membership role in the collectivity (Parsons and Shils, 1951, p. 192).

Classroom societies have all the complexities of larger societies. The individuals who are collected there bring with them their own set of needs and drives; they already have been exposed to many of the values and beliefs of some other society and have probably internalized some of those expectations; and, they most likely have learned to play some roles. The classroom system that develops will be a product of the students' existing systems and the new drives, values, and role expectations stimulated by the classroom environment. Any comprehensive understanding of life in classrooms must deal with these complexities, otherwise, only distortion would result.

The initial theory presented here proposes a model that explains classroom behaviors of both teacher and students in terms of the needs of the individuals, their values, and their successes in role performance. When what is happening in any classroom can be explained as interrelationships of the above factors, then the goals of elementary school education or of open education can be measured and the results of certain pedagogical practices can be more predictable. Dewey (1938) cautions against promoting any philosophy of education as dogma. "Any theory and set of practices is dogmatic which is not based upon critical examination of its own underlying

principles (p. 22)." A social science approach to theory building can help educators avoid such a pitfall.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The first step of this study was to determine specifically which areas of open education would be of concern. Not all the principles of open education were of equal interest to this study. While, in fact, I did pay attention to most of what was occurring in the classroom under observation, having certain guidelines for attention helped me select certain events for closer observation and follow-up. What was avoided was establishing in advance any limits for observing specific incidents, thereby freeing me to incorporate any and all relevant data as they developed.

The focus of this study was on the interpersonal behaviors of the students and the teacher in an open classroom. This included student-to-student interactions, student-to-teacher interactions, and any other interactions that seemed pertinent to the classroom under observation. At times I felt it was necessary to include observations of an interaction between a student and his/her physical environment because such interactions seemed relevant to the principles in question.

## Basic Assumptions

Open education practices are based on assumptions.

These assumptions, explained in detail by Barth (1972), are often related closely to the goals of open education: the development of independent, autonomous, self-reliant, trusting individuals. The assumptions that provided the base for the observations here included the following:

(1) Children have the potential of intrinsic motivation for learning which can be actualized in an open setting (Barth, 1972).

Children may have in and of themselves the capacity for motivation, but motivation is realized only through the relationship of the individual to something outside himself, to other persons or to bits and pieces of the world (Barth, 1972, p. 20).

What actual effect does the outside world have on a child's motivation?

It remains for open educators to clarify the place of the adult in releasing or activating the child's motivation and to differentiate the child's control from the adult's (Barth, 1972, p.21).

(2) Self-confidence is developed when children make important choices about their learning (Barth, 1972). What are the "important" choices? Does confidence follow choice, or is it the other way around?

The important point here is that open educators have not yet considered, let alone established, a relationship between development of self-confidence and the ability to make responsible choices about learning. So far, the two are seen as necessary to each other, but the nature of the relationship remains to be spelled out (Barth, 1972, p. 22).

(3) Children are competent to make significant decisions about their learning and will choose activities that are of high interest to them (Barth, 1972). What are the factors that influence children's choices? Does a child usually base his/her choice on a personal learning need? What makes an activity interesting to a child?

(4) When children are interested in the same activity, "they will often collaborate in some way (Barth, 1972)." When and why do children choose or not choose to collaborate?

(5) "When a child learns something which he considers important to him, he will wish to share it with others (Barth, 1972)." What kinds of sharings occur and what results from these sharings?

(6) "The structure of knowledge is personal and idiosyncratic and a function of the synthesis of each individual's experience with the world (Barth, 1972)." This assumption raises the complex question that underlies this study. What do individuals learn from interactions with a world that is largely made up of other people?

While the above assumptions are concerned with the students, there are assumptions about the teacher that are important to consider, too. These include:

(1) The learning environment of any classroom is an extension of the personality of the teacher . . . Whatever else the teacher in an open classroom does, it is vital that he know himself and be himself, for only through encounters with real persons will children learn to know and be themselves (Barth, 1972, p. 65).



(2) The teacher in the open classroom respects children as individuals by stressing the quality of the relationship between adult and child and among children rather than the frequency or quantity, in the belief that a highly individual contact between individuals is more important for learning than continual group exposures (Barth, 1972, p.74).

(3) "It is vital to the successful functioning of the open classroom that the teacher be an authority, without becoming an authoritarian (Barth, 1972)." The distinction here is that an authority relies on experience and judgment, while an authoritarian relies on the power to sanction or punish.

If a teacher behaves according to the above expectations what effect does it have on the students' behaviors toward the teacher and toward each other?

The above nine assumptions and the questions they raise provided the initial structure for the observations that were to follow. They cued me in deciding which incidents to watch closely, suggested follow-through procedures and guided the analysis of the data. Focusing on the social learnings was done at the expense of determining the quality of the academic learning that was also resulting. For example, an observation might include factors involved in a student's choice of a mathematics activity, that student's involvement with the teacher or other students as concerned the activity, and any outcomes that resulted from pursuing the choice or from the interactions. What was not noted was the student's progress in mathematics as the weeks passed. Attention to subject matter learning was noted when it appeared to be directly linked to social learnings.

## Site Selection

Once the direction of the observations was established, the task of locating a suitable site to observe was begun. Since the observations were intended to be done in an open classroom, such a classroom had to be identified. The two chief criteria categories I used for selection were (1) the classroom organization with regard to the assumptions it made about the students, and (2) the perception of the teacher about his/her role as an open educator. This division is supported by Chittenden and Bussis:

A major assumption of an open philosophy is that the organization of experiences and growth of knowledge can best take place when the child himself is very much at the center of the learning process and acquires responsibility for learning. On the other hand, this does not imply that the teacher is merely understanding and supportive in any essentially passive way. While teachers certainly should strive to understand and support children, they are also perceived as active, thinking adults whose job it is to extend and integrate children's learning in all spheres. It therefore (is) apparent that 'child-centeredness' and 'adult-centeredness' might be well viewed as independent dimensions, rather than as opposite ends of a single continuum (1971, p. 361).

Suggestions for possible observation sites were sought from university staff members involved in open education teacher training programs. From this initial list of suggestions some classrooms were eliminated because distance from the university was so great that observation time would be limited. Another set of classrooms was eliminated because those classrooms involved many student teachers and volunteers, and I felt that such situations were so unique that generalizations about a more typical adult-child ratio would be difficult. Other

classrooms were deemed inappropriate after I visited them and discovered that although the students were involved in many learning activities, they were assigned to the activities rather than allowed to choose them. One situation was not selected after the teacher revealed to me in an interview that students in the class "had open education in the afternoon," leaving her morning time to make sure "the important things got done."

The final site was tentatively chosen after an interview with the teacher indicated her perceptions of her role accorded in many respects with the characteristics of an open classroom teacher listed by Chittenden and Bussis (1970). At the time of the interview the teacher was attending a workshop designed to stimulate ideas for instruction in an open setting. Her comments indicated she was seeking a balance between the child as a self-learner and the teacher as a learning guide. Question: "Do you think you have an open classroom?" Answer: "We are about three-quarters open. I'm still working at letting children make decisions about their learning and helping them see the value of activities I have provided." On a later occasion, after the observations were underway, my impressions of the initial interview were reinforced when the teacher shared with me a chart she used to explain to parents the operation of the open classroom. It was the same chart I had used as an interview guide. Developed by Chittenden and Bussis (1970), it called for high input of both students and teacher to the learning situation.

A discussion with the teacher of the daily class schedule indicated that time was provided each day for students to suggest and choose learning activities, that during the working time the teacher both assisted in the learning and evaluated the progress of individuals, and that a time was set aside each day for the students to reflect on their work and share their accomplishments with their classmates. This discussion between the teacher and me took place in July, 1973, when the classroom under consideration was not in session, so no evaluation of actual operations could be made then. I was able to visit the site a week before school reopened, and, at that time, was able to note that there was an abundance of learning materials easily accessible to the students, that areas were provided for children to work in small groups or alone, that a variety of activities was possible at one time. The room was organized with children in mind. The bookshelves were low; large floor pillows were on the rug near the books; tools were hung at child height; paper, scissors, paints, staplers, tacks, and rubber bands were where students could see them and get them unassisted.

The information obtained in the interview with the teacher and the arrangement of the classroom noted in the initial visit led to a conditional selection of this setting as the observation site. During the first few days of school in September the criteria for selection were confirmed. The children did participate in the planning of learning experiences, did choose from a variety of activities, and the teacher did try to guide rather than direct the students

in their experiences. The principal of the school mentioned to me that this classroom was one of the "open" classrooms in that school where both open and traditional settings were operating as alternative instructional styles. Two university professors who were involved in a teacher preparation program that emphasized the integrated day approach and who were familiar with this teacher and classroom indicated to me that this teacher and classroom operated within the definition of an open classroom. And, a student teacher who was preparing for integrated day teaching was assigned to this classroom for her practical work. The interview and the observations of the classroom in action for the first few days, along with the confirming opinions, determined the choice of this classroom as the site for the extended observations.

#### Observation Agreement

The teacher agreed to allow me to visit her classroom and conduct my observations after I explained as fully as possible the purposes of this study and the methods I would use to obtain data. I explained that the purpose of carrying out this study was to sharpen my observational and analytical skills for future use as a school administrator, as well as to gain insight into the operations of an open classroom. I also explained that I was principally interested in the responses of children to open education and in the role of the teacher with regard to her impact on the students.

Data were to be collected by note taking while the class was in session, talking to the children, reviewing the children's work and records, discussing of observations with the teacher, and using any other methods that later seemed appropriate with the teacher being made aware of those additions. In fact, additions were made. I participated in parent conferences as a listener, interviewed the principal, read communications to the teacher from parents and the principal, and talked with other teachers in the building -- all of which were known to the teacher involved in the observations.

It was agreed in advance that I would be allowed to observe on days of my own choosing, that all classroom events could be noted, that I could talk with any students I chose, and that my notes would not be subject to review by the teacher during the observation period. The teacher also agreed to spend some time with me each day to answer questions I wanted to ask.

In return for the privilege of observing this classroom I agreed to several conditions. Mainly, I agreed to assist in the classroom operations as "an extra pair of hands" during the observation time, doing whatever the teacher thought would be of help. It was understood that what I was asked to do should not inhibit my observations or require me to make decisions that were normally reserved for the teacher. I would not participate in planning sessions, arbitrate disputes between students, assign or choose children for tasks, or

decide which students needed what attention. Although qualified as an elementary teacher, I was to be treated by the teacher must as any non-professional adult who had time to volunteer assistance in the classroom.

I also agreed to discuss the content of my observations only with my advisors and to share this dissertation with the teacher for discussion before the final draft was submitted for final review. She, in turn, agreed not to ask what conclusions were developing while the observations were going on, but to wait until all information had been obtained and analyzed before seeking any feedback. Although the temptation to bend this last part of the agreement frequently occurred, both of us adhered to it rigidly throughout the weeks of observation.

I informed the principal of the school of the purposes and procedures of this study. He agreed to allow the observations to proceed without adding further conditions. Typical of the monitoring of this work by the principal was his friendly question once a week or so, "How's everything going?" My steady reply was "Fine," and that was the extent of the conversation.

#### Observer's Role and Schedule

Actual observations began on the first day of school in September, 1973. During every week that followed I spent two full days a week, usually Tuesday and Thursday, observing in the classroom. The final observation was on the last

Thursday before the Christmas recess in December, 1973, for a total of thirty days of observation. An observation day began with my arriving at the school ten or fifteen minutes before the children entered the building and usually ended when the teacher left the building in the afternoon. When the children were at recess I was in the schoolyard for the half of the period that the teacher was on duty. When the teacher went to the teachers' lounge for an assigned break, I went along. When the children ate lunch, I ate wherever the teacher ate. I went with the class on field trips, to resource rooms, to assemblies, and to the gymnasium or outside activity areas. I tried to see as much during every observation day as I could, looking for chances to watch both teacher and children in as many situations as possible.

A primary concern of mine was to be as unobtrusive as possible while gathering data. Choosing the role of participant-observer facilitated this. In this particular classroom everyone was busy with learning activities most of the time. A nonparticipant would have been more conspicuous than anyone who was participating. Other adults, usually parents or school resource personnel, were frequently in the room and working with students, again reducing my impact. Active participation also allowed me access to activities for close observation and a natural entry into conversations with the students for purposes of eliciting data.

First, to the students, I was introduced as a person who had once been a teacher, but who was now studying at the



university and who would be spending a couple of days a week helping in the classroom. Later, to other teachers, parents and visitors, I was introduced as a graduate student who wanted to spend some time in a classroom familiarizing himself with some open classroom procedures and helping in the classroom whenever I could. No further elaboration of my role was given by the teacher that I was aware of, and I likewise, did not offer any other explanation of my frequent presence. I did reveal my previous teaching experience if asked, or that my future plans were for a position in educational administration. Actually, few people questioned my presence or pressed for details of what I was doing; the self-contained classrooms and the several student teachers in the building helped reduce my visibility.

Also, the very structure of the field study approach applied to the classroom brought a degree of its own non-obtrusiveness. The teacher soon recognized, as she mentioned to me in a conversation, that I would observe often enough to get a balanced impression of what was happening in that classroom. It would have been impossible, I think, for the teacher to show me only what she wanted me to see when I observed all day long, two days a week, for four months. Thus, I believe the teacher pursued her normal activities most of the time. No one--not the children, or the teacher, or the student teacher--was asked to do anything special, different or unusual for my benefit. No schedules were altered, no tests

given, no controlled experiments conducted.

### Data Collection

My single, consistently unusual behavior was to take notes constantly while in the classroom. When quizzed about this activity by the children I explained that I was writing things down so I could remember them later. The children each kept a written record of their daily activities in a notebook; I likened my recording to theirs except that I chose to write things down as they happened instead of waiting for the recording period. I did not take notes during times that I considered obtrusive. I took no notes while outside for recess, in the teachers' lounge, at assemblies, or during lunch. When events occurred during those times that I felt should be recorded, I did so immediately upon my return to the classroom. Notes were taken during after-school talks with the teacher and while I was sitting in on parent conferences.

Narrative note taking was the primary means of recording data. Stenographers notebooks were used for this purpose. The left half of each page contained a descriptive, running account of the activities of a day. The right half was used for my personal notes: questions to myself, questions to ask the teacher, reminders to review notes for similar incidents, opinions, impressions, and material other than direct observations. The notes taken during the day were recopied in the evening into a larger notebook in more complete form

than the pace of the day's activities allowed in the classroom. These notes were regularly reviewed for completeness. Among the items checked were the attention I paid to verbal behavior, nonverbal behavior, use of space, inclusion of all students, use of time, and composition of small groups. This type of review helped me keep my ongoing observations balanced. The notes were also reviewed to make sure description and opinion were being kept as separate as possible.

Watching was only one form of data elicitation; listening played an important part, too. Whenever the teacher and students grouped for verbal interactions, I placed myself where I could hear what was being said. When activities were underway I moved around the room frequently to hear what was being said among children, or between the teacher and a child, to supplement what I could see happening. Since the classroom was seldom silent, this moving close enough to hear what was being said was vital to understanding the full context of events. Also, my strategy on the playground and in the teachers' lounge was to refrain as much as possible from entering conversations, but to consciously attend to what the teacher said to others and to what others said to her. On the playground I usually could avoid being drawn into conversations by standing close to the teacher, but facing away from the center point of the conversation and watching the children at play. In the teachers' lounge I usually busied myself with the snack that was available that day

while the others did the talking.

More direct verbal information was obtained by interview. Often, while engaged in activities with students, I would ask them questions designed to fill out my data. I frequently asked questions of the student teacher when she was not involved with students, and I often used the lunch period to ask both the teacher and student teacher questions about the events of the morning. No notes were taken during any of these informal interview times so as to encourage more relaxed replies. What was said was noted immediately after the conversations.

After the students left school for the day I had formal interviews with the teacher on an average of one interview for every three days of observation. I prepared the basic questions in advance and took notes as the teacher replied. The formality of this time was evidenced by the fact that the teacher stopped everything else and sat down at a table with me until the questioning time was over. The teacher seemed open to these interviews; I would always ask for after school time a day or two ahead and was always accommodated. The student teacher frequently sat in on these interviews and added her comments more regularly as time passed. All interviews were conducted in the classroom with only the teacher, the student teacher, and me present. This privacy seemed to facilitate openness. When others entered the room during an interview, the interview usually stopped until only the three of us remained.

The combination of narrative entries and interviews was intended to give a more complete impression of the operations of the classroom than either one alone could provide. I could check my impressions of what was happening against the teacher's and the teacher's opinions against my observations. This combination also seemed to reduce any threat that the teacher might have had about being constantly observed. She was assured of a time when she could get on record her impressions of what was going on and her reasons for actions she initiated. In fact, adhering to this combination right from the beginning probably was the reason the teacher started volunteering information to me about the reasons for her behaviors during the regular day without my asking, resulting in more complete notes than I would have had if I had to think of all the questions.

In addition to the narrative notes and interviews, other forms of data were elicited. Pupils' records were surveyed for family information, birth dates, and test scores. The teacher provided me with copies of notices sent to the school staff by the principal, and I was allowed to make copies of notes the teacher received from parents. The teacher narrated to me her account of meetings she attended at which I was not present, such as faculty meetings, meetings involving only the teacher and the principal, conversations with parents, and conversations with other teachers. I was able to sit in on a number of parent-teacher conferences when they were regularly scheduled by the school in October. An interview was held with the

principal for an hour one morning in December. And the teacher usually found time each day I was there to fill me in on things that had happened on days I was not present. This last procedure of filling in the gaps was initiated by the teacher and seldom needed any prompting.

As one check on my intrusion, I asked the teacher to report to me anything she consciously did that was rooted in conversations or interviews we had had. Periodically, I would ask during an interview, "Have you made any changes in your organization or behavior as a result of anything I have asked or said?" Her reply was always negative. Several times during the months of observation the teacher expressed a desire to get my opinion as to possible courses of action for her in improving certain situations, but she, herself, would always recall that our agreement prohibited my offering suggestions, and she never pressed for such opinions. I, too, resisted the frequent urge to offer alternatives that I thought might be appropriate to the classroom organization. This became increasingly more difficult as patterns began to emerge from the data and empathy between the teacher and me grew. It was a conscious effort by both parties that allowed me to maintain satisfactory detachment.

