

Experiencing Education, Chapter 7

Students Seek Harmony amidst Change



Students use the latest technology in the foreign language lab.

Innovation, a hallmark of the Laboratory Schools since their founding, became a central theme in the 1960s. Change came in many forms, but education was like other aspects of life in that decade— it took on an experimental and often unconventional tone. Teachers devised new approaches to learning— sometimes based on the notion that “life is complex,” in the words of Francis Chase, Dean of the Graduate School of Education. “It is not neatly structured; there is not always a correct answer.”

Students developed their own attitudes toward discipline and authority as well as old educational methods that they regarded as old-fashioned. For this reason, it was not an entirely harmonious time at the Schools, though the administration worked hard to keep pace with fast-changing attitudes. New programs in the classroom, such as independent study for high school freshmen, were launched. Moreover, the revived Graduate School of Education developed close relations

with the Lab Schools— it represented an additional push in the direction of experiment and change.

However else success at the Schools was measured, its enrollment increased substantially during this time, and growth required new facilities. As these were built— most notably a new building for the High School— the advanced educational techniques were accompanied by facilities that were among the most modern of any secondary school in the country. Clearly, the Lab Schools' role as a model school would continue in this period as it had in decades past.

STUDENT LIFE IN TURBULENT TIMES

The 1960s began with the disappearance of two bastions of student life at University High— the Boys' Club and the Girls' Club. The Boys' Club was the first to run out of steam, as reported in the *U-High Midway* in November, 1959. Their annual Halloween party had been a "comedy of errors," the paper admitted, because of lax preparation. "The only successful venture in which the Boys' Club has had a hand this year was the Fall Social, in which it and the Girls' Club collaborated. The conclusion is obvious: due to either a lack of manpower or a party-throwing talent distinctly inferior to the Girls' Club, the Boys' Club is unable to avoid getting things all fouled up when left to its own devices."

Yet, the Girls' Club's survival was short-lived as well, and the resulting vacuum was filled by the new Student Union, created in February, 1960, and charged with managing Lillie House, at 58th Street and Kenwood Avenue, a center for extracurricular activities. Lillie House became the center of student life, with pool, billiard, and ping pong tables. The building was later taken over by the School of Education, by which time the new High School building was complete and equipped with a student lounge. In the middle 60s, many student activities were conceived and organized in the lounge and on the sun-filled landing on the new building's second floor.

High School students continued to be involved in charitable activities. The tradition of Bazaarnival, begun just after World War II, grew as an event to raise money for foster children in postwar Europe. It became a combination of bazaar and carnival, and featured human mazes, egg-toss booths, freak shows, and discotheques. A king and queen were elected with five-cent votes from students. The events became a stage for the unusual, typified by a ride on a tricycle through the halls by U-High Principal Carl Rinne in 1969, the last year of the festival, which was replaced the following year by the Rites of May.

The social consciousness of Lab Schools students, always active, grew considerably with the Civil Rights and anti-war movements that shook the whole country in the 60s. While student life previously was noted for harmony (with a few normal exceptions), the new tenor of the times led student organizations into new areas. Protest and confrontation were now common. What brought students

together was often as not anger against the Establishment. University High was hardly alone in facing turbulent times; protest was growing on campuses everywhere. But the situation had a certain focus in Hyde Park, the University of Chicago, and the Laboratory Schools. While its intensity was sometimes disconcerting, student organizing at the Lab Schools never lost its value as an educational experience— which was a credit to the administration, the teachers, and the students.

The vanguard of the era's student protest movement arrived in Hyde Park, and touched University High, with Jacqueline Goldberg, one of the leaders of the Free Speech movement at the University of California, Berkeley. Goldberg was in Chicago as a candidate for a Master of Arts in Teaching at the University, and in 1966 she spoke to University High students about the movement and the importance of protest. "She says high school students, like college students, should have a voice in policy and disciplinary decisions and possess the power of suggestion on curriculum matters," the *Midway* reported. It was advice that many students took to heart.

The counterculture of the 1960s took firm root at U-High in other ways. As the school year opened in 1966, the nearby Koga Gift Shop on 53rd Street advertised: "Burn Some Incense. For better grades this year, stack your homework in a woven straw basket. Find your inspiration— and fun— at Koga Gift Shop." The Fret Shop on Harper advertised guitars and lured students toward the pleasures of psychedelic music. Parents began to ask if pop songs could turn their children onto drugs, and the *Midway* interviewed disk jockeys who defended their music. Joel Sebastian, a well-known jockey on WCFL, told the paper, "I have yet to find a teenager seriously influenced by a popular song," he said.

