

special effort to provide caring relationships. They must provide examples of the kinds of personal relationships we expect as the behaviors we intend students to exhibit when they are adults. The way that happens is for all those persons who are in the schools to live and work that way in their schools.

The scope of the challenge before us is immense. The more anyone thinks about the penetration of responsibility throughout the entire school personnel population—2½ million individuals—the greater seems the task. It requires substantial commitment to staff development for the adults who must have this caring relationship.

If I were selecting one strategy to push across our country to improve the health and education of students at the middle-grades level, it would be to assure a caring relationship between each student and at least one adult in school and at least one adult outside of school, and, furthermore, to assure these three individuals know each other well. If we could make that happen, it would be a very significant gain.

Let me conclude with one thought about the importance of public officials' connecting funding streams in health and education at the local, state, and federal levels. This is the prime task to which policymakers must give attention. We can approach connections of services by way of spinning up new organizational arrangements, coordinating councils, and other devices. Sometimes they are important, but they are not nearly as important as having responsible officials at federal, state, and local levels think through the problems at the point-of-service contact and ask the question, "How can I change the flow of our agency funds to connect them with other sources and make something more effective happen?" That is collaboration. That is really connecting health and education.

Transforming Schools into Powerful Communities

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Our schools represent a lesson in creating a powerful community. In both the elementary schools and the high school, we have made possible strong relationships between and among people. There is no point in labeling these relationships cognitive or affective. They are relationships around issues, around life, around things that matter to young people.

A community embodies the hopes of human beings. You cannot learn to play tennis if you have never seen it played. You cannot teach children the power of wonderful ideas if they have not been immersed in a community that cares about wonderful ideas, that believes in them, that explores them, and that puts them into practice.

Intellectually and morally, we are a serious and respectful community. Despite the fact that I speak as an expert on middle schools, I started out as a pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teacher. I have come to believe that there is nothing children need in the middle grades that they do not also need for the rest of their lives. Children may need some things more than others at different ages. Every age I have worked with, however, seems to me to be critical. I have come to the conclusion that children, and human beings in general, need and deserve a decent environment at every single age. Whether they are six or sixty, people are more amazingly alike than they are different.

We finally did an in-depth study of the first seven graduating classes of Central Park East (CPE) Elementary School graduates—students who had completed sixth grade between 1978 and 1985. It took a lot of work to track down all those youngsters, but we did it. Of the first 135 we reached 119. We managed to have phone conversations with most of them, and long face-to-face interviews with about 40, plus conversations with many of their families. It turns out that even though they left our school following sixth grade, before the onslaught of adolescence, and most went on to pretty terrible schools, schools that do not graduate most of their incoming ninth graders, the CPE students survived. In fact, 90 percent managed to earn high school diplomas, and another 6 percent received general education diplomas. We did not have any direct relationship with them after they were twelve years old—nevertheless, contrary to the usual proportions in high schools, two-thirds went on to college.

Reading the interviews is a reminder of what counts. It is a reminder that a powerful community can have a transformative impact on other human beings at any age. People who care, who have access to young people for an extended period of time and who create a community around them, for them and their families, have an enormous effect. The impact of a good school is evident not only among children nor only in the acquisition of academic skills; it has an effect on the entire constellation of family and student beliefs in their powers and their ability to handle the world around them.

I saw a television program some years ago that remains a metaphor for what I am talking about. The interviewer asked some high school dropouts, seventeen or eighteen years old, whether they knew anyone who had ever graduated from college. These three dropouts said no. I thought, what an odd thing to say. They had been in school for almost twelve years, and had had somewhere between twelve and fifty teachers, all of whom had

graduated from college. On the other hand, this was not a strange statement at all. The youth did not include any of those teachers among the people they knew because they did not know their teachers. The fundamental fact in our school, and in schools like ours, is that at times the children may be angry with us, they may hate us, they may love us, they may be disgusted with us, they may want us "out of their faces"—but they include us among the world of people they know. We are part of their universe. We are part of the web of influences in their lives.

Curiosity is one of the things that keeps us alive. We wonder why. We wonder what tomorrow will bring. Our intellectual curiosity about the world around us, our interest in it, our noticing that this or that is an amazing fact, an amazing idea—this is what makes each day memorable. Pursuing our interests develops habits of mind that give us hope, that sustain us through pain. It is fundamental to our health. Immersing children in a culture in which such habits are valued is health-promoting, more health-promoting than any health-ed course or program ever invented.