The two-day a week observation schedule also appears to have contributed to observer objectivity. Neither teacher nor children came to expect me to be present all of the time. The break between days of observation was long enough for me to

see the newness of each day and made it possible to concentrate intensely on the scene for the full observation time. The time between observations gave me a chance to review and reflect on the data. Even the driving time of two hours to and from the observed classroom was used to advantage; I carried a cassette tape recorder on those trips, using it to record ideas and impressions that occurred during that time.

Two checklists were developed to crosscheck some impressions from the data. One list was used to note which students were working together at various random times on selected days. The other list noted what a student was doing at randomly selected times on selected days: whether that student was engaged in the activity he/she had selected, or in a related activity, or a nonrelated activity, or appeared not to be involved in any activity. The information on these checklists supplemented the narrative data also being recorded at the same time.

In sum, the research procedure called for looking at an open classroom in action, recording how children reacted to one another and with the teacher, asking for information to amplify the observations, thinking about all this, and then looking some more. The procedure was repeated twice a week, every week, for four months. As patterns of behavior appeared to emerge, these patterns were looked at in greater detail while attempts were made to account for deviations in

those patterns. What follows in the next chapters is an account of some patterns found in this classroom which seemed particularly relevant to the premises of this study.



## C H A P T E R I V

### THE CLASS AND THE CLASSROOM

#### Information About the Students

On the first day of school in September eighteen students reported to the classroom. The class was designated a mixed second and third grade both to offer students an opportunity for assignment to a vertical age group situation and to keep the total second and third grade population of the school in optimum class size. There was also a separate second and a separate third grade classroom in this school. According to the teacher of concern here, parents of the children in her class were told that the class would have second and third graders in it, and that the structure of the classroom organization was intended to be open education. All parents, reported the teacher, had the right to request that their child be assigned to another room if they objected to the mixed grade or the open structure. Therefore, all students in this classroom should have been there with the consent of their parents.

Six students, two girls and four boys, had been in this classroom the previous year as second graders and had elected to do their third year work in the same setting. Five of the second graders, two girls and three boys, had been in an open first grade classroom the year before. Two of the third grade boys had been in a more teacher structured second grade the

previous year, but that grade was reported to have had an individualized reading program that allowed students to choose their own books. One third grade girl had been in that classroom for about the last month of last year when she transferred to this school. One third grade boy had been in a very teacher-structured room the previous year. And, a second grade boy and girl and a third grade boy were in their first year at this school. The class roster follows; all names have been changed.

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Age as of Oct. 1</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Experience last year</u>
1.	Edward	8	3rd	in this room
2.	Beth	8	3rd	in this room
3.	Joey	9	3rd	in this room
4.	Marc	8	3rd	in this room
5.	Martha	8	3rd	in this room
6.	Jeff	8	3rd	in this room
7.	Raymond	9	3rd	non-open class
8.	Alex	9	3rd	non-open class
9.	Danny	8	3rd	non-open class
10.	Tamico	8	3rd	non-open class
11.	Todd	10	3rd	not at this school
12.	Cindy	7	2nd	open first grade
13.	Marie	8	2nd	open first grade
14.	Arnold	7	2nd	open first grade
15.	Perry	7	2nd	open first grade
16.	Hank	8	2nd	open first grade
17.	Betty Ann	8	2nd	not at this school
18.	Ross	7	2nd	not at this school

During the first two weeks of October the enrollment was increased to twenty-three by the addition of five black

students who were bussed to this suburban school from a large nearby city. As near as I could determine, students who were bussed to this school were assigned to classes in a way that would balance class sizes. I saw no indication that the students or the parents did any choosing of classes. Prior to the assignment of these five black students, there was only one other minority student in the classroom, Tamico, a Japanese girl whose family was temporarily in this country while her father was doing graduate work at an American university. The additional students were:

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Age as of Oct. 1</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Experience last year</u>
19.	Nora	7	2nd	inner-city school
20.	Woodrow	8	2nd	inner-city school
21.	Reggie	7	2nd	inner-city school
22.	Lisa	8	3rd	inner-city school
23.	Dorothy	8	3rd	inner-city school

The class was now made up of thirteen third graders and ten second graders, fourteen boys and nine girls. Seven of the children had repeated one or more grades of school before assignment to this class. Some of the children came from large families, some were the only child in a family. Some were the oldest child, some the youngest, some somewhere in between. Two children did not have fathers at home and one child lived with his father and stepmother. In summary, the class population was a mixture of sexes, races, physical sizes, sibling status, degrees of success in school, and experiences with open education.

Perhaps unique about this group as a whole was the amount of education of the parents of the students. Twelve fathers and ten mothers had college degrees. All twelve fathers and three of those mothers were actively working in professions. This school was located in a town considered to be the suburban home of some of the nearby city's professionals. However, this particular school drew some of its students from the low-rent housing area of that town, and accepted city children from low-income families through the bussing program. Eight of the parents indicated they worked at non-professional jobs. Fifteen parents said they were not working full time, including one father. This information was taken from the school records and elaborated on by the teacher. The socio-economic range of the class was a broad one.

Now in her fifth year of teaching, the teacher had been using open education techniques for four of those years. For the past two years she had been affiliated with a university program that placed student teachers in open settings and that provided cooperating teachers with the opportunity to attend open education workshops at the university in the summer. This teacher took an active part in those workshops.

Her school day regularly began thirty minutes to an hour before the pupils arrived, and she was frequently the last to leave the building. During the weeks I observed, she was present on all but three school days.

## Classroom Organization

All of the classrooms in this school were on the same floor of the building located in two wings separated by the office area and resource rooms (Fig. 4.1). The observed classroom did not connect with classrooms on either side; it was completely self-contained. One door opened on the corridor and another door opened on a grassy area between the wings. The wall of the classroom adjacent to this grassy area was mostly windows. The grassy area itself was not used as a play area, and the children entered the building through the wing door which did open on to the playground.

The classroom was organized into work areas and resource areas (Fig.4.2). Children did not have individually assigned seats. Each child had an assigned storage bin--actually a plastic dishpan--which was kept in one of the two bin frames. In the bins were kept the student's notebook, workbook, pencils, crayons, and other personal articles. There was no teacher's desk in the room; she kept her materials in her closet or file cabinet.

When children were working alone or in groups they usually worked at one of the tables, at a desk, on the rug, in the corridor just outside the room, or on the cement steps outside the door to the grassy area. When the class met as a whole, they met on the rug.

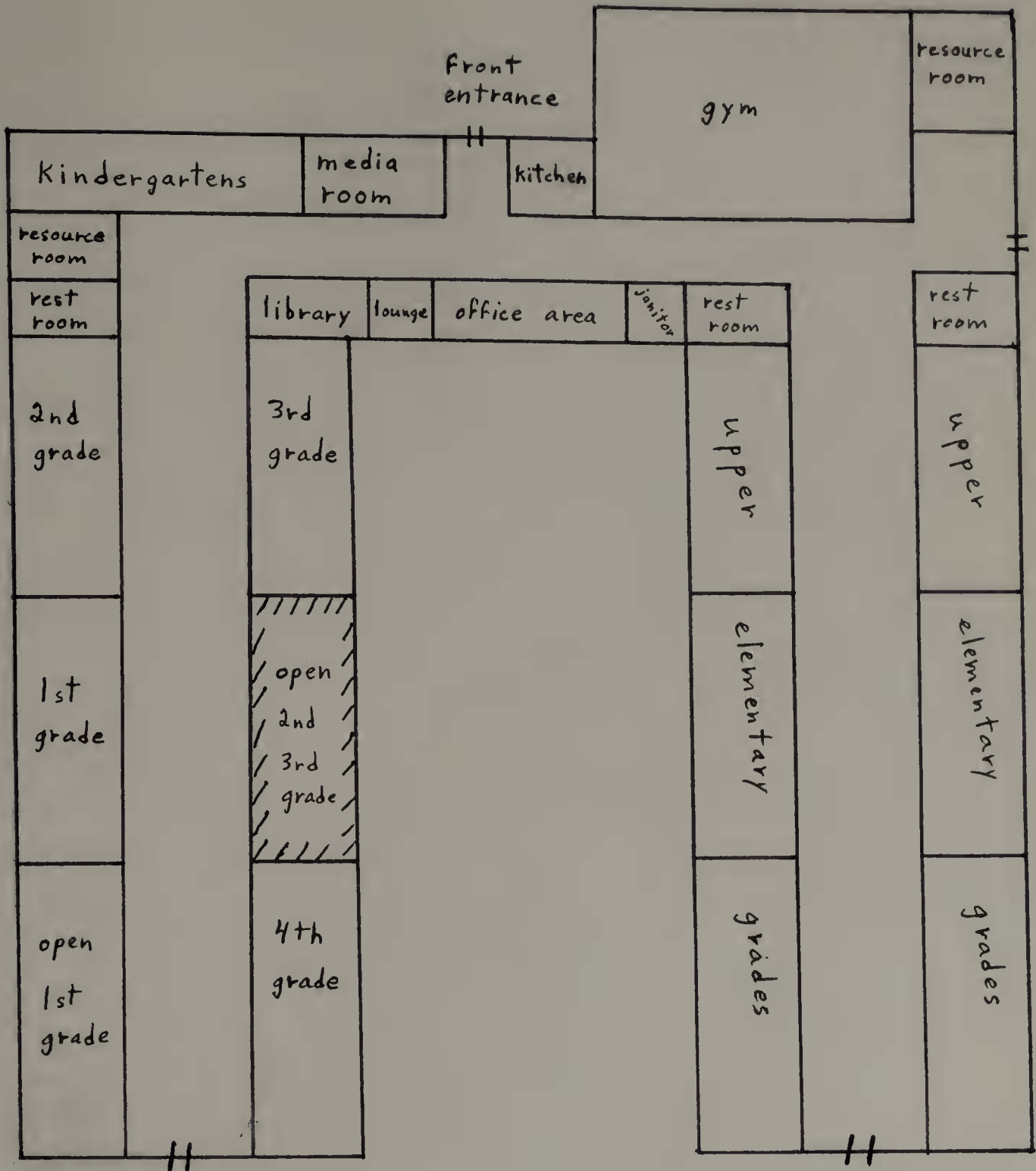


Figure 4.1: Outline of the School Building

## Key to Figure 4.2

- 1 - 9' x 12' rug
- 2 - activity selection board, chalkboard
- 3 - game and puzzles storage area
- 4 - book shelves and student bins
- 5 - reading and language materials
- 6 - individual desks separated by five foot high partition
- 7 - woodworking bench
- 8 - wood box
- 9 - hexagon table
- 10 - coat rack with hats and costume materials
- 11 - display shelves and student bins area
- 12 - typewriter table
- 13 - paper storage area
- 14 - tool rack
- 15 - word board and office-type supplies
- 16 - teacher's file cabinet
- 17 - rectangular table
- 18 - gerbil cage and bookshelves
- 19 - teacher's coat closet
- 20 - miscellaneous storage area
- 21 - students' coat rack
- 22 - round table
- 23 - teacher's storage closet
- 24 - painting easel
- 25 - sink
- 26 - shelf
- 27 - math materials storage area
- 28 - hexagon table
- 29 - book rack
- 30 - book shelves
- 31 - story chart easel

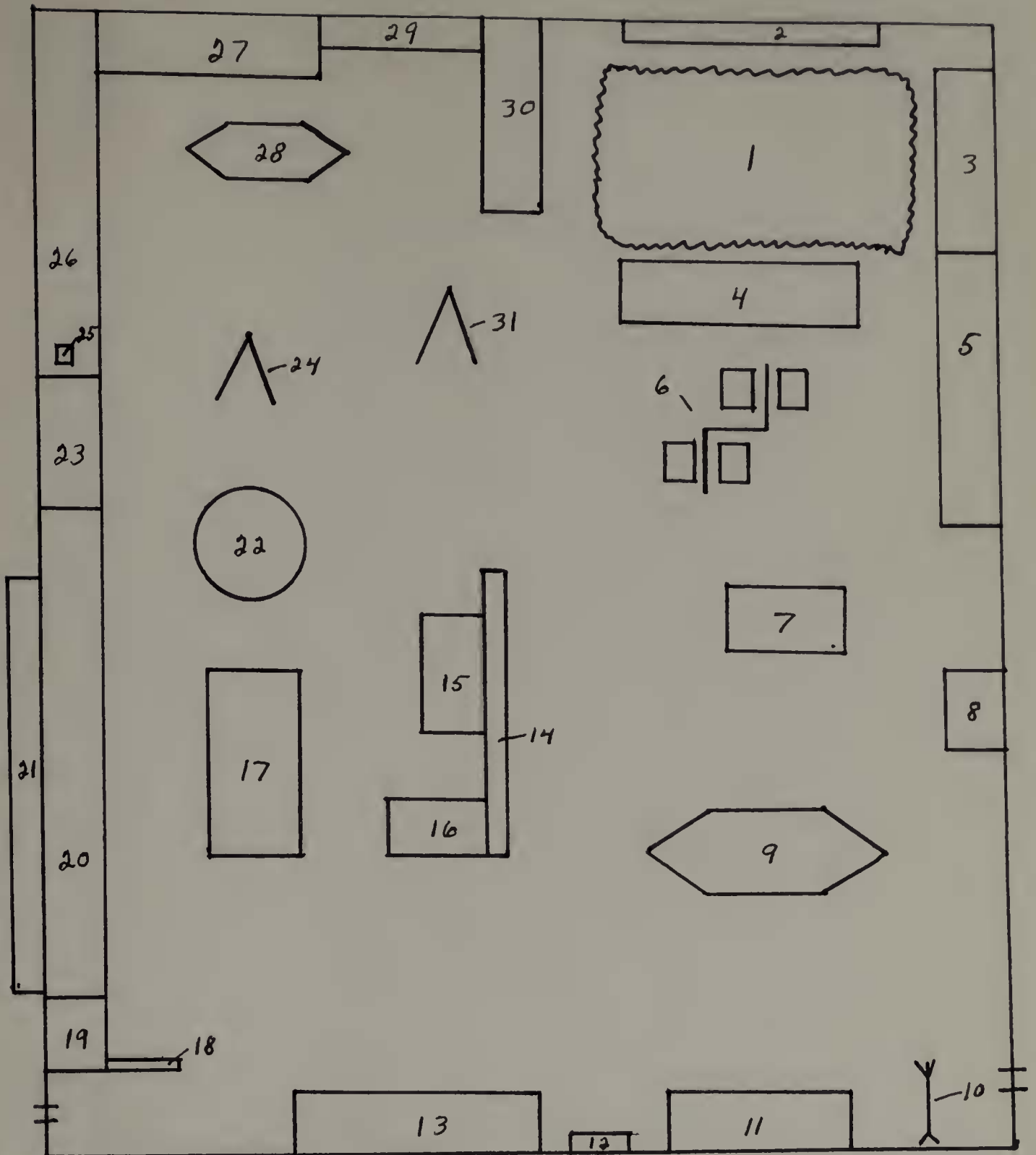


Figure 4.2: Outline of the Classroom



A typical daily schedule during the months I observed follows:

- 8:15 Children enter room.
- 8:30 Class meets on rug to plan and choose workshop activity.
- 8:45 Workshop begins.
- 9:30 Class meets on rug to plan and choose math activities.
- 9:40 Math activities begin.
- 10:00 Recess.
- 10:30 Story time.
- 10:45 Math continues.
- 11:15 Make daily notebook entries.
- 11:35 Sharing period.
- 12:00 Clean up, prepare for lunch.
- 12:10 Lunch.
- 1:00 Class meets on rug to plan and choose reading/language activities.
- 1:15 Reading/language activities begin.
- 2:00 Physical education period.
- 2:30 Clean up.
- 2:40 Dismissal.

The basic schedule was kept flexible to allow adjustments to the contingencies of the day. Work periods were shortened, moved to other time slots, or eliminated when other events like assemblies or special visitors with presentations used part of the day. The teacher followed this schedule more closely at the beginning of the school term than as the weeks

passed. This was done, she explained to me, to assist the two-thirds of the class who were new to this room adjust to the routines and expectations of an open classroom. As the children became familiar with the materials available and the process of choice, planning periods were fewer in number, but the plans became more complex.

The first fifteen minutes of the day really belonged to the students. They were free to use any of the materials, to follow any of their interests, or just to socialize with their classmates. Some children continued activities from the previous day, some started completely new activities. Some played games or worked puzzles together, others read a book or worked on something alone. Many frequently chose to use this time as a greeting period, sharing with the teacher, student teacher, or myself something of personal interest to them. In open education terms, there was a lot of "warmth" during these minutes; it was a product of friendliness, personal satisfaction, interaction, and relaxation.

At eight thirty everyone moved to the rug for planning and choosing. As the children got used to participating in the organization of their day, this first planning period was moved to the afternoon and the rug meeting was just a reminder of what choices were made the previous day. But in the beginning, planning was done each morning. The teacher had arranged a section of the bulletin board as an activity selection area. Students and teacher suggested activities for

the upcoming work period, then the students chose their activity from those suggested and tacked their name tags under that activity's heading on the board. When the number of children selecting an activity exceeded the resources of that activity, or when the teacher felt a student was limiting his/her own experience, the teacher intervened to influence the selection process. Planning for all work periods followed this same procedure.

The workshop period was one of the most enjoyed times of the day, according to the students. The variety of possible activities was limited only by the imaginations and resourcefulness of the children and teacher. To add a dimension of unity to this period, activities were developed around a central theme. The first theme of this year was "Nature." Other themes were introduced as the year progressed. From these core ideas, suggestions for activities were made that covered the full range of an elementary school curriculum. Children used the workshop time for reading about something, writing about something, figuring out something, building something, designing something. The basic skills of language and mathematics were put to use, and areas like science and social studies were explored. Marc commented one day at the sharing period that he liked having workshop as part of his school day because it gave him a chance to put his skills to use. "People in the world don't just do work in books," he said.