Whether encouraged by music or not, drugs became a concern at the Schools, and the *Midway* reported frequently on the whole question. A faculty committee was formed in November, 1967, to examine drug use among students as "a result of discussions between parent groups and the school's administrators over the past three years," according to the paper. School psychologist Charles Saltzman was interviewed, and he said, "Not all is known that should be about drug use here." Students using drugs were urged to contact him, though drug activity continued to rise according to most accounts. By the end of the decade, administrators estimated that at least half of the students at the school had experimented with marijuana.

HAWK TALK AND DOVE LOVE

The Lab Schools administration was facing the radical changes of the 1960s squarely, though it did not eliminate the inevitable conflicts and tension of the period. In 1967, Director Francis Lloyd described, in a report to the University's Precollegiate Board, how this era differed from earlier periods of American history. "The war is now our number one preoccupation," Lloyd wrote. "From all their acquaintances, from all the news media who give not only editorial opinions but report the statements of government and national figures, the student is

deluged with conflicting 'hawk talk' and 'dove love.' One simple example of the difference of climate that exists for today's students as compared to the forties is that during World War II there was almost total unanimity of public opinion concerning our country's involvement. In contrast, the degree of security in his world that an adolescent should have a right to take for granted as he matures is today not present. The increasing degree of disorientation of the young with the world as they find it as reported by psychiatrists and by research scholars can hardly be thought surprising."

Certainly, University High School during the late 1960s was not immune from the turmoil that rocked many campuses throughout the country. Because the school was on a major university campus, students could witness the impact of well-organized protest movements. As students at University of Chicago expressed their contempt for the Vietnam War, their protest flowed over into many other aspects of American society, and the sense of alienation from establishment authority struck Lab Schools students as it did everywhere else.

University High students participated in protests in Chicago and other cities. In April, 1968, students marched at Grant Park in a protest that was aimed at mobilizing increased opposition to the war. Later that spring, many of the same students also participated in the Poor People's March in Washington, D.C., organized by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Closer to home, students boycotted games with Morgan Park Academy after a white player for the Morgan Park basketball team refused to shake the hand of a black U-High player as was always customary at the start of games.

The youthful energy of the decade established other traditions at University High. In 1967, students organized Arts Week at the suggestion of student council president David Boorstin. "Because arts are becoming more and more popular at U-High, and more people than ever before are choosing art and music courses, I wanted to establish a special week each year devoted solely to all phases of arts and crafts," Boorstin said in an interview with the *Midway*. The independent streak of students at the time was also behind the May Project, initiated in 1969 for seniors as an opportunity to end their U-High years in month-long individually-designed programs of learning outside the school. The first year of the May Project, about two-thirds of the class-107 students-took part. One senior used the month to work as an assistant for *Chicago Daily News* columnist Mike Royko. Another helped the American Civil Liberties Union gather data for a suit against the Chicago Board of Education. Several others worked in projects for disadvantaged children.

AN EXPERIMENTAL SPIRIT

National concern about the quality of education, particularly at the secondary level, prompted federal and state governments to make educational grants for experimental work during the 1960s. The Laboratory Schools, with the support of the Graduate School of Education, benefited from those funds.

In 1963, for instance, the Schools received a \$50,000 grant from the State of Illinois to make a broad investigation in ways to stimulate student curiosity in the educational process. This money was targeted at students from kindergarten through fourth grade and at high school freshmen; the latter were to embark on one of the most ambitious independent-study projects of any school in that period. The programs were designed for a world that was increasingly complex, and where a student's good judgment was regarded as the key to learning. "It is important to develop the ability of individuals to weigh evidence and to make choices in complex situations where knowledge is less than complete and where the ability to foresee the outcome is imperfect," Dean Chase said as he introduced the "Experiment in Independent Learning," as it was called.

In the Lower School, this involved studying children as they chose books and discussed them. Teachers learned how they could help students maintain interest in books when some of the ideas were advanced and vocabulary unfamiliar. At the High School level, freshmen in English, mathematics, science, and social studies were divided into groups as part of the project; teachers observed how students could be helped to develop as creative and free-but-disciplined thinkers.

This was one of the earliest programs in self-directed study anywhere and remarkable because it targeted students at such early ages. In explaining the program at the 1963 Summer Education Conference held at the School of Education of the University of Michigan, High School Principal Willard Congreve pointed out that it was entirely new and experimental, but that it also reflected some of the most strongly-held traditions of the Lab Schools. "Our teachers have always enjoyed a great deal of autonomy, as well as responsibility for the development of the school's curriculum. Most of them spend twice as much time developing the curriculum as they do teaching it. They meet regularly, questioning each other's ideas, searching for the most effective methods and materials."

Social studies teachers Edgar Bernstein and Ernest Poll were in charge of the independent learning program the first year. They oversaw the work of 42 freshmen over three class periods each day in a suite of four rooms, including a science laboratory and the library. The students took classes three days a week and had two free days in which optional activities took place, such as student-led discussions about subjects such as Chinese foreign policy or Homer's *Odyssey*. Students could also participate in individual projects, such as exploring the works of Herman Melville independently but with the guidance of a faculty member.