Children go to institutions called high schools, created for a variety of reasons a century ago, which fail to sustain their curiosity. Instead they drive young people mad. Students develop ways of adjusting, techniques for handling madness, which we then attribute to their hormones. None of us, at any stage in our life cycle, would survive well in such institutions. No other institution we know of, even the army or prison, is organized so mindlessly. In no other institution do we change supervisors and peer groups every forty-five minutes, or engage in a totally different activity every time the bell rings, without any particular sequential order.

This kind of high school could not conceivably be an institution intentionally created to give our minds good exercise and to help us develop intellectually serious habits, not to mention intellectually serious connections with people. Young people go to schools in which adults are allowed no time to act as serious mentors. Teachers are not models of people who engage in serious discussion because students never see teachers engage in a serious discussion, serious debates, or an argument about something that we teachers want them to argue about.

The typical high school is a setting in which the adults and the students are not members of the same community. Instead, they exist in two unconnected communities inhabiting the same building. We have abandoned them in adolescence to a community in which there are no adults to have an influence on them. Then we decry the fact that they create a peer culture that does not have the values we as adults want them to have. This is insanity. We commit a crime in spending our resources to create institutions that foster habits so adverse to the physical and emotional health of young people.

In our school we decided to reverse all of that. We have created a high school that is essentially like a good kindergarten. All we really did was to

adopt the practices that I knew worked in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten and keep them going through elementary school, through middle school, and all the way up through twelfth grade. We should not be surprised to find that this works. If we look at universities like Oxford and Cambridge or other elite universities we find that they are informed by the same ideas.

Students at Oxford, for example, have a central tutor, someone who knows them well and who helps to orchestrate a powerful learning community around them. The assumption is that novices learn from experts. Students are surrounded by and immersed in a community of people who are more expert than they are. That is what we did in our high school and our middle school. Youngsters stay with the same small cluster of teachers for at least two years. Each child has a principal adviser who knows him or her and his or her family well. I am an adviser myself.

The culture of the schools includes an understanding that young people need to learn from their families. We believe all families have things to teach their young. A school that implies to young people that the adults in their life outside of school are not worth respecting has lost an important ally. We find many ways to tell the children's families that they are important.

If the parents' first contact with school, their first conference with a teacher or administrator, makes them feel more powerful, more useful, more knowledgeable, and better able to help their youngster, they are likely to come back for more. If, however, coming to school is only a political act, to show the school you care, then parents with busy lives, who feel tired and defeated, find it difficult to visit the school—and each time it gets harder. All this just to show teachers you care? Parents need some strength and hope that they *can* do well for their children.

School size is a major drawback to creating sane and healthy learning environments. The size of the school should be based on the number of teachers who can gather around a table together. That means no more than 250 or 300 students, or 15 to 20 adults. I do not mean that this is the right size for a "program" or a "house." It is the ideal size for an ongoing, life-giving, healthy school.

No matter how many good programs there are, or how brilliantly conceived, because of their context they often turn into a charade. It is the *culture* of the school, not its programs, that counts. To create a culture is not easy; it takes a lot of face-to-face encounters. We built big buildings because we had some other idea in mind—factory-style efficiency—and because of the cost of space in large urban areas. But the buildings exist. What we want to do is use them to house small communities, each with sufficient autonomy to create for young people a living model of what it is like to be in control of one's environment, to have strong, stable, and continuous relationships.

Big buildings need not be our enemy. They can contain small schools. The building of which I am the official principal has over a thousand pupils. It

houses, however, three separate schools, each with its own parent association, its own school head, its own operating life.

We need not put only children between the ages of eleven and fifteen together. There are different strengths and weaknesses at different ages; mix them up. It is a wonderful fact of life in our building that our adolescents see four-year-olds and seven-year-olds and that the young children see older adolescents, and look up to them as models. This reminds us of the basic idea that learning takes place when we have contact with people who are more expert than we are, when our community is composed of various stages of expertise.

Finally, we need to see our buildings as places that can house services other than education. Instead of assuming that the school, the board of education, and the principal must run all the services that children need, why not share these buildings with others? Let the building house health services, and family services, and after-school services. For school people to pretend to take on all the tasks only exhausts us, drowns us, makes us ineffective. Let us create a school culture that acknowledges its limits, and collaborate with other experts whose services children need. The power of the school is not a matter of bricks and mortar, but of the human relationships we create that give young people the courage and ability to create other healthy relationships on their own. We should help them to establish such relationships beyond the boundary of our school but we should not pretend to be more than we are.