The math and reading/language times allowed for suggestions and selections in those areas of content. The teacher monitored pupil selection more closely during these periods than in workshop. On some days the teacher listed the alternatives available and let the children choose from them; on some occasions she requested that particular students spend some of their time in certain activities that she felt would be of special benefit to them. However, in general, the planning and choosing sessions were active times with both teacher and students as full participants.

The morning recess period was a half hour long. When the weather was fair, as it was on all but one observation day, the children played outside in the large schoolyard. All classes in the school had recess at the same time. The primary grade children used the yard adjacent to the primary wing; the upper children played on the opposite side of the school. Seldom did an upper grade student appear in the primary section of the yard. When one did he/she was usually told by a teacher to return to the other side.

Teachers shared the yard duty time. Half of the teachers were in the yard for the first fifteen minutes while the others had some free time, then the roles were reversed. The teacher in this study was in the yard for the first part of the recess. She usually used that time to converse with the first grade teacher who had an open classroom. The other teacher on duty did not participate in these conversations, but stationed herself

at the opposite end of the yard. I did not see the principal in the schoolyard during any of the recess periods. And the teachers who had the second-duty shift almost never were out at ten-fifteen as scheduled, shortening by as much as seven minutes the free time of the first shift.

All teachers, primary and upper grade, shared the kitchen and usually congregated there while their classes were at recess and they were free from yard duty. Teachers made and drank coffee or tea in this room and there was always some kind of pastry or fruit on the table for anyone who wanted some. There were eight chairs in the room which was two to five less than the number of people who came into the room for a break. Often the principal was in the kitchen at break time.

The children ate lunch in a large room in the basement of the school. Each class sat at an assigned table. A non-professional was hired to monitor the lunchroom, freeing teachers during the lunch time. Two other non-professionals supervised the schoolyard when the students went outside after eating. Each week one teacher was designated the head teacher for the lunch period and any problems that came up during that time were brought to his/her attention for action.

The kitchen and lounge could not accommodate all the teachers and student teachers at lunch time. Most days, the teacher, the student teacher, and I ate at a table in the media room. Two or three other teachers often ate there, but at a separate table. Some days the teacher decided to have

lunch in the classroom and invited students to have lunch there, too. On these days the student teacher and I also ate in the classroom. If there was time after eating the three of us would sit and talk, or the teacher would use that time to prepare materials that would be used in the afternoon.

Everyone was expected to help during the clean-up times. The students and teacher had suggested a list of tasks to be done. Students were placed next to the tasks on the posted lists to designate the individual primarily responsible for completion. These names were rotated each week. Teacher, student teacher, and I had no assigned tasks, but worked wherever help was needed. The overall supervision of the clean-up was assumed by the teacher.

The role of the student teacher deserves some elaboration. At the beginning of the year the student teacher and I functioned in much the same way. We did what the teacher requested of us, helping where the teacher thought we were needed. However, after school, the student teacher participated in the planning sessions which I did not do. Gradually, the student teacher began to share more and more of the teacher's activities: chairing selection sessions, choosing individuals for tasks, evaluating work, and settling disputes. By December teacher and student teacher had almost identical responsibilities with either able to take charge of the class whenever it was necessary. The after-school planning sessions became more of a joint effort as the student teacher gained confidence and skills.

The students during the day did work on a variety of tasks, most of their own choosing, some of their own suggestion. A suggesting and choosing period would begin with the teacher asking for suggestions from the students for activities for the coming work period. All suggestions were listed on the activity board, including any the teacher wanted to suggest. Then the teacher polled the students for a second time for a list of participants for each of the listed activities. When every student had indicated with which activity he/she would be involved, the planning session ended and the work period began. Every student did not have to suggest an activity, but everyone was expected to join in one of those that was suggested. Seven activity suggestions were an average for the workshop time; math and reading/language periods averaged about four suggestions each day. Math activities were usually supplemented by the teacher expectation--stated verbally at the planning session--that all students would spend some of their time completing some pages in their math workbooks. Some reading in a book of the student's own choosing was expected during the reading/language time.

Each child kept a loose-leaf notebook that served as a diary. Some time was set aside each day for the students to make entries in this book. These entries were to include what activities the student had participated in, what had been accomplished, and what feelings the student had about his/her day. There was no established format; the paper provided for

the writing was blank, ruled notebook paper. A student was expected to share his/her completed entry with one of the adults in the room. The adults were expected to comment on the content of the entries as well as suggest any style modifications--sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, detailness, etc.--as that adult felt were appropriate for the child whose work was being reviewed.

All games, math manipulative materials, books, paper, typewriter, saws, hammers, hand drill, scissors, staplers, thumb tacks, paper clips, paints and paintbrushes were accessible to the students. An electric cardboard saw was used with the assistance of an adult. The paper cutter was used by an adult, or by a student with adult help. There was a sink in the classroom. And there were no restrictions on talking during any of the working periods.

This was the setting in which the assumptions listed in the previous chapter were studied. These were the students, this was the teacher, and this was the classroom where I tried to learn more about the operational, social characteristics of open education.



## C H A P T E R V

### THE STUDENTS

#### Restatement of Assumptions

What happens to students who participate daily in an open classroom because of the social interactions that occur there? The previously cited six assumptions about children--part of the underlying rationale of open education practices--were selected as guidepoints for developing an understanding of the social elements of this classroom because they would appear to result in social interactions or be effected by such interactions. These assumptions also appear to be directly linked to the rationale of open education. Briefly restated, they are:

(1) Children have the potential of intrinsic motivation, which, when actualized, results in more independent behavior.

(2) Children learn self-confidence by making choices, thereby building self-esteem.

(3) Children can make significant decisions about their learning and become more trusting when they are given that freedom.

(4) Children will collaborate when interests are alike and will learn about cooperative behavior at the same time.

(5) Children will share important learnings with other children. Sharing produces a knowledge of others which is basic to responsibility.

(6) A child's personalized synthesis of his/her experiences is respected as fundamental to the child's sense of autonomy.

### Two Examples of Positive Social Growth

Individuals could be selected from the roster of this class and behaviors found in the data to support all of the above assumptions. Martha and Cindy are two examples.

Martha is a third grader who has already had one year in this classroom. She functions as an autonomous, cooperative person, aware of her own abilities and conscious of the existence of her classmates. Each planning session is a time of involvement for Martha as she exercises her right to make choices concerning her learning. Almost daily she suggests activities that interest her and follows them through to completion. But Martha is open to the ideas of others, too. One time, I noticed that she listed one activity on the planning board when suggestions were being solicited by the teacher, then chose one of the other suggestions when the students were asked to make selections. I questioned her about this and she told me that sometimes someone suggested an activity that she thought was more interesting than hers after she had already made her suggestion. When this happened she revised her own plan and opted for another's idea.

Keeping track of Martha during an activity period was an easy task; she was where she said she would be. Usually she chose tasks that matched her ability, meaning that the task

took all or most of the work time allotted to complete. Sometimes I noticed that Martha was continuing to work on an activity she had chosen on a second or third day until she completed it. When she finished something before the period ended, she would seek out another activity for herself or just observe others at work, commenting or asking questions of the participants.

Although demonstrating independence when choosing her activities, Martha did not work in isolation. When others chose the same activity, Martha either initiated collaboration or would join in with others when asked. If someone were having difficulty with a task that Martha understood, she would stop her own work to assist the other person.

During the formal sharing time Martha exhibited a sense of the purpose of that time. She actively listened to others, that is, she looked at the one who was speaking, commented on what was said, and asked questions of the sharer. She made no demands of the teacher to share first even when what she had to share seemed particularly important to her as when she brought some special treasure from home or was ready to talk about an in-class project that had taken two or more days to complete. On one occasion she asked to be last. She had an elaborately decorated metal box with candies in

it. After showing the box, she opened it and gave everyone a piece of the candy. I can only wonder if Martha wanted to be the last to share because it would add to the effect of her presentation, or if she knew that others would not be able to match her that day and did not want to detract from what they had to share. From watching Martha exhibit her concern for her classmates in many different ways during the weeks of observation, I would speculate the latter was closer to her purpose.

While Martha was an individual who operated autonomously from the beginning of the year, Cindy was a person who developed autonomy as the weeks passed. A second grader, Cindy hardly even spoke to anyone for the first two weeks of school. At planning time she made no suggestions and had to be asked by the teacher to choose one of the activities suggested by another as her work. During a work period she worked on her task alone even when others close to her were doing the same thing. If she ran into difficulty, she just stopped and waited for an adult to come by and notice that she needed help. Even when she completed some project she would not volunteer to share her accomplishment with others; only when the teacher prompted her with questions about something she had done would Cindy have anything to say. No independence, collaboration, trust, or willingness to share was overtly evident in the first three weeks of school.

But Cindy changed. By October she was suggesting activities and exercising her right to make choices. One day the teacher suggested that Cindy use her workshop time to complete her diorama project started the day before. Cindy politely refused saying she preferred to do something else that day and would finish the diorama another time. It was the first time I ever saw Cindy reject anyone's suggestion as to what she should do. Incidentally, when I was in the classroom the following week, I noticed Cindy had found time to complete her diorama, but on the day that is referred to here, Cindy went her own way.

Cindy began looking to her classmates for help too. One time she chose to build a boat at the woodworking table. I was in the same area helping students learn to use the tools. I explained to Cindy that she might want to draw lines on the boards she wanted to saw before she began cutting, then I turned my attention to another student. I noticed when she finished making the lines, she stopped working. I was still busy with the other student. After a short time, Cindy asked Betty Ann who was also building a boat for help with the sawing. For the rest of the period those two worked together on their projects.

Cindy became more active in sharing. One time when she had a painting project to show and could not seem to get the attention of the teacher for the right to the floor, she simply got up from her place and joined three other

girls who were sitting together when the teacher recognized that group who had also done paintings, sharing hers along with them.

### Two Examples of Negative Social Growth

If Cindy and Martha could be cited as examples of children who, in Martha's case, found the open classroom a place to function autonomously and cooperatively, or who, in Cindy's case, found it a place conducive to the development of independence and trust, there were other students who were much the opposite. Beth and Joey are two.

Beth, a third grader also in her second year in this classroom, was independent to the point that she often was unfair to her classmates. She demonstrated an obsession with being first and winning at any cost. Every time Beth was a part of any game involving others she would announce she was to go first because she was the first to announce she was going first. Whether this reasoning was logical to her classmates or whether they just did not want to hassle with her, Beth went first. Only a few of Beth's classmates challenged Beth's claim to the right to have the first turn, Martha and Jeff being the most common two to object. Then Beth would settle for a draw of a card or a roll of the dice.

When in a game, Beth cheated. I watched her play a game that involved moving a marker across a board. The move was allowed if the number of syllables on a word card drawn from

the top of the player's pile corresponded with the number on one of the squares adjacent to the square where the player's marker was. While others took their turns, Beth lifted the corner of the next card to see what word she would draw next. If it did not correspond with a square she could move to, she slipped that card to the bottom of the pile and checked the next one. She won the game that day.

Another time I watched her play a math card game with Jeff. Jeff took his turn, added his points to his score, then began explaining the rules of the game to me. Beth took her turn and added her points to her score. When Jeff was finished talking to me he asked Beth if she had taken her turn yet. She said she had not and took another turn.

I noticed during the weeks that there were days when no one chose the game Beth chose and she had to find another activity. When someone else was without a game partner, Beth would shift her activity choice to that game, seemingly delighted to have someone to work with, but once the game started she appeared only to see her classmate as someone to beat in any way possible. Like Martha, Beth was in her second year of this open classroom experience, yet the two demonstrated very different kinds of autonomy.

If Cindy is an example of a student who grew in an open setting, Joey is one who went in the other direction. He began the year, his second in this classroom, as an activity suggestor, a collaborator with others of similar interests, and a

person with something to share almost daily. By December he was assigning himself to what others suggested, seldom finishing any task, and working alone most of the time. In September Joey organized and led bug hunts. He helped others identify their catches and searched library books for more information. In December he would sit alone at a table with a closed book in front of him waiting for some adult to discover him and offer to help him. When he did do something with someone else it often did not end well. One morning he was playing a game with another student who played by different rules than those Joey used which resulted in Joey's breaking into tears, putting on his coat, and heading for home. By December he was avoiding many of his classmates or having conflicts with those with whom he associated, quite a different progression from Cindy.

Looking at individuals and comparing their behaviors with the assumptions about children that are the foundation of open education did not prove much in that process alone. Some children matched or exceeded the expectations; others in the same situation did not come close. If I counted the children in the classroom who measured up to the expectations implied by the assumptions in December, they would exceed those who did not. But that would not say much about why this is so. Likewise, those who did not often meet the expectations, did meet them sometimes. What is needed, and what follows, is a more comprehensive look at the total social situation for some clues to understanding the individuals and their behavior.



### Sample Observations

What follows are selected observations taken from the narrative notes made during the first two and a half months of school, a total of twenty observation days covering the first forty-seven days of school. I have selected these instances because I believe a balanced impression of the daily activities of this classroom can be seen in them. These observations are also examples of the data I used in my analysis. I intentionally have avoided including a running analysis of these events because I do not want to create the impression that I knew what each item meant at the time it happened. After eleven weeks of observation I believe I began to understand the social organization of this classroom. My analysis of that organization follows this presentation of data.

#### September 5

This is the first day of school. When the students arrive they find that games, puzzles, and books are on the tables and rug. The teacher tells them to explore the room and try some of the things. She will be busy during the first hour taking a few children at a time out of the room and snapping a picture of each child, then tacking those pictures on a display board in the room. Every person is asked by the teacher to make time that morning to make a name tag from the materials available on one of the tables. Most of the manipulative materials are put to use by the students; the books and cross-

word puzzles are not touched. Alex twice asks the teacher if any "work" will be done that day. She replies that there are many types of work and using the materials on the tables can be called a kind of work.

When the teacher finished taking pictures she calls the class to the rug area for a story that she reads to them and follows the story with some get-to-know-each-other games. The games are played in pairs; some children choose their partners, others are paired by the teacher. One game requires each student to interview his partner to find out something new about that person. When the interviews are completed, each child is asked to report his findings to the full group. Most children report their discoveries; some say nothing.

Today is only a half-day of school, but the teacher has arranged to take half of the class to a nearby park for a picnic and hike in the afternoon. Tomorrow, another half day, the others in the class are scheduled for the outing.

#### September 11

The day starts with fifteen minutes of non-teacher directed activities. Students choose their materials and work alone or in small groups. At 8:30 the teacher calls the students to the rug. It takes about five minutes for the whole group to get there, but once there the planning session is a short one, and within three minutes the students are at work on the activities they had suggested and signed up for yesterday afternoon.

One activity this morning is leaf printing. The teacher shows the group how to begin, then leaves them to their work. Alex, new this year to this classroom, asks Martha, in her second year in this room, "Do you do projects like this all year?" Martha replies, "Yes." Alex: "Do you do any work?" Martha: "This is work."

During the math period Marc and Joey work together to build a castle with geoblocks. Alex joins them and adds some pieces to the structure. When the period ends, Alex asks Joey for permission to knock down the castle. Later that morning Edward seeks out Joey for help in spelling the name of a type of butterfly; Joey refers him to a book about butterflyed on the bookshelf.

In the afternoon an outside period is scheduled. The teacher suggests one game, but some students voice other preferences. Marc calls for a vote. The game Marc suggests gets more votes than any other and is the one played that afternoon.

#### September 13

Perry, Arnold, and Betty Ann are working on a mural in the hall outside the room this morning. While Betty Ann spreads out the newspaper on which the mural paper will be placed for painting, Arnold and Perry play on the railing of the short stairway leading to the outside door. Later Arnold finds he has paint left over after he has finished his section of the mural. He asks me what else he should paint, but I do not give

him any suggestions. He returns to the mural and adds several trees with apples on them without asking Betty Ann or Perry about it although I understood the mural was planned as a group project.

Martha is supervising the leaf printing today. The dialogue goes like this:

Beth asks Martha: "Can I squeeze my paint tube now?"

Martha: "Yes."

Cindy to Martha: "Is that enough paint?"

Martha: "A little more."

Cindy: "Martha, will you come over and squeeze my paint out?"

Marie to Cindy: "I'll help you."

Marie to Martha: "Is this good?"

Martha: "Yes, it is."

Martha to the group: "Take a piece of colored paper. Choose the side of the leaf you want to show in your picture and roll paint on it. That's good, Cindy. Try not to move your papers when printing. That's good Marie. That's a good print, Beth. Why don't you try it again with a different leaf?"

During the entire episode I was standing less than six feet from the printing table, but no one asked me for assistance. All questions were directed at Martha.

Today Betty Ann, Beth, Arnold, and the student teacher are assigned to a classification game for math. During the period Beth asks the student teacher, "When are we going to

do some decent math?" When asked in return by the student teacher why they don't like this game, Betty Ann and Beth say it doesn't teach them anything. Arnold says math is learned on paper. The game continues though.

While planning for the next day's workshop time, Beth and Jeff ask the teacher when the workshop period will be lengthened. Both were in this classroom last year.

#### September 20

I am invited by Edward to play a counting game during the first minutes of school this morning. Martha asks to play the winner, and Jeff wants to play after Martha. The game between Edward and me ends in a tie. Both of us give up our places and Jeff and Martha play each other. Alex asks to learn to play the game; Martha volunteers to show him how tomorrow.

Jeff uses one of the math kits today. No one has suggested using that kit before Jeff did today. Cindy chooses leaf printing again, but works without assistance this morning.

The teacher asks Perry to show at sharing time some of the art work folders he had helped construct but Perry refuses. The teacher bargains with him: "You get one of the folders and I'll explain it." Perry says he does not know where the folders were put. The teacher tells Edward to show Perry where the folders are kept. Perry returns with a folder and the teacher involves him in the explanation by asking him questions about it.