Although some students thrived on the freedom, others were clearly unhappy with the approach. Still, the school felt the program should be continued with some retooling to accommodate differences in student learning styles. As the program expanded, it was led by eight teachers in English, mathematics, science, and social studies who worked in teams. Students were clustered into three

groups based on their learning types, with some being identified as more dependent on teachers than others.

In evaluating this program, teachers found that students in the independent learning project generally attained results at least equal to those in traditional classrooms. Most surprising was that average students benefited from the program in equal measure to high-ability students. So welcomed were these results by the grant-making authorities at the state Department of Education that they provided an additional \$35,000 in grant money in 1966 for Lab to help establish other such programs in other schools in the state. Lab Schools teachers met with teachers from other schools to explain independent learning and encourage its adoption elsewhere.

Still, Lloyd acknowledged that not everyone was happy with the freshman program. "This experiment has been labeled, on the one hand, by the most cynical as a 'publicity stunt' or a vehicle for personal aggrandizement, and, on the other hand, by its devotees, as a breakthrough," Lloyd wrote. "Those who see the Freshman Program as a disaster, and there are many, ask for conclusive evidence of its success. There are no such data."

Despite doubts, however, the Freshman Program continued, and other experiments were undertaken at the Schools, some of them establishing national models. The U.S. Office of Education, for instance, provided funds for Lab Schools teachers to develop a two-year world history course to incorporate various social science viewpoints in the study of history. This program was tested at several public schools as well as at Lab.

Another experiment at the Lower School was the establishment of a Learning Center to enhance and elaborate, in an independent setting, subjects introduced in the classroom. The Learning Center was a room filled with reference materials and audiovisual equipment. "There is no limit to the range of topics that can be pursued: how genes work, problems of the Chicago Public schools, mapping lines of force of various types of magnets, solving geometric puzzles, and building a light board to test knowledge of French verbs," according to a program description at the time.

Advanced educational techniques proved every bit as important for younger students. In the Lower School, Principal Robert Newman spearheaded a project to evaluate an expanded alphabet called the Initial Teaching Alphabet, including 44 letters and designed to be easier to comprehend than the conventional alphabet. These early experiments were conducted at the Lab Schools and at a few other institutions in this period, and educators were initially pleased with the results. This program accompanied work by Lower School teachers in developing new curriculum programs at the behest of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. And while most of this work was highly innovative, some Lab Schools experimentation harked back to some of the earliest techniques of Dewey and Parker— such as a project by fourth-grade teacher Ann

Wheeler who worked with students to expand lessons in many different subjects through the use of dramatics.

Experimentation pervaded all the Lab Schools, no less in Nursery School than anyplace else. A pair of long-term projects at that level included one that investigated the way memory affected learning, and another that studied the emotional response of children to normal nursery school situations. Director Philip Jackson told parents he believed it would be inconceivable to have a Nursery School in a university environment without using it for worth-while research.

The work of the teachers led to important contributions to professional publications. Lloyd praised the work of the teachers, who he said are "talented individuals who are highly visible to the outside world. Take a look at the program of any educational conference, or the Table of Contents of any educational journal, and you are likely to find the name of at least one of our teachers or administrators."

MIDDLE SCHOOL AND A NEW HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING

Whatever else was going on at the Lab Schools, it was growing. By the beginning of the 1960s, enrollment stood at 1,157, substantially more than could be accommodated in Blaine and Belfield Halls, buildings that were intended to hold about 800 students. The enrollment, which had been 650 in 1940, was boosted by population increases generally, by growth in the Hyde Park-Kenwood neighborhood, and by increases in the standard of living which made it possible for more families to pay yearly tuitions ranging from \$400 for Nursery School to \$800 for University High.

With this growth— which continued to 1,600 students by the end of the decade— the Lab Schools embarked on one of its most important physical improvements ever. The construction of a new High School building, a three-story structure which connected Belfield and Blaine Halls, was completed in 1960 and was regarded at the time as one of the most modern secondary school buildings in the United States.

The construction of the new structure was financed by a \$2.5 million fund-raising drive aimed at parents and alumni. As the administration discussed prospects for the new wing, it stressed that it would be a modern and much-needed addition in the School's primary mission, but also that it would constitute another bastion in ongoing efforts to stabilize the neighborhood.

"Facilities permitting an expanded program of continued high quality will be of enormous value in our efforts to maintain a decent neighborhood around the University," read a booklet published to help raise money for the project. "A good quality education for neighborhood children will help keep people from leaving the neighborhood and will, as has happened, draw others to it. The net effect will

be to assist in our program for maintaining a neighborhood composed of different types of people with different incomes and tastes living decently— in short, a model of what a city neighborhood should be.”

The new High School building’s facade, with pointed arches over first-floor windows, reflected the Gothic architecture of the University, but also represented what was new in modern architecture, essentially glass, steel, and an abundance of light inside. “When we walked into the new University High School building, we realized we had wonderful new facilities,” recalled Renee Bennett, ‘61, in an interview. “I remember the new laboratories especially and the language laboratory in particular. It was wonderful. We didn’t have anything like that in Blaine.”

The new building was also designed for the flexible, “modular” class schedules that were a part of educational life in this decade. The walls of many classrooms were collapsible panels which could make rooms larger when necessary, or smaller. In the independent learning program, for instance, the suite of rooms was arranged so that students could move freely between the library area of the rooms and the science laboratory. Many students might devote more than three hours a week in individual study in the library as a result of this arrangement. The suite concept allowed teachers to give lectures and demonstrations, and lead discussions in spaces large enough or small enough to accommodate their needs.

The new building was also advanced technologically. It had television monitors in every classroom so that instructional films could be shown in class. An audiovisual center maintained by the School of Education was added at the Lab Schools. The film library of the center had more than 500 titles, almost as many film strips, and countless tape recordings available for individual use and for groups. Included also was a modern foreign language laboratory, installed at a time when such facilities were rare as well as the most extensive and best-equipped science laboratories. And the large, bright library included a wide variety of nonbook items, including music scores, art reproductions, slides, microfilm, and filmstrips.

The new High School building was dedicated in a ceremony on October 27, 1960. Arthur Flemming, U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, was the main speaker, and also on hand was the new Principal, Willard Congreve, appointed earlier in the year to oversee expanded experimentation at a school now more than ever known for “unequaled opportunities to exert leadership for the improvement of American education,” as Dean Chase said when appointing Congreve, a University of Chicago Ph.D., to the post.

In 1963, the Schools initiated another innovation that would influence many educators for years to come— it was the Middle School. Since the time of the founding of University High School in 1903, the Schools had included an Elementary School and a High School. Although organization varied over the

years, the system usually consisted of seventh-graders joining High Schoolers as "sub-" or "pre- freshmen." For most of the time since the "Hutchins College" was discontinued, the Schools did not have eighth grade and this continued for a while. Now, the fifth through seventh grades made up the Middle School; nine through twelve constituted University High.

Teacher Raymond Lubway, who had joined the faculty in 1953 and taught a variety of classes, became Middle School Principal. The new division was located in Belfield Hall where space became available with the opening of the new High School building. "Under the new organization we expect to see the Laboratory Schools intensify their experimental impulses to improve educational processes," explained Dean Chase. "The new structure of the Laboratory Schools will permit closer relationships between students, faculty, and administration. This, in turn, will provide broader scope for research pointed at specific age groupings."

TEACHING TEACHERS

From the time the new Graduate School of Education was established in 1960, the two-year M.A.T. program included extensive work in the Laboratory Schools. Courses and practice training led to degrees in the teaching of many different high school subjects— biology, chemistry, English, French, geography, German, history, mathematics, physics, Russian, Spanish, and social studies— or in elementary education. Training was intended to produce outstanding classroom teachers who were scholars as well. The first year of the program included a period of student teaching at the Schools where they worked under experienced teachers. The program attracted more than 1,000 students in the 1960s when the University and the Lab Schools were noted in educational circles for new ideas and a true willingness to innovate.

Despite their enthusiasm and reputation, a sometimes stormy environment was created in the Lab Schools. Graduate students in the classroom certainly had an influence, as it did when Jacqueline Goldberg called on students to protest against authority. Perhaps more important, the success of the M.A.T. program made Laboratory Schools teachers highly visible in educational circles, and many were lured away to other schools. Faculty turnover became a problem just as administrators and parents were growing concerned about discipline in the Schools.

The situation forced the Schools' Director, Francis Lloyd, to face the problem and reiterate the system of values that had always made Lab Schools teachers and students remarkably free thinkers. In 1967, Lloyd wrote that youngsters no longer believed they could look to adults for guidance in understanding many large issues that were burning at the time. So sharp was rebellion that even the teacher-student relationships were being threatened.

"Only two or three years ago, many young people went off to the South or into the big cities to work for civil rights," Lloyd wrote in 1967. "Today in many instances

they are uncertain of their reception by the very individuals with whom they wished to join forces." It was the beginning of hard times in all schools. Lloyd, along with parents and teachers, was determined that the Laboratory Schools remain an orderly institution despite the difficulties and even distrust connected to Civil Rights, the War in Vietnam, and other tensions of the era. He was also determined that students would learn the invaluable lessons that these conflicts often taught.