On the playing field in the afternoon the game is "Capture the Flag." Jeff, actually a member of the opposing team, tells Joey he will take over as flag guard, then steals the flag when Joey leaves it. Joey complains of this trick to the teacher, crying while he explains what happened. Back in the game Joey gets into a scuffle with Raymond which is repeated in the classroom when the outside period ends. When explaining to the teacher why the dispute happened, Joey, again crying, says Raymond and Hank always boss him around. He has no one to boss.

#### September 25

I found out this morning that the teacher and Arnold's mother had a conference yesterday to discuss Arnold's classroom behavior. Frequently, Arnold interrupts when stories are being read or others are telling about something, or bothers others who are engaged in learning activities that do not involve him. Arnold, present at the conference, agrees to improve his behavior in exchange for stickers in his notebook awarded by the teacher as recognition of that improvement.

Cindy and Tamico choose to paint today. They get the necessary materials themselves. Alex notices Tamico at work and comments on how well she paints, then moves to the other side of the easel and compliments Cindy. Joey, Raymond, and Hank are at the woodworking table, each working on his own

project without any signs of collaboration. Tamico later enters in her journal that she painted "with Cindy" that morning.

October 2

Martha indicates to me this morning that she has some purpose in mind for going to school daily. She says to me, "You're lucky. You're just a helper here. You don't have to learn anything." (These remarks also indicate to me that my observation techniques are unobtrusive to at least one person.)

Reggie arrives today, the first of five black students who will be assigned to this class from those children who are bussed to this suburban school from the city. The teacher asks Ross to show Reggie around the room and help him select an activity. Reggie chooses to work at the woodworking bench with Ross. Shortly after they begin working together, Reggie shoves Ross and in the scuffle that follows Ross is pushed to the floor. Ross leaves the bench area and Reggie works alone for the rest of the period.

At sharing time Betty Ann shows her diorama to the group. For some reason Alex did not hear the presentation and later urged Betty Ann to show her project. When Alex finds out that she has shown it and expresses disappointment at having missed it, Betty Ann moves from her place to one

next to Alex and quietly re-explains her diorama to him.

#### October 4

Martha organizes a math game with counting blocks at math time. She invites Alex to join her group and he accepts. Martha explains the rules of the game to Alex, Danny, and Tamico with no one objecting. Later, in the schoolyard, Alex tries to force his way into a game being played by Martha and some other girls. Martha complains of this intrusion to the teacher and Alex withdraws to the sidelines and watches.

Reggie is having his share of scuffles. When someone objects to the way Reggie does something, he challenges that person with "Hit me." Whether the challenge is accepted or not, Reggie usually pushes or strikes the other person.

"Capture the Flag" is again the afternoon game. Jeff and Marc are the team captains at the suggestion of Jeff who says he and Marc should be on different teams to make the game fair. Alex and Danny choose not to play.

#### October 9

The science resource person for the school system is scheduled to spend some time in the classroom today with an activity involving rocks. Only Arnold and Perry choose that activity. Reggie and Hank do not choose anything, so the teacher suggests they try the rock activity and they agree.

Nora joins the class today, another of the bussed students. Marie helps her get acquainted with the room at the



start of the morning, then Nora joins Marie and Tamico for painting during the workshop time.

Jeff and Beth again initiate an activity not done by other students previously, a math game called chip trading. While Jeff tells me how the game is played, Beth throws the dice three times, stopping after the third throw which is a higher roll than the earlier ones. Jeff does not appear to notice Beth's trial rolls.

The rock activity is a noisy one with Reggie and Arnold arguing over the ownership of some rock. Joey is making a boat today. When I stop at the woodworking table to check student progress there, Edward says, "What do you think of Joey's boat?" I reply that it looks pretty good and Edward comes back with, "Pretty good? It's great!" I ask Edward if he helped Joey build the boat and he says he did a little of the work, but Joey adds, "I did most of it myself."

Jeff and Beth are now chip trading in base three numbers. Jeff tells me about base three numbers while Beth takes her turn. When Jeff is ready to resume playing, Beth takes another turn. Ross joins them in the game. The teacher invites Marie and Raymond to learn the game by watching the others play. They watch, but are not invited to join in.

Todd is assigned to report to one of the school's resource teachers for some special work this morning, but does not go. This assignment was made because of Todd's

history of emotional problems in schools in previous years and was not Todd's or the teacher's choice. Todd says he prefers to work in the classroom in the morning and the teacher agrees to readjust his schedule.

At sharing time Edward shows a picture he painted that morning. Tamico, unable to speak much English, will not show a picture she painted even when the teacher asks her. For the first time I notice Raymond has something to share. He reads from an "I Wish" poem that he has been writing for the past several days and which is now over thirty pages long. The teacher has to ask him to stop and save some for another day to give others time to share. Joey shows his boat which is now completely painted. I recall to myself that the teacher had told him to wait until tomorrow to paint the boat at the beginning of the math period. I later ask him when he painted it and he tells me he found time. When I ask him if he did any math, he admits he did not. Todd also shows a boat he made, and gets annoyed when Reggie starts answering questions about the boat that are directed at Todd. "You got a big mouth, Reggie," he tells him and Reggie stops answering.

The bulletin board in the hall outside this classroom and outside the open first grade are filled with children's work; the other boards in the hall are empty. In the main entryway to the school hangs a felt collage done the previous year in this classroom.

Martha comes into the classroom after the lunch break crying. Other students say she has been fighting in the schoolyard with a bussed-in student from another class. She stops crying, then joins the others on the rug never mentioning the incident.

October 11

The teacher has to be out of the classroom this morning and leaves a note for Beth because Beth has caused some problems for the student teacher on a previous occasion when the teacher was not present. In part the note says, "I'm expecting you to set an example & help the other children as much as possible." When she returns later in the day, the teacher asks Beth if she did as the note requested. Beth says she could not because she did not understand the "&" sign or what the words "set an example" meant. Beth, in my opinion, is one of the best readers in the class.

Two more students are added to the roster today, Lisa and Dorothy. During the reading/language period Reggie hits Arnold who complains to the teacher. Arnold usually complains to the nearest adult when he has difficulty with some other student.

October 16

There are now five black students in the class with yesterday's addition of Woodrow. The teacher tells me that the sudden influx of students makes her uneasy with the fast

pace with which she has been promoting openness in the daily routines. She is not sure the new students have the same understandings of her program as those who started in September, now six weeks ago. However, I can't document any problems other than Reggie's aggressiveness. At this morning's planning session Nora and Lisa both suggest activities and Reggie is one of the first to indicate his choice. Woodrow elects to join a group who are practicing a play.

Hank paints alone today. Dorothy, Reggie, Nora, and Marc are involved in the chip trading game at math time. Arnold and Perry build a tower with Cuisenaire rods.

#### October 18

Beth suggests and chooses a math card game for her first activity today, but no one else chooses that game. The teacher asks me to play the game with Beth which I do. Later Martha asks to play too; Beth objects and I am in favor of Martha joining us. Martha joins in. Beth demands the first turn. When I suggest that the next game should begin with either Martha or me going first, Beth threatens not to play another game. Time runs out before the present game is finished leaving the question of who will be first in the next game unanswered.

Woodrow has begun hitting his classmates in a pattern similar to Reggie's. Most attacks seem unprovoked or are the result of minor incidents like someone brushing against

Woodrow while passing close to him. Today he starts hitting Arnold when the class is seated on the rug for sharing. Arnold's only offense appears to be that he chose to sit next to Woodrow.

During the planning time for the next day's workshop period, Ross suggests woodworking. When the teacher asks for a show of hands of those who would like to do woodworking, the number doing so exceeds the space and tool resources. The teacher selects three students, but does not include Ross who originally suggested the activity. She explains to him that she wants to let people who have not yet done that activity have a chance at it. Ross makes no objection and selects something else.

Arnold, who has been working with Perry most days, works alone today. On the way to an assembly this morning I notice Hank and Perry walking together with arms over each other's shoulders.

Woodrow fights with another bussed student in the schoolyard at lunch time. When the classes resume he is still upset and kicks Lisa. It is necessary for him to remain in the hall several minutes after the rest of the class is in the room until his rage subsides.

#### October 24

Last night was parents' night at school. This morning the teacher tells me of some of the conversations she had

with some of the parents. Reggie's mother expressed pleasure with Reggie's attitude toward school. She reports he comes home happy, has fewer fights in the neighborhood, and reminds her in the evening to wake him early enough to catch the bus.

During the music period today, conducted by the school's music resource teacher, Reggie shows Arnold how to play one of the instruments and Martha helps Joey with another. The teacher mentions to me how "happy" she thinks Lisa appears these days. She recalls that when Lisa arrived she mostly scowled and frowned.

Just before the day ends Woodrow squirts Raymond with water from the bottle used to water the classroom terrarium. The teacher tells Raymond that she is not going to reprimand Woodrow this time because she now knows that Raymond did the same thing to Woodrow earlier in the day. Raymond leaves the room crying and saying he will not be coming back to school again.

#### October 26

Some time is now set aside each day for group relationship building. The teacher tells me that she feels such a time is necessary to minimize the conflicts that some pupils are having. The games selected by the teacher are supposed to help students find out more about each other or give them an opportunity to work with a variety of partners.

October 30

The morning begins with a fight. Reggie shoves Raymond for no obvious reason. Raymond shoves back. Now Reggie pushes Raymond into Woodrow and fists start flying between Reggie and Woodrow. Raymond moves away from the action. Reggie stops after a few punches, but Woodrow is now so violent that he has to be led from the room.

Lisa and Raymond are paired by the teacher for the group relationship building activity this morning. At first Lisa refuses to work with Raymond, but gives in when the teacher so requests. By this time, however, Raymond is objecting to working with Lisa and the teacher does not force them to continue participation. Reggie and Todd are partners. Reggie pokes Todd and Todd pokes back, but no conflict erupts.

On the playground at recess, Marc, Jeff, Beth, and Todd chase Reggie to the yard supervisors saying they are going to beat him up because he is always hitting people and has disrupted what had been a good class. Reggie goes into the building and works in the classroom for the rest of the recess time at the yard supervisor's request. This is the first time I have seen Marc and Jeff initiate any conflict. When recess ends the incident seems to end with it. Woodrow, too, goes through the rest of the day without a fight.

Today Tamico has completed another painting. She volunteers to hold it up at sharing time for others to see and when she does so Woodrow explains what has been painted while

Tamico, still struggling with English, smiles as if she appreciates Woodrow's help. No one asked Woodrow to assist; he just did.

#### November 1

I am greeted today by a smiling teacher who tells me what a great day yesterday was. When the class was gathering at the door to go home at the end of the day someone said, "Gee, today was a good day!" The teacher asked the group why this was so, and another student said, "There were no fights." Then all the children cheered. It looks like today is going to start with a fight when Todd pushes Reggie and both raise closed fists, but Woodrow steps between them and all three start smiling and go off to activities.

Nora comes in from recess crying because Dorothy has hit her. Cindy goes with Nora to the drinking fountain and when they return to the room Nora has stopped crying. Later Reggie and Joey hit each other until the teacher stops them. Woodrow seems to regularly push, poke, or hit Arnold who always complains of that action to the nearest adult.

#### November 6

Today Reggie and Raymond start the day by arguing over who had a pair of dice first. The argument ends when the teacher calls both to the rug for the planning session. Hank and Marie select painting. Although both share the same easel, they work separately. Once Hank says to Marie, "I'm



going to paint a car," but Marie makes no response and there is no further conversation.

November 8

The teacher is absent today. A substitute is present, but the student teacher will try to run the day. Dorothy has already had a disagreement with Beth that involved name calling and threats before the day is five minutes old. At the rug the disagreement erupts again and Lisa sides with Dorothy. The student teacher tries to deal with the conflict by involving everyone in the search for a solution. Jeff says no group solution is possible because the students who are bussed to school, except for Nora and Reggie, cannot accept the group decisions. Reggie objects to this generalization and Jeff points out to him that he had excluded Reggie and Nora when he made his remarks.

The rest of the morning does not go much smoother. Other children have conflicts, including Jeff, Marc, Martha, Beth, Lisa, Dorothy, Reggie, Joey, and Woodrow. The Joey-Woodrow fight in the schoolyard at lunch time is so physical that Joey has to spend the afternoon in the school clinic with a bump on his forehead where he was kicked by Woodrow. And Woodrow's jacket was ripped when the yard supervisor tried to pull him away from Joey.

But the afternoon is peaceful. The language/reading period is free from conflict and the outside group game is played without incident.

November 13

Today is one of Woodrow's most productive days. He spends the entire math period doing pages in his math workbook. When he needs help with his math he asks Lisa, who is working at the same table, for assistance. She replies, "I'll help you if you give me a kiss." Woodrow says no, but moments later Lisa moves next to him and they work together. Joey is quiet today, too, and works mostly alone.

November 15

By this date there is a noticeable change in the daily events of this classroom. The aggressors of the past weeks are now among the most productive members of the class. Reggie, Woodrow, and Lisa suggest activities, seek out groups to work in, and call for adherence to standards. At sharing time, for example, these students remind others to listen and wait for a turn to talk. Both teacher and student teacher will in a few weeks look back to this week as the time when the classroom began to operate smoothly.

Analysis of Observations

The events I have chosen to list above are a rough synopsis of the first eleven weeks of school. Studied as individual occurrences they might appear fragmented and often unrelated. But seen as the definers of an emerging social organization they form a coherent pattern. Through analyzing the events listed here, supplemented by the more complete notes taken by

me during those first eleven weeks, I can identify certain social factors which appear to be exerting considerable influence on the daily actions of the students.

The first discernible elements of the social structure are the expectations of behavior implicit in the organization of the daily routines. At the very beginning of the very first day the students find out that they will be expected to choose from a variety of activities and involve themselves in the activity of their choice with a limited amount of teacher direction. The group sessions on the rug imply that the students will be expected to do some things as a group and some things with one or two other students. Working with others becomes an expectation. Finally, the class outing on those first afternoons helps establish the identity of this class. It implies that this group can chart its own direction since the rest of the school is not even in session, much less on a field trip, and raises the expectation that this class will be deciding other things for itself in the year ahead. More of the same type of schedule on the following days reinforces those initial expectations.

As the expectations become more explicitly understood and accepted by the students, these expectations become standards or norms against which behaviors can be measured. The norms, in turn, imply a way of behaving which becomes a role expectation for the student. It is not too surprising to discover in this classroom that the students who first come closest to meeting these expectations are the students who

were in this classroom with this teacher last year. These six students--Martha, Beth, Marc, Jeff, Edward, and Joey--form a kind of core unit. This early social structure can be diagrammed as one that consists of six people who know the expectations and twelve people who need time to figure them out (Fig. 5.1).

I will call this group of students who seem to most clearly understand their role the inside group, and will refer to the others as the outside group. Some of the outsiders recognize who the knowing ones are and seek them out for direction. Alex looks to Martha for cues, for instance. Others try to behave in accordance with the norms. Betty Ann and Cindy try to work with some independence during the first weeks. Todd indicates he wants to remain in the classroom and be involved in the activities there. Marie assists Tamico who is having some difficulty with English.

A few outsiders--namely, Arnold, Perry, Hank, Raymond, Ross, and Danny--appear to me to be having difficulty understanding the expectations. Their behaviors appear to be confused or have a way of irritating their classmates. When Arnold, Perry, and Betty Ann work on a mural project, Betty Ann has to get everything ready alone while Arnold and Perry play. Raymond tries to read a thirty-page poem when he should be sharing the time with others as well. Ross needs more teacher assistance in selecting learning activities than many others.

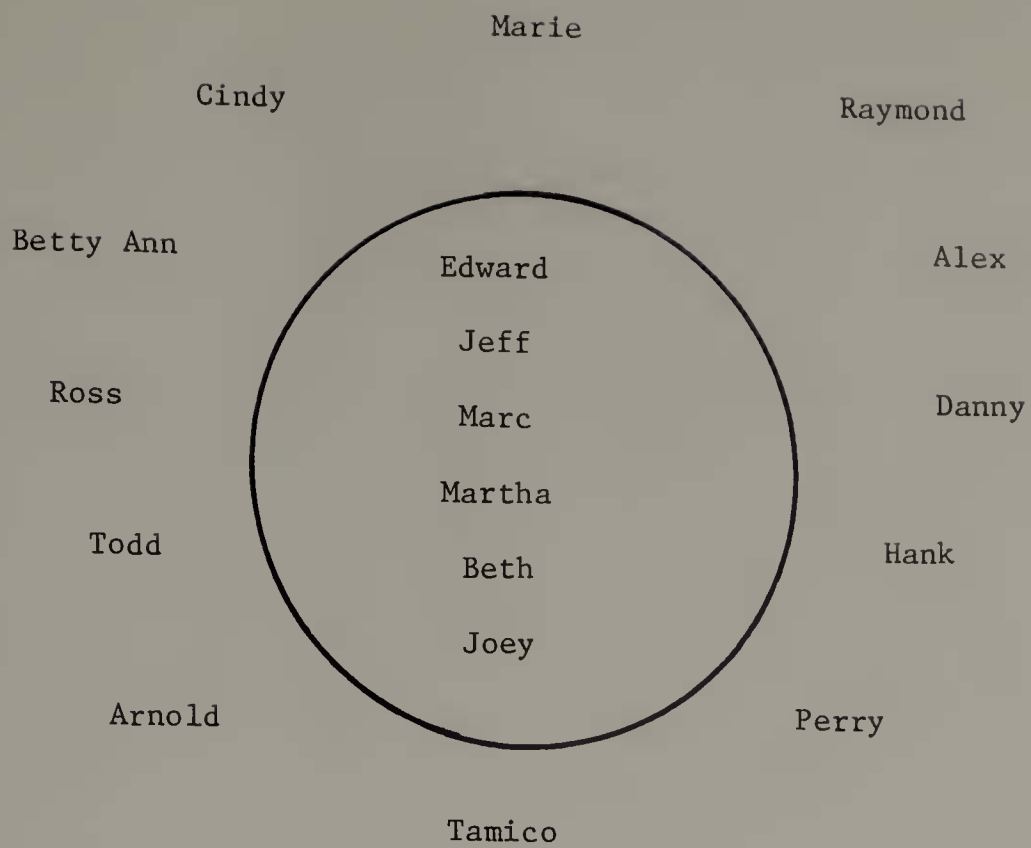


Figure 5.1: Student Sociogram After Three Weeks of School

Before I can detect any solid rearrangement of the initial social structure, the entire classroom organization undergoes some disruption with the arrival of the bussed-in students in October. Actually, it was the turmoil created by Reggie and Woodrow that gave me my first insights into the existence of a social structure and caused me to review that data that had been accumulating for a more complete picture. The battles of Reggie and Woodrow show two distinct patterns. First, they do not fight with everyone in the class. Raymond, Joey, and Arnold are their regular opponents, as well as each other. Second, in both cases, their conflicts appear to reach a peak, then their behaviors change dramatically to behaviors more closely approximating the implied expectations for this classroom before their arrival. I believe that what Reggie and Woodrow do is make a successful show of strength that is acknowledged by most of the other students, and that this acknowledgment somehow helps these boys accept the norms of the classroom as their own.

When the major amount of the fighting ends in November the daily events follow a more consistent pattern. But with the clues provided me by the fighting I am able to watch these events from a new perspective. In trying to determine the patterns of the fights I had started keeping a record of which people were involved in a conflict, the time of day, the location of the conflict, and the events that followed a fight. I mapped where people sat during rug sessions,

noted who worked with whom during an activity period, and checked to see which people actually did the activity they selected. I continued with these techniques and by the end of November was able to construct another social organization diagram (Fig. 5.2).

The behaviors of the insiders in this construction had certain consistencies. Beth was the exception; her behaviors remained much the same as I indicated earlier. The others all showed an acceptance of the norms by displaying appropriate behaviors. They were active planners of activities, regularly cooperated with each other on projects, and took an active part in discussions that dealt with norms. For example, one discussion considered what kinds of things students should be doing when the class was on the rug for a story. Another discussion preceded an assembly and elicited suggestions for acceptable behaviors for members of this class when they were in the assembly area with other classes.

There appeared to be two ways of moving from the outside group to the inside group. One way was by the quiet acceptance of the implicit expectations, in other words, an understanding of the role expectations and compliance with that role. All of the insiders with the exception of Woodrow, Reggie, and Lisa did it this way. Not all moved at the same rate; Betty Ann and Alex were on their way in the first week while Cindy and Perry took much longer.

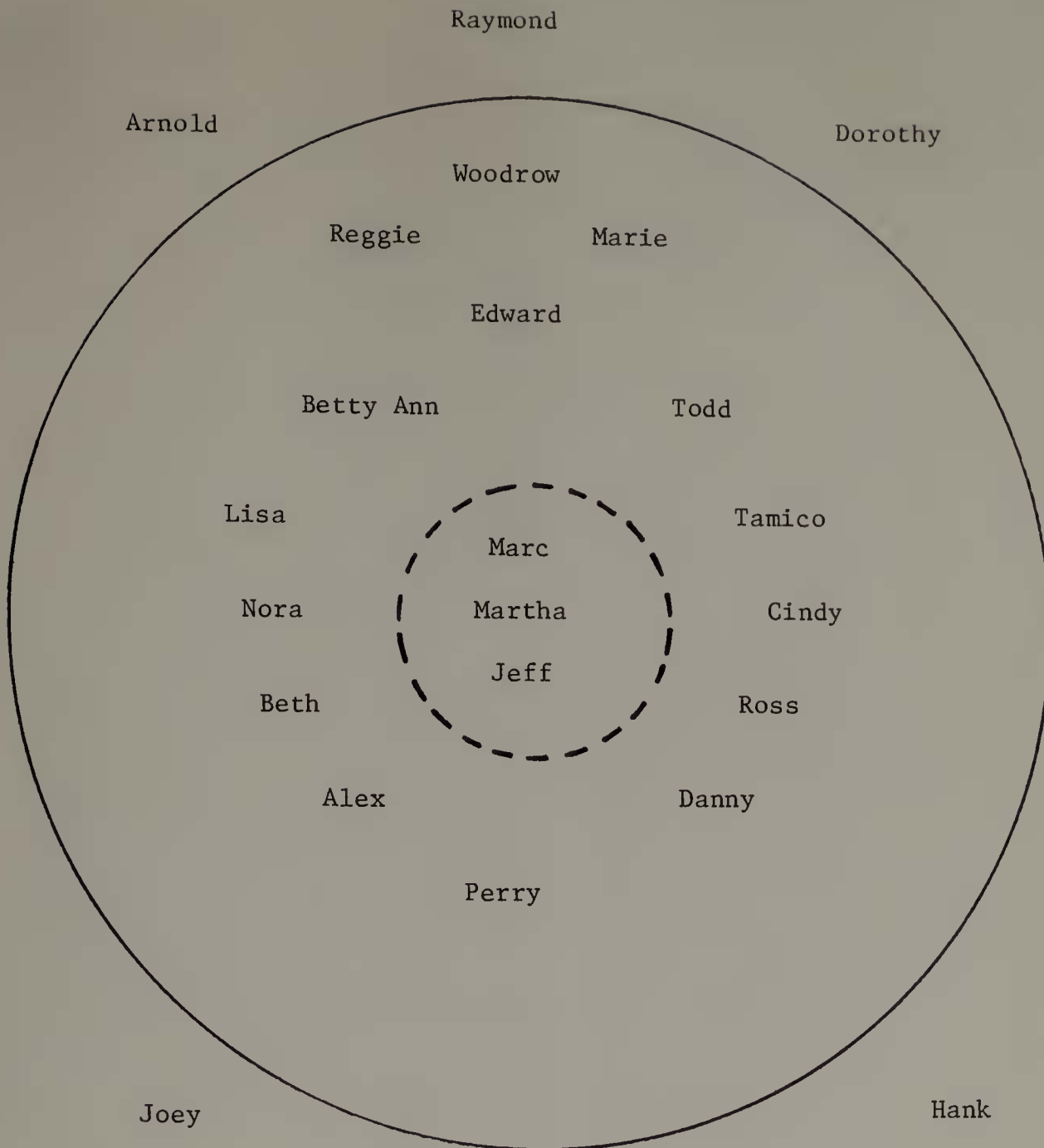


Figure 5.2: Student Sociogram After Eleven Weeks of School



The second strategy was a successful show of physical force. Reggie, Woodrow, and Lisa were hard fighters. Only an adult could cause them to stop pursuing and hitting an opponent, and even then the adult could do so only with difficulty and superior strength. These three would not stop fighting on command. Only when each had demonstrated some zenith of aggressiveness--and I am not sure how each knew when he/she had succeeded--did the aggressive behavior give way to cooperative behavior. Alex was one who recognized this change in Woodrow. He said one day in late November, "I used to be afraid of Woodrow because he fought so much, but now he doesn't do that any more and I like working with him." Jeff seemed to indicate a similar feeling about Reggie when he excluded him from his generalization about the hostility of the bussed students on November 8. The difference between the fights of Woodrow, Reggie, and Lisa and those of the remaining outsiders is those outsiders never seem to be winners.

Some reasons why Reggie, Woodrow, and Lisa choose to fight their way into the stabilizing social structure might be guessed. In the first place, they joined the class four or more weeks after school started and did not receive the indoctrination in expectations that the other students got. The teacher hints that she senses this on October 16.

Secondly, conferences with Reggie's, Woodrow's, and Nora's mothers disclose that fighting was common behavior

in the city schools that these children formerly attended. Nora's behavior in this classroom is an exception to that of the other bussed students, but her mother gives some clues as to why this might be so. She says she was advised by Nora's former teacher to transfer her out of that school because Nora was not a fighter. Also Nora was one of the first of the bussed students to arrive in this classroom and had a week to adjust before the fighting began. Her mother said she had always told Nora that no matter how others behaved, Nora should behave like "people," meaning trying to get along with others without fighting. After a few days in this classroom her mother said Nora told her, "Everybody behaves like people in this school." Parental expectations were probably an influence on Nora's recognition of the expectations of this classroom.

The behaviors of those I believe are in the outside group have a different set of consistencies. The continued observations of their work habits showed they most often worked alone. Raymond, Joey, and Hank frequently tried to do something together, but those efforts did not last long and often ended in some dispute. Arnold and Dorothy could not find anyone who would regularly work with them. Arnold tried Perry, Joey, Hank, Betty Ann, and Cindy without establishing any lasting mutual relationship. Dorothy had only limited success with Lisa and Beth. Their classroom behaviors were alike in that they worked mostly alone, often did not

complete what they started or did not do at all the activity they had chosen, always sat on the perimeter of the rug at group sessions, and constantly were calling on some adult to assist them with their work or to defend them in a dispute.

One other contrast between the outsiders and the insiders should be mentioned. I noticed that insiders often decided who they were going to work with before selecting an activity. Outsiders appeared to select directly from the activity board without regard for who else was choosing an activity. Any collaboration that followed was usually between those who had planned to work together while the outsider worked on the same activity but alone. For example, Alex and Danny would paint one picture together while Hank painted a separate one himself. Or Martha and Jeff would assist each other on Tangram puzzles without regard for what Raymond was doing with the same materials at the same table.

One morning in the middle of December the social structure sketched here was reinforced, in my opinion, when I watched this class perform a play as part of the Christmas assembly. Martha had the lead role and Marc and Jeff had the two major supporting parts. The rest of the cast included Todd, Edward, Reggie, Woodrow, Nora, Betty Ann, and Cindy. I was not present on the days when this play was planned and had not seen many of the rehearsals of it. I asked the teacher how the participants were chosen and how the parts were assigned. She told me that everyone who wanted to be in the

play was accepted, and that the students decided themselves who would get each part. Although not every member of the inside group participated in the play, not one of the outside members had a part. In fact, while the play was being presented before the entire school, only three people had to be stopped from playing on the mats at the back of the gym by one of the monitors. These three were Arnold, Hank, and Raymond; everyone else was watching the play.

The social structure of this classroom in December should not be considered a static one with members either in or out of the central group. If the center of the diagram were to indicate high adherence to the norms, any given individual would vary in proximity to that point on different days. Through the weeks it appeared to me that those inside the boundary line generally were moving toward the center while those outside were moving away from it. The exceptions are Dorothy and Beth. From the diminishing interactions of Beth with her classmates I suspect that she is gradually moving more and more away from the center, but in December she still meets enough of the expectations to remain inside. Dorothy's continued efforts to establish an alliance with some insider indicates to me that she is still trying for acceptance. Arnold, Joey, and Hank, on the other hand, have little to do with any insider--perhaps their choice, perhaps not.

Certainly the assumptions about the potential behaviors of children who participate in an open classroom do not apply to all members of this class in December. The assumptions appear to be accurate descriptions of the behaviors of the children who have internalized the expectations of the setting, that is, those children who perform a role consistent with the norms. It is role expectation and role performance, the basics of a social system, that explain many of the behaviors of the individuals in this classroom.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE TEACHER

#### Restatement of Assumptions

Three assumptions about the teacher in the open classroom provided a focus for observation of the interactions of this teacher in this classroom. Briefly restated, those assumptions are:

- (1) The personality of the teacher has an effect on the learning environment. When a teacher projects an honest self-image, the students will be willing to be open about themselves.
- (2) The teacher's respect for children will be evident in the quality of the relationships he/she fosters in the classroom.
- (3) The teacher will act as a leader in the classroom without resorting to force or coercion to maintain that position.

#### Sample Observations

Again, it would be possible for me to detail many of the behaviors of this teacher which would seem to be in accord with these assumptions. There are examples of such actions in the notes of every day of observation. But without trying to understand what this teacher believes she is trying to do and what success she thinks she is having, and without some efforts to try to understand what actual effects her actions are having on the students in this classroom, a quantitative analysis would

not have much meaning. The following anecdotes are a sample of incidents that involve this teacher. They are typical of the events that I used when I analyzed the data for patterns of teacher impact in this setting. Again I have tried to keep the data separate from the analysis. I will provide my understanding of the role of the teacher in this classroom after the sample.

#### September 5

It is the first day of school. The teacher has arranged the room so that there are many activities the students can do without her help. She uses those first minutes of the morning to photograph each child individually, in a pose of the student's own choosing, outside the classroom. She is wearing a name tag she made from materials similar to those provided the students to make their tags. Her tag has only her first name written on it, but on this day and all the days that follow the students will call her "Mrs. R\_\_\_\_" (surname deleted in accordance with our observation agreement). I, too, make a name tag of my first name only as does Helen (fictitious name), the student teacher. In the next four months the students will always call Helen and me by our first names and so will the teacher.

The teacher controls much of the activity of this day. She has placed the materials on the tables for the students to use when they first come into the room; she selected the story

she would read to them; she has decided which games the students would play as a group. The students ask her for permission to use the lavatory or to play on the ball field area of the schoolyard during recess.

#### September 11

On this fifth day of school the teacher mentions to me her dissatisfaction with the classroom behavior of Arnold. She says she is trying to think of ways to control him when his behavior become unbearable. She is considering telling him to leave the room at sharing time if he continues to use that time to talk while others are sharing. When she discusses Arnold's behavior with his former teacher in the kitchen during morning break, the teacher tells her that nothing will change Arnold. Her reply to this is, "Arnole will work out all right."

The teacher also tells me today that she is not satisfied with the amount of time it takes the students to gather on the rug when she announces such a session is to begin. She does not like having to call some people a second or third time because she feels that introduces too much teacher dominance into the routine.

The morning workshop activities are to generate from the central theme of "Nature." The theme was imposed by the teacher, but almost all of the specific activities are suggested by the students and accepted without exception by the teacher.

Today at read-aloud time the teacher asks for the student opinions of the book she is reading. She follows by calling for them to vote on whether she should continue this



book or start another. The vote is to continue. I ask her later if she had any preference in the issue, but she says she did not and was not trying to influence the vote in any way. In the afternoon the teacher suggests one outside game, but the students respond by suggesting other games. Another vote is taken on all suggestions including the teacher's. Her suggestion loses and she organizes the game with the most votes.

At dismissal time, the teacher places a pile of notices from the office on the bookcase near the door and tells the students to take one on their way out. At the bell the students leave the room informally with no signs of the traditional school line.

#### September 13

All students have been told by the teacher to keep a journal of their activities. Time is set aside each day to make these entries which are to be shown to the teacher or some other adult in the room.

The teacher tells me that yesterday Arnold completed a suggested poem writing activity with a poem that was filled with childish terms for bathroom functions. She talked with the principal about it and he urged her to call Arnold's mother, but she does not want to do that yet. She hopes downplaying such events will cause Arnold to lose interest in them.

During the planning period the teacher tells the students who are interested in the study of butterflies to get together and plan some activities, then share those plans with her so she might help if any materials are needed. She appoints Martha coordinator of the leaf printing group. Martha's own choice of a workshop activity for today was puzzles; she does not get much time for that today.

Alex and Danny complain to the teacher that Joey is taking a very dominant position at the geoblock table, telling others what they may or may not do. The teacher tells them to return to the table and to try to learn to work together, that working together is something they should be trying to learn.

The sharing period is still mostly under the teacher's direction. She asks most of the questions, repeats many of the answers loud enough for the group to hear them, and reminds students of the appropriate behaviors at sharing time. Before the students leave the rug to make their journal entries, the teacher tells them to try to include "what you did so far today, what you liked or didn't like, and how your group got along."

#### September 20

In our lunchtime conversation today the teacher tells me that she thinks her mother is a creative individual and that she has learned how to be creative herself from her

mother. Creativity is defined as the willingness to try something new or do something a different way. One of her goals this year is to have a classroom atmosphere in which students can risk new learnings without fear of failure.

The teacher has other goals, too, and lists them for me on October 16 in one of our formal interview sessions.

They are:

(1) Children will be encouraged to make decisions.

(2) Learning experiences will be relevant to the lives of these children.

(3) Children will choose from learning activities that provide for different ways of learning and allow for different rates of learning.

(4) She, the teacher, will actively involve herself in the learning experiences and not function only as an evaluator.

(5) The planning will be done by both the teacher and the students.

(6) Children will freely express emotions and feelings, and will take an active part in working out any problems that arise.

(7) Children will interact with each other; talking to one another will be a common activity.

(8) Relationship building and communication skills will be as important as reading, math, and other traditional school subjects.

(9) Children will be encouraged to use many kinds of manipulative materials, and these materials will be kept where children can get them when they need them.

(10) She, the teacher, will try to convey to the students her trust in them as seekers of knowledge by respecting their decisions and by seriously accepting their expressions of their feelings and wants.

(11) Thinking will be valued as much as learning. The process will count equally with the product.

The language/reading time today begins with the teacher instructing the students to explore the many books and language games in the classroom, to select something to read or do alone or with others, and to try to learn something from that activity through active participation. She explains to me that first she wants involvement; later she will assist students with developing the skills they need for continued progress as she and the students discover those needs.

Tamico asks the teacher for permission to leave the room to use the lavatory. She replies, "You don't have to ask me. Just go when you need to."

As the teacher is about to begin to read a story to the group, Edward tells her that Marie is now sitting on a stool that Edward was sitting on before he had to leave the rug area to put away some materials. The teacher motions Marie off the stool with a wave of her hand. There is a rule in this classroom that no student will take the seat of another

student if that other student has to leave the rug when a group session is in progress.

Today is the day Joey complains to the teacher of Jeff's play in the "Capture the Flag" game. The teacher does not intercede, but simply tells Joey to return to the game.

#### September 25

Today I begin noting where people sit when there is a rug session. The teacher takes a place on the rug against the wall, directly under the planning board. She will sit there in most future sessions, I will note. After possibly realizing that the sharing period is often confused by people sharing from wherever they are sitting, resulting in students not being able to clearly see or hear some sharers, she requests that the person sharing move next to her when presenting. This makes the period run more smoothly. It seems most of the students seat themselves so they can clearly see and hear the teacher.

#### September 27

"The more confidence I develop in myself, the easier I find it possible to let the students have more of a say in their learning," the teacher tells me today. I try to get more information about where her self-confidence comes from by talking about some recent events: her attempts to understand Arnold's behaviors, her request for bussed students, her heavy afterschool commitment to professional activities.

She says she sometimes thinks she lets her idealism run away from her and has second thoughts about her ability to finish something she has said she would do. On the other hand, she enjoys challenges and feels she has met most challenges successfully.

We talk about Cindy's decision not to complete her diorama. The teacher says that on the day Cindy started that project she had requested the teacher's help constantly. The teacher thinks she only gave the minimum of assistance to those requests. She does not expect Cindy will ever complete the diorama.

Alex and Danny choose the same math activity. The teacher asks Alex to change his choice, which he does. She tells me, but not Alex, that her purpose in requesting that change was to have Alex and Danny work with other people. They usually work together. I will notice that as the weeks pass Alex and Danny always do everything together, sometimes with others involved, too, but always with each other.

The group of children working with Cuiesenaire rods are noisy and argumentative. The teacher goes to that table, suggests an activity to them, and leaves. A few minutes later the group is arguing again. The teacher returns and this time tells them to do the activity she had suggested or build with the rods. The group settles into the construction activity.

At sharing time the teacher requests that the students share some of the poems they have been writing. She reads those that some students want to share, but are unwilling to read themselves.

#### October 2

At the beginning of the year, the teacher collected milk and lunch tickets from the students. Now there is an envelope on the wall near the front door for students to deposit their tickets. When a messenger comes to the room for the day's count, one of the students will usually figure the total by counting the tickets and telling the messenger the number. The task is not assigned to anyone. I notice it is usually done by the first student to notice the messenger.

#### October 4

The following conversation refers to a pencil Reggie had borrowed from the teacher:

Reggie: "Where's my pencil?"

Teacher: "What did you do with it?"

Reggie: "You took it away from me."

Teacher: "What!"

Reggie: "I mean I gave it back to you."

Teacher: "That's right. Now here is one you can keep."

Arnold's behavior is much improved, the teacher says.

She is glad no "behavior problems" were assigned to her class.

My notes indicate Arnold was a problem to his teacher in the first grade, that Todd has a history of emotional instability, that Joey and Raymond have both had problems getting along with others in past years at this school, and that Reggie is already having the first of what will be many fights in the next few weeks.

### October 9

Edward finishes a painting and brings it to the teacher to hang on a wire seven feet or so above the floor. Ross finishes his birdhouse and asks the teacher to help him open a can of paint for him to use. I notice that students often work without the teacher, but ask her for help when they need someone taller or stronger, or when they don't know where some item is stored. Alex comes in from the steps just outside the door with some leaves he has been pounding. He asks, "Are these pounded enough." She answers, "They need more pounding. It takes about fifteen minutes; you've worked about three." Alex laughs and goes back out to resume pounding.

The teacher says all may go out to recess except those who have not cleaned up after their workshop activity. Arnold, Perry, and Reggie start for the door. She calls them back to put away the rocks and they do so without objection.

Edward shares his painting with the class. The teacher asks Tamico to show hers. When she shakes her head no, the teacher does not ask again. Today is the day Joey shows his



completely painted boat. The teacher makes no mention of the fact that she told him to wait until tomorrow to paint it.

October 11

There are now twenty-two students in the class. The teacher says aloud at one of the planning sessions, "I think we need a bigger rug." Again the teacher accepts all the suggestions for learning activities. There are only five sections in which to list activities on the planning board. When more than five are suggested the lower halves of the sections are used for the additions. No one seems to be inhibited by a five-section board. I never will see the teacher stop accepting suggestions when the fifth section is labeled. "Sandcasting" is listed today. It is Arnold's choice, but the teacher tells him only those who haven't finished work in that activity may do it today. This was not mentioned before and the procedure in this class prevents further suggestions. Arnold must choose from the other activities listed.

October 16

Those choosing Cuisenaire rods today will be limited to four students who did not do that activity yesterday. Arnold raises his hand. The teacher asks, "Did you work with the rods yesterday?" Arnold shakes his head no. She asks, "Are you sure?" He appears to think a moment then says he is sure. The teacher adds his name to the rod group.

October 24

A group activity is being organized on the rug by the teacher. Dorothy and Joey leave the rug to join Woodrow at a nearby table where he is playing noisily with the balance beam. The teacher calls the three of them back, but Woodrow refuses. Nora is at the woodworking table, others have started playing with puzzles on the rug. The teacher tells the students that she is upset by this lack of cooperation. She recalls to them that there are times to work alone or in small groups and times to work together as a class. She invites the students to suggest how these full class activities could be improved. After a short discussion she proceeds with the planned activity and it appears to go smoothly. Woodrow, who did not participate in the discussion, does not take part in the activity either. When the activity is finished, the teacher goes to Woodrow and explains personally to him how this classroom operates.

October 26

This morning the class "brainstorms" for activities for the new workshop theme, "Jobs," meaning an investigation of occupations of people of the world. Both students and teacher make suggestions. Whenever a group discussion seems to be drifting from the subject, the teacher reminds them of the task at hand. When the specific activities for today are being suggested, I hear Lisa tell the teacher that she wants

woodworking. The teacher reminds her to wait until all the suggestions are made before she chooses. Lisa waits. It's now time to select and when the teacher asks for woodworking participants Lisa and Woodrow jump to their feet, waving their hands. The teacher tells them that she does not select people who jump up, and she does not let either of them select woodworking. Lisa selects another activity, but Woodrow refuses to make another choice. When the others go to their respective activities the teacher spends some time with Woodrow explaining the selection procedures and Woodrow chooses an activity.

At read-aloud time the group is noisy. The teacher says the noise bothers her and asks if it bothers others. Some say yes. Suggestions are made to control the noise, but when the reading resumes, so does the noise. I note today that the ones who are making the noise are not the ones who make suggestions for its control.

Cindy asks the teacher how to spell the word "plaque," a term used by a visiting dentist who explained the causes of tooth decay. The teacher tells Cindy that she is not sure how it is spelled, gets out a dictionary, and both look for the correct spelling.

Today is the only Friday I spend observing. As I enter the audio-visual room I sense some uneasiness in the teacher and ask if she would prefer to eat alone. She shakes her head no, and, as I sit down, tears begin rolling down her face.

Without any attempt to hide the tears she begins telling me how difficult the week has been, how many different events have demanded her attention in the classroom, and how difficult it has been for her to see progress toward the goals she has set. She often mentions being concerned with the impressions visitors get when they visit her classroom. Most outsiders only stay a few minutes, often, the teacher feels, at the times when everything isn't running smoothly. These visitors include guests of the principal and undergraduate education majors, including some who are sent to survey the situation before indicating where they would prefer to student teach. She wonders what impression they must take away with them. The mention of forming impressions makes me a bit uneasy, considering my reason for being in that classroom. Whether she senses this or not, she adds that my presence does not fall in the same category as that of other visitors. She thinks I am around often enough to see things go smoothly as well as badly, and from conversations we have had about some observations she feels that I am well aware of positive events. Perhaps I am even more aware of the positive events than she is. I have no goals to meet; I'm just trying to see what is happening. She also says she is satisfied that I am keeping the confidences we established, that my observations are not discussed with others with whom she works or with whom she has a professional relationship. The discussion shifts to plans for the afternoon and then on to other

things. When lunch is over we return to the classroom for what turns out to be a very smooth running afternoon.

#### October 30

There appears to be lots of interest in today's sharing activity. Even when the teacher leaves the group for a few minutes, the activity goes on. The student teacher is absent today; the group just proceeds. Today is the day Woodrow helps Tamico explain her picture. The teacher returns to the group. Todd tells the group he sometimes has a problem finding a place to do his math after the workshop period because so many items are left on the tables. He suggests everyone remember to put things away when finished. The teacher supports Todd's suggestion and other appear to be in agreement also.

#### November 1

Todd and Reggie square off with fists raised. The teacher, standing about six feet away, asks what is going on. Reggie accuses Todd of calling him a name; Todd denies it. The teacher, still six feet away, says, "One of you has to take the responsibility for stopping the fight." Woodrow suddenly steps between them and it ends. The teacher thanks Woodrow for his assistance.

Both the teacher and the student teacher are out of the room for about twenty minutes of the workshop period. I am standing near the window taking notes or assisting at the

woodworking table when asked. Everyone is as busy as when the teacher is in the room.

The teacher starts to organize a group game on the rug. Several students continue talking among themselves.

Teacher: "I'm getting a sore throat from trying to talk so loud," and she stops organizing the activity.

Alex: "Let's be quiet."

Beth: "C'mon Reggie, you're spoiling it for others."

Alex: "Reggie, we are waiting."

Beth: "Reggie, PLEASE, be quiet."

Reggie quiets down and the teacher resumes. All the time Alex and Beth are calling for order, she waits without saying a word.

On the way to lunch the teacher tells me how good she is feeling today. She says another teacher must have noticed the change yesterday when that teacher told her, "You look less frazzled today." A look back at my notes shows it was just two days ago that Marc, Jeff, and others tried to gang up on Reggie in the schoolyard. I think I see a pattern of the classroom running more smoothly after a conflict of one kind or another. The bigger the conflict, the better appears to be the recovery.

Yesterday the teacher talked with Alex's parents. They told her that they have noticed Alex now wants to be in on the decision-making at home. Furthermore, he had in the past insisted on sleeping in the living room with a light on to

be nearer his parents' room. Now he stays in his own bedroom, sleeping with all lights off. The parents asked if the teacher had noticed a nervous tic in Alex's face which regularly appeared while he was in school last year. The teacher does not recall any such thing this year. I don't either.

I sit in on a conference with Cindy's mother. She says she was a bit concerned at the beginning of the year about Cindy's being in a class with so few second graders because she considers Cindy a shy person, like she is. Now, however, with Cindy not mentioning any differences between second and third graders in conversations at home, she is no longer worried. She says, "Cindy is so happy. She never complains. Sometimes she comes home from school happier than when she left the house in the morning."

I notice in my notes that there are no big changes in the behavior of the teacher from October through December. In contrast to the first two weeks, she now involves the students in all phases of planning as well as including them in discussions on appropriate standards of behavior while in this classroom. She often puts matters to a vote and then supports the majority opinion. She appears free to share her ideas with the students. The students at times agree with her and at times disagree. With me she remains very patient, and, I feel, very open, in explaining why she did something or what she is trying to do.

### Observations of the Student Teacher

The other events that are beginning to predominate by November are those that involve the student teacher. Very briefly, here are some samples.

#### September 5

From this day of school, the student teacher is called by her first name, Helen, by everyone in the classroom. She sits on the rug during group sessions, but not next to the teacher.

#### October 4

The teacher tells me that Helen has been absent four times in the past two weeks, sometimes failing to notify the teacher that she will be out.

#### October 11

The teacher tells me Helen is frequently late for school. Also, she seems to lack the initiative or the desire to assume more responsibility. On a recent day when the teacher had intended to let Helen run the class, she had not prepared the activity the teacher suggested. The teacher says she has made other suggestions to Helen that Helen failed to follow through. On occasions on which the teacher has left Helen alone with the class for an extended period of time, things have not run smoothly.

At recess today I engage Helen in a conversation and try to find out more about how things go when she has the



class alone. I have not been there on one of these days yet. Helen tells me she finds it difficult to keep up with all the requests for assistance she gets when she is alone. She doesn't notice such a demand when both she and the teacher are present. Helen also tells me Beth was somewhat of a problem yesterday. Beth told Helen, "If Mrs. R\_\_\_\_ does not come back soon, there will be trouble." Beth continued to disrupt an activity Helen had organized by refusing to play by the rules the others were playing by.

I also hear today from the teacher about a visit she and another teacher had with some of Helen's college faculty. When the student teacher of the other teacher was mentioned several positive comments were made. When Helen was identified as this teacher's intern, there was no response other than "oh." The teacher tells me she could not find Helen's name on a list of student teachers put out by the university. She mentioned this to Helen, who replied, "I'm not surprised. They are always forgetting me." The teacher now thinks she might need to help Helen with her self-image. From this day on, I seldom hear the teacher speak of any nonperformance by Helen.

#### November 1

The workshop time is ending and the teacher is not in the room. Helen tells the class to begin putting things away, then moves around the room to remind individuals who are not complying with her directions.

November 6

The teacher takes some children from the room for a play rehearsal. Today Helen is to run the group relationship building activity. She asks the students to sit in a circle. She asks the group eight times, then asks three individuals separately before a circle is formed. Beth tries to take over the organizing, but Helen tells her that she prefers to do it herself. Now Raymond begins whistling and Lisa joins in. Helen asks Hank to leave the circle because he has been calling Joey names across the circle. Actually, Joey is the protagonist, making faces at Hank when Helen's attention is elsewhere. Fifteen minutes have gone by; the game is still not underway. Beth sits with her back to the inside of the circle. Finally, the game is played for about ten minutes.

Helen is left with the class again in the afternoon while the teacher has a conference with Woodrow's mother. I sit in on the conference. It is today that Woodrow's mother talks about his other school experiences. The teacher tells her that she notices some improvement in Woodrow's classroom behavior and hopes for more. She says to this mother, "I just don't know how to handle him when he gets mad." His mother answers, "I don't know what to do either. It's because all they did at his last school was fight. In that school system the teachers didn't give a damn. They just sent home a note saying he was bad." The teacher asks about Woodrow's reaction to

school these days. His mother says she has noticed a positive change in his attitude since the day he came home and told her about a boat he made. She goes on, "He now goes to bed eager to get up for the bus, and even takes his bath without being told." The teacher tells her that she thinks once Woodrow feels he is a part of this class, he will make more rapid progress in all areas.

When the teacher and I return to the classroom, Lisa, Reggie, Raymond, and Woodrow are in a battle. Most of the conflict appears to be between Lisa and Raymond. Helen says to us, "A half-hour alone and I'm mutilated," but she continues to try to control Lisa and Raymond while the teacher stops Woodrow and Reggie. A visitor in the room asks Helen how she usually handles fights when the present dispute is over. Helen says she has no set approach, that it depends on the circumstances. She mentions she is having less difficulty with Woodrow these days. The teacher tells us that Raymond's father is not in favor of having bussed students in this school. She learned this from Raymond's mother who also said she had a difficult time preventing him from "storming down" to see the principal after Raymond told him of some recent conflicts.

#### November 18

Today is the day the teacher is absent. Helen has control problems throughout the workshop period. Arguments

and fights keep starting. Helen handles each incident separately and does not stop the whole class from working. The substitute teacher stays out of the conflicts; she even takes a short break before recess. I try to play my regular role and do whatever Helen requests me to do. She never calls on me or the substitute to dissolve an argument or stop a fight. When the class is on the rug I notice Helen sits where the teacher usually sits.

At recess Helen talks to me and the substitute about the morning's problems. The sub says she should send the offenders to the principal. Helen explains that she would rather try to deal with the conflicts in the room as the teacher usually does. I say nothing.

Throughout the day Helen tries to keep to the established schedule. She stops to settle some dispute, then returns to the activity that is in progress.

A morning assembly is scheduled. The class attends and returns to the classroom right at recess time. They are noisy. The substitute yells, "Get your coats on, and go out." Lisa and Dorothy yell back, "No." Helen speaks firmly to both of them, "Yes." They put on their coats and leave the room.

When the class gathers near the door before proceeding to the lunchroom, there is again a lot of noise. Helen tells the group that they "don't sound ready." Marc complains that someone has taken a bite of his dessert during the morning. Helen sympathizes with him and promises to try to think of

a way of preventing this from happening again.

Woodrow and Joey have their big fight at lunch time and are not in the classroom in the afternoon. Helen begins the planning session for tomorrow's workshop period. The group is noisy. Todd leaves the group and flicks the lights. The group becomes quiet. Helen thanks Todd and proceeds. There are no fights this afternoon.

At dismissal time Beth asks Helen for permission to take her math workbook home. Helen reminds her that such is not the normal procedure. Beth persists in her request; Helen refuses her permission. The sub says, "I'm saying no." Beth ignores her and asks Helen again. Again Helen refuses. Beth leaves without her workbook.

#### November 13

Helen tells me at the end of the day that she feels good about the way today went. She asked people to do something and they did it. I noticed that Helen took charge at times when it looked like someone should, and that the pupils responded to her directions.

#### November 16

Today I have lunch with a graduate student who knows Helen. He mentions to me that he saw her at a student teacher meeting this week and noticed that she was smiling. He remembers that his previous recollections of her are most of her rather depressed appearance. "Hang-dog look" is the term he uses.

November 27

The teacher is absent today. No substitute is present. Helen runs the day herself and all goes as smoothly as if the teacher were present.

December 13

The teacher, Helen, and I talk about how the class has been operating in recent weeks. I ask Helen for her comments as to how her internship went. She says it was difficult for a while, but that recently she found she was having a lot of success. I ask her if she can recall when things began to get better. She says it was shortly after the day Joey and Woodrow had their big fight, the day she was alone with the class. I ask her what she thinks made the improvement. She says she noticed a better response from the students after that day and she felt more confident in trying new things. The teacher mentions she, too, noticed a change in Helen and her relationship to the class at about that time. Since then she has been more willing to let Helen run the classroom.

Helen mentions one other thing. She says she started having more success with the students when she began acting more like the teacher. She tried to sit where the teacher sat during rug sessions, and she tried to settle disputes as she thought the teacher would settle them. She saw what techniques worked for the teacher and found they worked for her too.

### Analysis of Observations

I have tried to include in the incidents above much of the material I used to analyze the role of the teacher in this open classroom. From what I observed it seems evident to me that the three assumptions I chose to start with are accurate assumptions about this teacher. Her openness with the students was reciprocated. Her respect for her students was demonstrated in her refusal to give up her goals even when nothing seemed to go right. She worked through the most difficult situations with patience and firmness, not coercion and punishment. But I think the data has more to say than that about her role.

There is the position the teacher occupies in the classroom social organization to consider. She is at the very center of the social structure (Fig. 6.1) for at least three reasons. First, she is the central figure because of the traditional design of the school environment. Each classroom has one teacher; it is his/her classroom and the students are in his/her class. The students recognize the status of this teacher right from the beginning. They call her "Mrs. R\_\_\_" while all other adults in this room are called by their first names. Alex first asks the teacher about what work will be required of him. Tamico asks her for permission to use the lavatory. These actions would be typical behaviors in a traditional classroom where most students' attention would always be directed at the teacher. But in this classroom a student wanting to ask something of the teacher must often seek her

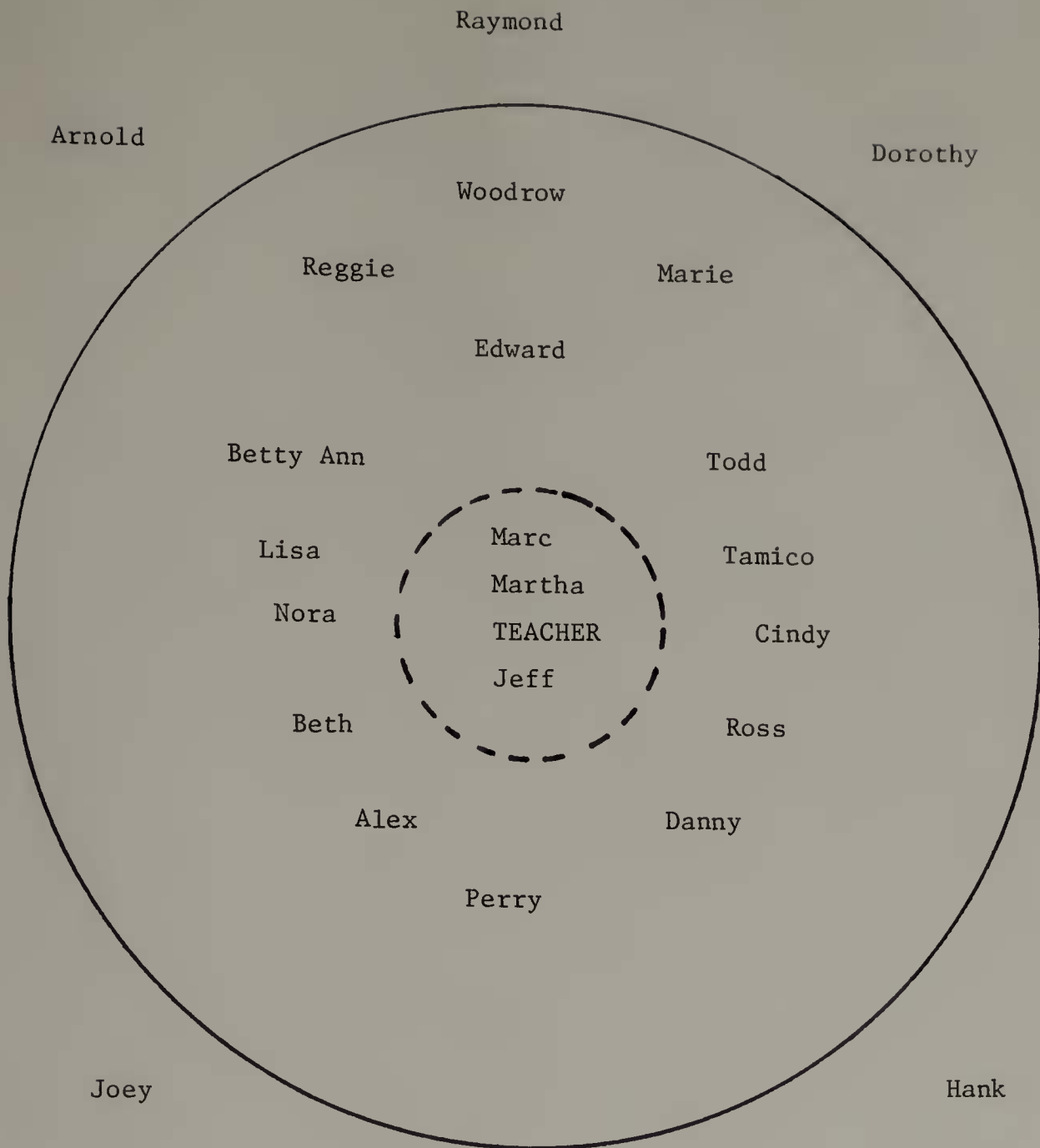


Figure 6.1: Teacher's Position in Class Sociogram



out, bypassing in the process others who have the same information. That many students do this, especially in the first few weeks of school, shows their recognition of her assigned central position. The school keeps reinforcing the status of this teacher by beginning every announcement to this classroom over the intercom with "Mrs. R\_\_\_." The message begins the same whether it is for the teacher, for the entire class, or for one specific student.

The second factor that places the teacher at the center of the system is that she is the one who sets the expectations. Now the question raised by the previous chapter as to where do the expectations for student roles originate can be answered. The teacher establishes these expectations. She does so by arrangement and content of classroom materials, organization of daily routines, and verbal explanations of how students in this classroom are to "work." During the day she functions as timekeeper, reminder of responsibilities, and chairperson of group sessions. Some recognition of her central operational role appears when the students seat themselves on the rug in positions that allow them to direct their attentions in the direction of the teacher. The entire sharing process immediately improves when students move next to the teacher before speaking to the group. There are also examples in the data of the teacher reinforcing those expectations with individuals -- she tells Alex and Danny to learn to work Joey -- or extinguishing non-expectations -- she does not fully help Cindy

when she requests assistance on every step of a project.

The third factor is the teacher's own classroom behavior. This has as much to do with establishing her central role as it does to her ability to maintain that position. Everything this teacher expects her pupils to do, she does too and often better. She is active in the planning and active in the work periods. She tries to work with students in a learning activity, rather than simply tell them how to do it. She settles disputes by showing that she wants to understand the problem first, then involves those with the problem in arriving at a solution. When a vote is taken, the teacher abides by the decision of the group.

Some other clues as to how the teacher gains the center position of the social structure can be found in the progress of the student teacher to that position (Figs. 6.2 and 6.3). Helen gives the main clue herself when she says she began behaving more like the teacher behaved. It appears, then, that there are expectations for the role of teacher too. I believe that the difficulties imposed on the student teacher by the students for the first two months were actually tests by them to see if she could qualify for the status of teacher. Could she meet the expectations the teacher met when under pressure? Helen's performance on the day that the teacher was absent seems to be critical to this analysis. If she did not keep control of the class, she certainly kept control of herself. She did not change the standards or abandon the procedures of

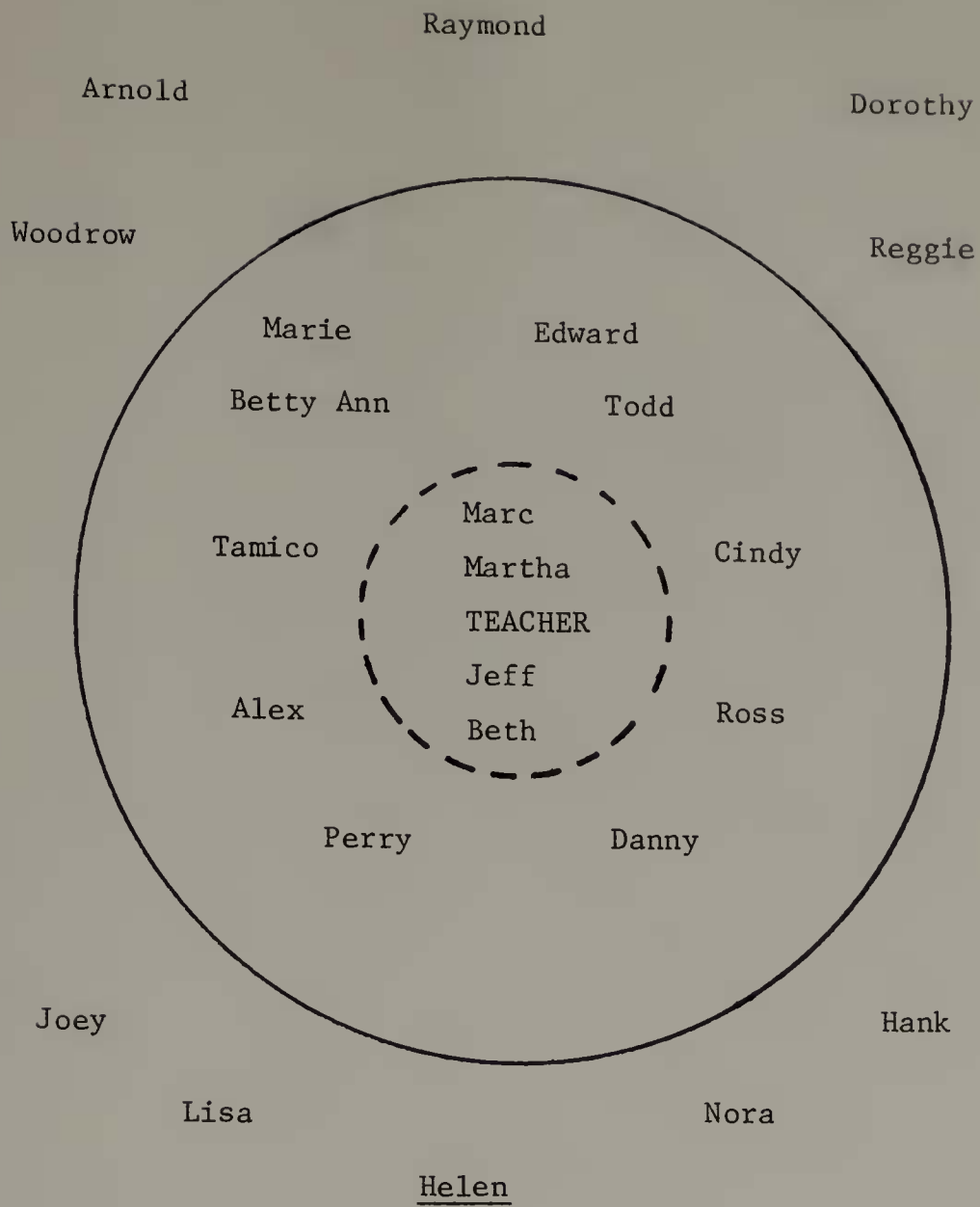


Figure 6.2: Student Teacher's Position in Class Sociogram in October

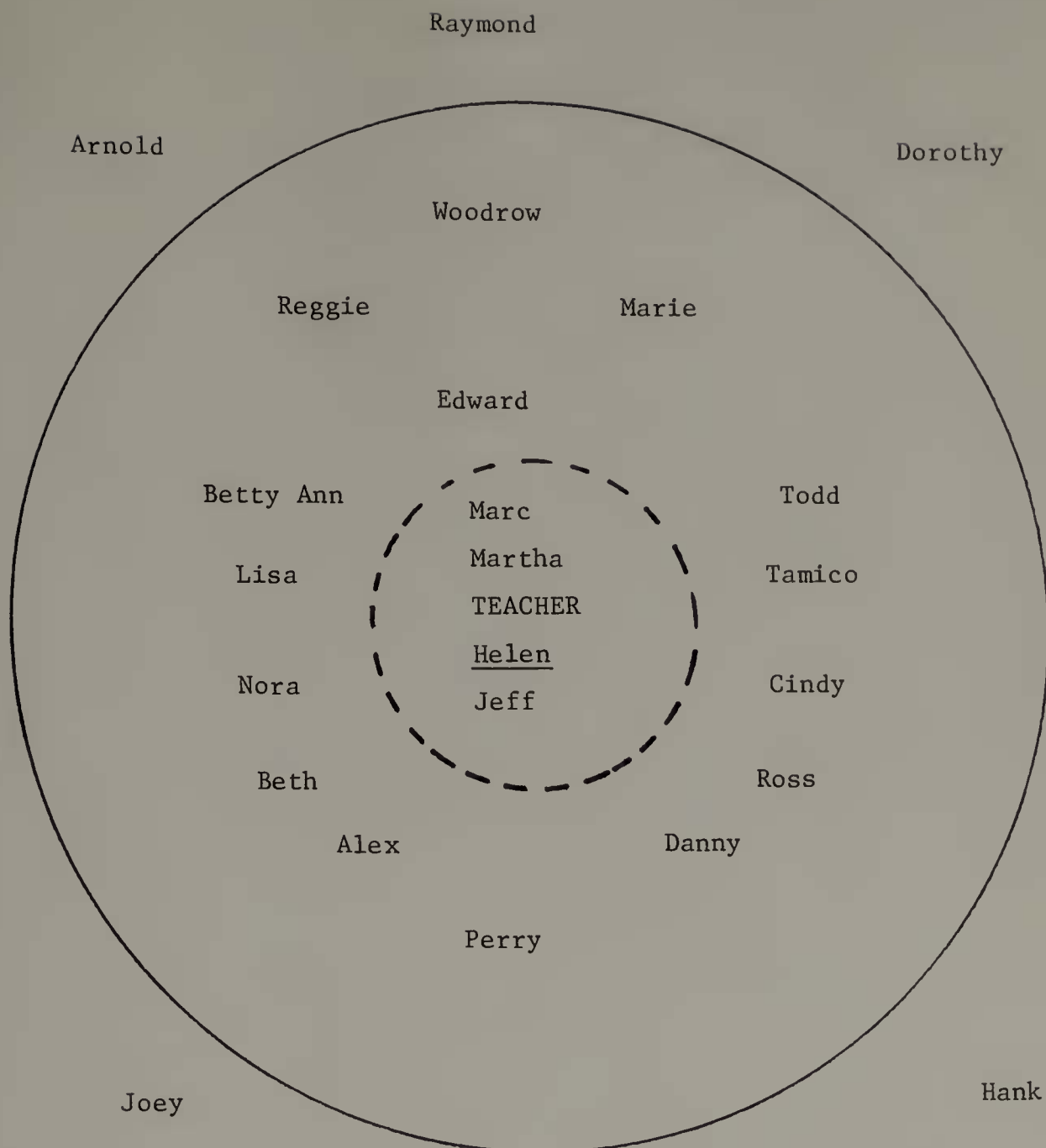


Figure 6.3: Student Teacher's Position in Class Sociogram in December

days when the teacher was present. She resisted the urgings of the substitute to invoke punishments or call for the principal. I think the students noted her performance and began awarding her teacher status from that day.

Some evidence of this ability to retain her position under pressure can also be found in the teacher's actions. The most trying examples of those months were her efforts to control Woodrow's hostility. She was under pressure from the principal, some teachers, and some parents to request his removal from her class. No one from whom she requested assistance came to her aid. Yet, she resisted even her own impulses to change her expectations for Woodrow or any of the bussed students from those of the other members of the class, or to incorporate punishments into her strategies for solving conflicts. When Woodrow's behavior changed, there was considerable relief from a lot of people. I think some of the relief the students felt came from their realization that this teacher could survive in accord with their expectations.

Why this teacher chose to establish the aforementioned expectations for her students and herself might be explained by the teacher's own personality system. She feels she has more confidence in the decisions of the students as she recognizes her own self-confidence as a decision maker. She can allow students the opportunity to try to learn in different ways because she thinks her own creative abilities are stimulated by trying new ideas. She can ask students to persist

in the face of obstacles because she faces and surmounts obstacles every day herself.

One of the most obvious traits of personality of this teacher in the data is her autonomy. She refuses to be discouraged by Arnold's former teacher. She will not ask for Woodrow's removal from her class when parental and peer pressure mounts; she even refuses such a suggestion when it comes from the principal. When it seems that no one else understands what goals she has for her class, she persists in her efforts because she understands. This teacher is probably far from the center of this school's social system. The expectations to which she adheres are more a part of her own personality system than they are of the school system's expectations for its teachers.

To say, as the open education assumption does, that the personality of the teacher is a major influence on the operation of the classroom is a superficial statement. It appears that the personality system of the teacher must be of a particular kind if he/she is to have expectations of autonomy from others. Perhaps the first step in setting up an open classroom should be to staff it with an autonomous teacher.

The role of the teacher in the social system of this classroom follows from her personality system. She plays the key part in the establishment of the role expectations of the students, those elements that will direct the formation of a classroom social order. When she, herself, shows she can

meet the expectations she has for others, the operations of the classroom show a reduction in conflict, a commitment to tasks, and a rise in the level of cooperation.

It is when a social organization develops from accepted expectations of a balance between self worth and group worth that the members of that organization demonstrate the characteristics of open education: independence and cooperation, autonomy and trust. The teacher begins the process, then the social group perpetuates the desired behaviors as the norms of the group exert an influence on the behavior of each individual member.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

There are two sets of conclusions to this study. One deals with what was learned about open education; the other concerns the methodology used to obtain this knowledge about an open classroom. But before proceeding with those conclusions, I want to draw attention to the fact the data used to support these conclusions comes from only one classroom. Although I feel the analysis of that data provides an accurate explanation for the events of that classroom, I am not at all certain that the conclusions can be applied to other classrooms. However, such a broad application was not the intent of this study. I believe each classroom situation is unique enough to warrant a study of its own. Only after many studies of individual classrooms are conducted in a manner similar to this one will it be possible to compare them and derive possible hypotheses for a survey of a large sample of classrooms. Then generalizations might be appropriate. The purpose of this present study was the description and analysis of the social system of one classroom; the conclusions are intended to be applicable to that situation.

Another limit of this study was its focus on the social system of the classroom. The cultural systems and personality systems that were present did not receive as much attention



as the social system. Conclusions that attempt to integrate all the systems are based on a lesser amount of data than conclusions that are specific statements about the social system.

Both of these limitations should be remembered when the conclusions that follow are considered.

### Conclusions About the Students

An initial objective of this study was to find out if students in an open classroom did behave as autonomous, trusting, independent, cooperative individuals as Rathone (1971) and others (Silberman, 1970; Featherstone, 1971; Hassett and Weisberg, 1972) said they would behave when in such an environment. More information about Barth's (1972) assumptions about children was also sought. My conclusion about the children in this classroom is that most of them behaved, most of the time they were in the classroom after mid-November, as autonomous, independent, trusting, cooperative individuals. At least five of those students did not fit that description. Those students who were identified as members of the major social structure of the classroom behaved as autonomous, independent, trusting, cooperative individuals. The five who were identified as non-members of that social structure did not behave this way. Some additional insight into this conclusion might be gained from more attention to the social organization itself.

The social organization was characterized by role expectations and role performance. I am further convinced that a social order developed by mid-November, and that it was not

just a case of some individuals learning the acceptable role at different rates, by the apparent formation of a boundry. Until mid-November it was possible for students to affiliate with members of the central group at different times. After that time not one of those I had identified as outsiders was able to penetrate the boundry. In the five weeks of observation after mid-November I watched the outsiders work in greater isolation with less productive efforts. Any one of the outsiders would spend up to a whole day without involving him/herself in any of the activities he/she had selected. Hank, Joey, and Raymond at times managed a very loose alliance; Arnold and Dorothy seldom found anyone who would work with them. I have presented examples of role expectations, role performance, and now a boundry. These are the characteristics I used to define a social system. I found evidence of all three in this classroom.

Some additional support for these ideas about the formation of a social organization is provided by Homans (1950). His work was a comparison of small group behaviors for consistent characteristics among a number of groups. He defined a small group as one in which each member has first-hand knowledge of every other members. One characteristic he identified is the tendency of the group to maintain its equilibrium. A disruption in that equilibrium is followed by changes

that tend to restore the equilibrium. The difficulties that this class had with Reggie, Woodrow, and Helen caused disruption in the form of conflicts. Equilibrium was restored when a change of attitude was made by the members of the group and group acceptance was granted to these three.

I believe Homans (1950) also provides some clues as to why the outsiders in this classroom did not become members of the larger group. Homans says that an individual cannot become a member of a group unless he has a capacity for membership and such a capacity is learned in groups. In other words, a person must be sensitive to role expectations, a skill that is learned in social situations. Joey missed much of his first grade year in school because of a recurring ear infection. Raymond's house is not near the homes of other children, and he is dependent on his mother to transport him to some other child's house or bring someone to his house for interaction with other children during non-school hours. Arnold's favorite play area is his own bedroom which he and his parents have elaborately decorated so he will have a place to play his favorite fantasy games like being Superman. I do not have enough background information on Hank or Dorothy to tell whether they have had interference with social growth. Homans (1950) states: "Persons who interact frequently are more alike in their activities than they are alike other persons with whom they interact less frequently (p.135)."

Not knowing how to act in group situations might be the basic difference between the outsiders and the inside group which prevents the outsider from developing the very capacity needed to join this group.

Another possibility for nonmembership are the personality systems of the outsiders. Their demand for continuous assistance, their frequent appeal to adults to help them out of conflict situations, their inability to complete tasks unless paired with a proficient partner indicates to me a highly dependent personality. Spiro (1961) maintains that no society knows how to accept high dependency. This similarity in personality systems is the only common factor I could detect in all five outsiders. I also found this dependent personality in Danny and perhaps Marie, but both of these individuals always paired themselves with proficient partners.

There is still Beth to explain. She was a member of the larger group, but many of her behaviors differed from behaviors of the others. I think she stayed in the group because she knew when to back down. Perhaps she sensed the solidarity of that group and would not risk ostracism by openly violating its norms. Beth knew how to behave in groups. Last year she was an accepted member of the class, the teacher told me. From other conversations with the teacher, I get the impression that Beth is being pressured by her parents to constantly demonstrate success. They seem to measure success by high test scores and other forms of academic achievement. The

values in Beth's cultural system are probably influenced by these demands of her parents, and those values might be in conflict with the objectives of individual growth that are promoted in this classroom.

### Classroom Aggression

The incidents of aggression have been mentioned so frequently in the data and in this analysis that the subject of aggression in this classroom cannot be dismissed without comment in these conclusions. I have found Erich Fromm's book The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness (1973), very useful in helping me clarify my own ideas about aggression that I developed in the course of this study.

I believe I saw three distinct patterns of aggression in this classroom. The first is demonstrated by the fights of Lisa, Reggie, and Woodrow. I have stated that they fought to show their strength as a way of gaining acceptance from their classmates. Fromm (1973) labels this "instrumental aggression." It is aggression that is used to "obtain that which is necessary or desirable. The aim is not destruction as such. (Fromm, 1973, p. 207)." In this case, these individuals wanted the respect of their classmates which in turn would provide them with an entry point into the dominant social order. Being inside was the desirable thing.

I am aware of the racial element of these fights. The fighting began only after the classroom contained both black

and white students. I reject the idea that the conflicts had racial origins. Reggie and Woodrow fought as often with each other as they did with any white student. When there were signs of group acceptance, Reggie, Woodrow, and Lisa stopped fighting.

Why did Reggie, Woodrow, and Lisa choose to fight their way into the classroom system? Others who had to gain similar entry, specifically the white students new to this class, did not use that tactic. Perhaps the black children were calling upon a different cultural system than the white children for valued behaviors. When the teacher was asking for help in understanding the eruptions of October, one person to whom she talked was a consultant hired by the directors of the bussing program. A black himself, who had grown up in a neighborhood similar to those from which these bussed students came, he told the teacher her problem was the white children. "They don't know how to fight," he told the teacher. "Somebody should teach the white children to fight," he said. Although his suggestion was not followed, his comments provided another perspective for understanding the fights.

The second category of aggression involves Marc, Jeff, Beth, and Todd, and their persistent attempts to assault Reggie in the schoolyard in an event I previously mentioned. While I was looking for possible reasons for the fighting in general, I looked at use of classroom space for possible explanations. Some students had been working in this classroom

for a month before some others arrived. I looked for claims to specific areas, territorial rights, but could find none. The enrollment had increased by almost a third, yet the amount of rug space remained the same. Some fights started on the rug, but some started in areas where there was no physical crowding. I could not detect that the fighting resulted from any invasion of personal space either.

Fromm (1973) points out that there is a type of "crowding" other than physical crowding that produces aggression. Social crowding occurs when the established social order is disrupted. If Beth, Marc, Jeff, and Todd saw the fighting behaviors of Reggie as a threat to the social structure, they might well have responded with defensive aggression. When the social order was restored none of these four initiated any further aggression.

The fighting of Raymond, Hank, Joey, and Dorothy that occurred after the social system was in equilibrium in mid-November, and that appeared to have no effect on the structure, requires a third explanation. I believe these fights, mostly between each other, resulted from the frustrations these students experienced as social isolates. Fromm (1973) believes each person must see him/herself as an effective being. If denied that self-image, aggressive behaviors are a possible reaction. He goes on to say that this type of aggression is the most dangerous because cruelty and destructiveness are possible outcomes. Again, there is a lot of conjecture here,

and much more investigation is needed.

### Conclusions About the Teacher

A second aspect of this study was the teacher's role in the social system. I have already stated that I believe the norms and the role templates of the social organization originated with the teacher and were conveyed to the students through her expectations. Why she was successful in establishing this order requires more explanation.

In short, this teacher was an effective leader. Using Rostow's (1968) definition of leadership as a communication process and a learning process, the actions of this teacher show a pattern. From the first day she began establishing communication channels between her and the students as well as among the students themselves. Some of the clearest incidents that reveal her priority on communication are her dealings with Woodrow. Whenever the teacher made a point before the group that Woodrow rejected, she took time immediately after the group dissolved to re-explain her point to Woodrow individually. She did the same with other members of the class.

Communication is a two-way process. This teacher was a listener, too. She heard her students and found out many of their needs from them. This listening was basic to her function as a learner. She could lead effectively because she knew how to open lines of communication and could chart her direction from what was communicated. Levinson (1973)



says many people in leadership positions fail to find ways to become aware of the motivations of their followers. This teacher could succeed because she could discover the motivations of the students.

Because this teacher was mostly successful in establishing a classroom that met her expectations, I do not want to imply that any teacher can set any expectations and most students will comply. The expectations of this teacher have some unique qualities; they provided this teacher with some guidelines for action that have roots elsewhere than in the simplistics of behavioral conditioning theories. I watched her put into operation the ideas of Combs (1962) and other perceptual psychologist (Avila, Combs, Purkey , 1971 and 1971a). She became a helper rather than a driver; she searched for ways for the students to experience success; she created situations in which students were needed and wanted by each other. Her open-ended objectives were not attained by her presenting stimuli and rewarding appropriate responses. She maintained her position not by imposing controls on the students, but by meeting the expectations herself. She became the accepted leader as the expectations became the accepted norms.

I think now I can clarify Barth's assumption about teachers that refers to their being an authority not an authoritarian. Again I cite Homans (1950) for support of what follows. He found that when people were put in a small group situation, one in which all members had firsthand knowledge of each

other, and had a task to complete, a social organization developed as a result of the interactions that occurred. Within that social structure a leader emerged. He/she was the individual most at the center of the interactions with behaviors that came closest to the norms. The leader promoted conditions that prompted the group to discipline itself. He/she gave orders that the members were willing to obey; he/she learned what orders would be obeyed from the group members and issued those orders. A teacher who is going to function as an authority, an order giver who does not rely on sanctioning powers for enforcement, must discover the needs of the followers before issuing orders. This teacher did just that and continued to be effective in directing the group.

#### Conclusions About Open Education

My final comments on the contents of this study are my conclusions about the principles and practices of open education itself. I believe that the results of this study indicate a need for a restatement of the principles of open education as goals to be achieved rather than as assumptions about the student growth that will necessarily follow the implementation of open education practices. I have found no conclusive evidence in my observations or in my survey of related literature to support any premise that the nature of every person is to be independent, trusting, and cooperative. I think such characteristics are just some of the many

potentials included in the human nature. Since social learning seems to have an effective influence on the development of an individual's independence, trust, and cooperative potentials, these characteristics should be seen as goals to achieve.

Such a viewpoint would permit a scientific approach to improving open classroom practices. When there was evidence of movement toward the goals, the practices in operation could be continued; when progress toward the goals was not noted, the practices could be changed. This suggested revision of perspective removes the danger of individuals being classified as innately deficient when they are unsuccessful in an open classroom, that is, when they act as dependent, non-trusting, non-cooperative people. It also gives open classroom teachers a way around the pitfall to which Barth (1973) calls attention. He warns that some open education practices themselves are becoming highly prescriptive with the rising expectation that all open classroom teachers will do the same activities in their classrooms. Accepting the principles of open education as goals allows teachers to incorporate activities of their choice into their classroom operation, justifying them by evidence that shows progress toward the common goals. The principles, not the practices, are the major guide.

I will speculate as to why this classroom began to function smoothly once a social organization was established. Homans' (1950) research and some anthropological research (Coon, 1971) indicate that when the environment permits, people will choose to work in small groups. A small group in the sense used here means all members have firsthand knowledge of each other; that knowledge results from interactions with each other. When interactions were encouraged in this classroom setting, the members followed the historical pattern and formed a small group.

Both Homans (1950) and Coon (1971) point out that small groups have a historical importance as a reason for the continued existence of humans. Group members cooperate to meet mutual needs. Individuals who are in need of support find it in the group. Ease of communication leads to effective problem solving within a small group. A key to continued group cohesion is leadership that knows and strives to meet the needs of the members of the group. If Homans (1950) and Fromm (1965) are correct in their opinions that civilizations deteriorate and individuals suffer psychological damage when people cannot find or do not know how to function in small groups, then the encouragement of open education in classrooms takes on

importance. It might teach children an element of species' survival.

I see an implication in the importance of leadership in an open classroom. In the beginning, the teacher is recognized as the group leader, but he/she must work to keep that position. I think the skills needed to lead are those listed in Helping Relationships (Avila, Combs, Purkey, 1971). These skills call for listening and understanding on the part of the leader before direction is designed. Teachers in open classrooms should have or should develop an ability to discover the needs of others before proceeding with an open classroom. Otherwise, the tendency of the students to form a group and recognize a leader might result in a social order that excludes the teacher. I think the task of the open classroom teacher is underemphasized and underdeveloped. It should be receiving more attention.

Finally, I do not see the exclusion of some members of the class as a necessary part of small group organization. The individuals who were excluded in this situation had counterparts who were accepted. If I could determine the reasons for this, maybe I could suggest ways of maximizing the inclusion. Perhaps, if dependent behavior irritates most people, it may not irritate all people to the same degree. If one individual who is not highly dependent accepts another who is, maybe the others in the group will accept both of them as long as they function as a pair, as this group accepted Danny with

Alex. If the teacher is one of the most respected members of a group, perhaps he/she can share some of his/her strength with a weak member and gain enough acceptance of that individual so that he/she will be allowed to function within the group. I would like to think that being allowed to work in a group might eventually change the characteristics of the potential isolate so he/she could gain acceptance free of sponsorship.

All this brings me to a redefinition of the terms that are characteristic of open education writings. Trust and cooperation refer to a person's relationship to other members of his/her small group. Independence means acceptance as a group member for one's own role performance without sponsorship. Autonomy is a sense of the worth of oneself as an effective person in a small group. The long-range effect of being able to achieve these goals by successfully participating in an elementary school open classroom remains to be seen.

#### Comments on Methodology

This research was done as a field study. I intended to describe and analyze an existing situation without trying to support any preconceived notions about the operations of an open classroom. Rather than start with hypotheses, I began with some basic information about the situation I would observe and tried to develop further understandings from what I saw in the situation itself. I felt no obligation to prove

or disprove the assumptions of open education that provided me with a beginning, and I have not tried to do so in my conclusions. I believe enough is still unknown about classroom operations to justify this approach to research.

As this study proceeded it became a combination of inductive and deductive investigation. I studied the accumulating data for patterns that I then converted into low order propositions. Then I gathered more data and refined those propositions. I repeated this process until I felt the propositions could explain many of the recorded behaviors and could be used to predict some new behaviors. These high order propositions were the basis for the social organization theory I developed for this classroom. This refining process results in valid conclusions and qualifies this approach to research as scientific inquiry.

### Personal Reflections

My intention in choosing a field study approach to research was to improve my own skills of data gathering and analyzing, of listening and understanding. Now I am sure that the best way to do this was to conduct an actual field study. Learning about these skills before going into the field was a help, but the refinement of these skills under actual field conditions could not have been learned elsewhere. While accomplishing that purpose, I learned several other things, too.

I found out a lot about the operations of an open classroom. Before beginning this study I had a year of experience teaching in an open setting and had read much of what has been written about open education. Neither of those experiences taught me as much about the open classroom as my extensive observations did.

When I proposed studying a classroom to document what was happening there instead of looking for examples of a predetermined list of behaviors, I suspected that much was still unknown, at least to me, about the complexities of classroom operations. I now know the complexities are real and that my understanding of them is just beginning. However, I do not think a fuller understanding will come if that complexity is denied. I think that the systems of action present in a classroom deserve more attention. Theories of action, like the one underlying this study, need to be expanded and refined. There is a need for research to seek out more empirical data. The complexity of educational environments will not be understood if the complexity itself is ignored in research designs.

I said I did this study to help me in my role as a school administrator. I think I learned some valuable lessons in that respect, too. The opportunity to spend entire days



recording classroom activities gave me a new appreciation of the amount of energy a successful teacher must expend to keep things going. Being with a teacher who would freely share many confidences with me made me aware of the many frustrations and the loneliness of teaching. I recall the frequent and futile attempts of this teacher to secure some support for her actions in the classroom, some feedback on how well she was doing her job. I am not talking about praise; I am saying this teacher needed information about the success of her efforts from a perspective other than her own to help her chart her course.

I can remember the helpless feeling I had when I could see the teacher asking everywhere for information. I wondered then if I would change the groundrules of this study when I began observing classrooms as an administrator. Would I tell a teacher what conclusions I was formulating as the data accumulated? Staying with those rules throughout the study helped me answer that question. No, I would not -- not exactly.

The most important thing that I learned that I think will help me as an administrator I learned both from doing this study and from the example of the teacher. She could lead because she knew how to listen and learn. The research procedures of this study forced me to listen and learn, skills I now believe are the foundations for effective leadership. I don't think I would have been a lot of help to her if I

just told her what I thought. What I would do with a teacher in the future is to share with him/her what I was seeing as objectively as I could report it. I think developing a clear, shared understanding of some situation should be done long before any suggestions for action are made.

It seemed to me that sharing observations objectively with the teacher had a lot to do with the rapport that I think we developed. I remember occasions when she exhibited some trust in me. She invited me to parent conferences. She mentioned to outsiders that she liked having an additional pair of eyes in the room, eyes whose task it was to watch what was happening while the teacher was so very busy making things happen. She asked for my observations of events she thought she might have missed. Several times, for example, her attention was drawn to two students only after they began fighting; she would ask me what I saw happen before the battle began. I hope that using these same field study techniques as an administrator will help me build similar trust relationships. Trust is a basic of good communication, and communication is that other half of leadership.

I have been asked by people to whom I have explained my reasons for doing a field study how practical this approach really is for the already ever-busy elementary school principal. I cannot legitimately answer that question yet. I have my own questions about what interference will be automatic when the classroom observer is the principal instead of an

outside researcher. I personally feel, for example, that some of the successes I had with this study are traceable to the fact that I first secured permission from the teacher to observe her classroom rather than secure a principal's permission to observe one of his/her teachers first. I wanted no power structure interference. That could be a whole other study.

I prefer to look at the contents of the question another way. If a principal's hours are busy ones because the complexities of a school are many, will a principal lose anything by taking time to learn more about those complexities? The principal makes many decisions. Are those decisions easier to make if the principal does not have much information?

Certainly, there are many demands on a principal's time. Wolcott's (1973) field study of one principal shows that. Still, I am convinced that there is a need for school administrators to continuously conduct their own field studies. Time is just another element of the complex system about which I still have much to learn.

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