

Two Schools in Chicago: The Log of a White Student Teacher

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FIRST SCHOOL

September 8

My first morning at K. High School was very disappointing. It began when I walked into my cooperating teacher's room and she didn't even know that she had been assigned a student teacher. Things got progressively worse as I discovered that Mrs. H.'s source of pride in her classes is her ability to keep the students in their right desks and out of the halls between classes. Her method of teaching she calls "instant success," meaning to make everything so easy for all students that they rarely make mistakes, which would only discourage them. After discovering there were no textbooks yet, as the school is brand new, I was heartened when Mrs. H. showed me some loose-leaf books recently put together by the Ford Foundation on African Literature. But I was once again discouraged by her comment that the reason she wanted to teach this material was because all the "coloured" thought that everything from Africa was so good that she wants to show them how primitive it is so they will appreciate their regular English matter. My morning was saved by my observing another teacher - very enthusiastic and able to get good, interested responses from her pupils.

September 9

Today was not too much different from yesterday. I had the same negative reaction to Mrs. H.'s classes and was again discouraged by her remarks about my upcoming teaching. When talking about my teaching her Basic Class, she practically forbade me to use discussion, even as an incentive for writing, for she says the kids can talk fine but they need to "read, write-read, write" - and her idea of writing is for her to dictate two or three sentences for them to copy. These, of course, you would grade, hand back for correction, and grade again, always raising the grade, thereby employing "instant success." The reading she uses is not a bit relevant to the students, and their boredom and fatigue are obvious. For her Regular class, she is giving the class three days to read a whole anthology of traditional and modern African poetry and literature - all of which she will cover and discuss in one forty minute period on Friday. She also

gave me her views about the Curriculum - one should never deviate from it because it was devised by great minds and cost a lot of money; thus, she says, the black communities are wrong in insisting on injecting stories of their choice in literature, for it is not up to our standard. I could go on and on, but I can't really let myself go since I'm trying to control my attitude so that we will be able to work together in some fashion or other for the next six weeks.

I had a short chat with a teacher I observed today, who did some of the finest teaching I've ever seen. Her class had an atmosphere of freedom and free-flow of ideas, and yet the classroom was orderly and the students well-behaved. There was very good rapport between teacher and students and I really felt like I was in an exciting place of learning.

Our conference with the principal was short and sweet, not particularly productive, but she made us feel very at-home and wanted at the school.

We stayed for lunch at the school and got to talk to a few teachers, then spent some of the afternoon familiarizing ourselves with the building.

September 10

I really enjoyed my first period observation of the chairman of the English department's class. Her class ran so smoothly and was so organized - it was easy to see the hand of an old pro at work in its planning. Also, for the first time I began to feel a bit like part of the faculty as before I left her class, Mrs. T. "welcomed me aboard."

Mrs. H.'s classes were generally the same as they'd been for the last two days. More advice about "squelching" students who ask bothersome questions by just staring them in the eye and not answering.

Fifth period I observed another very exciting class under Miss. S. It was the first time I had ever seen a lecture method used successfully. Since pupils didn't have texts, the teacher described in vivid terms the life in England in Beowulf time. She was so enthusiastic and interesting that I found myself wanting to take notes; student-initiated questions were numerous. I had an interesting conversation with her after class, as she explained to me that she had had several ACM teachers under her in years past.

I hope Mrs. H. introduces me to her classes soon. I think they're beginning to wonder if I'm some sort of secret agent!

September 11

Today I had a rude awakening in Mrs. H.'s 9th grade Basics class, which I will begin teaching next week. I had realized the students were poor readers and writers, but I didn't realize that they are really on about a second or third grade level. She had them write a paragraph of four sentences - the whole form was on the board and each sentence begun for them, yet many did not get beyond the first or second sentence in thirty

minutes. Most of them didn't know what a paragraph was, how to indent, what quotes are, etc. But one thing impressed me as I walked around, offering help individually, and that's that each student was trying very hard - it wasn't their fault they had been left behind in the education shuffle some years back.

Later, when Mrs. H. was correcting their papers, I had a very upsetting conversation with her about grading them. She told me that students in Basic never receive marks higher than a C, because to receive a B or A in Basic would not be the same as an A or B in Honors. I asked if that wouldn't be cleared up by appearance of Basic or Honors on the transcript along with the grade. Besides, I said, if I were a student getting nothing but C's and D's year in and out, I would get pretty discouraged. However, she said that no other system could be used, and if the kids consistently worked above a C level, their reward would be to move up to Essential level.

At any rate, after today I better understand what problems Mrs. H. has been up against in this class. It is a situation actually requiring a specially trained person. I hope I can help them without this special knowledge - I'll try my best!

Another fascinating class fifth period under Mr. A. The class was reading African poetry and got into a lively discussion of value judgments, free will, death, etc.

I'm beginning to get anxious to teach.

September 15

My first day of teaching, how can I describe it? I didn't feel as nervous as I had anticipated when I first went to school, for I felt well-prepared in my lesson plans. However, my first period conference with Mrs. H. made me feel more shaky. She didn't think my lesson plan for Basics would work because it called for group participation and discussion. She said to try it, though, so that then I could see how incapable they are of doing anything but reading and looking for answers to questions about what they've read. Consequently, as I taught my Basics class, I felt my whole teaching method was on trial and I was right - she gave it the death sentence. The students weren't used to breaking routine and the class was chaos. They caught on quickly but their attention span was extremely short. I felt like a failure when the bell rang. The next class went very well; the students were interested and responded and I finished my whole lesson plan just as the bell rang. I felt a little better, but will have to do a lot of thinking about my Basics class.

September 16

I think I'm learning more and more how to tread lightly with Mrs. H. while still sneaking in some of my theories and methods under the surface. My Basics class was not a discipline problem today, but I wasn't at all satisfied with reverting to Mrs. H.'s old routine just for the sake of a quiet classroom. I'm going to figure out a way to get to those kids - revelation and development of student self-concept - "self-concept" might be one of the keys. My Regulars class produced one of the

moments of joy in teaching - genuine, unharnessed enthusiasm, spontaneity, imagination, and perception. I couldn't have asked for anything more. It was so exciting for me to feel in part responsible for what I consider a true learning experience. I sat in again on one of Mrs. C.'s classes and decided that in addition to being a great teacher, she is a very unusual person in her establishment of relationships with people - not many teachers could get by with "shut up and don't make a scene" and have the kids love it and obey at the same time. Had a good talk with Mrs. G. at lunch.

September 17

Today was a discouraging one. After having two fairly successful classes, Mrs. H. told me, in so many words, that I was doing a good job keeping the kids interested, but that they weren't learning the essentials. She said in studying Tom Sawyer that the most important points are "life on the Mississippi in 1850's," kids' understanding through Aunt Polly of parents' discipline for the sake of love, and recognition of 3 types of novels: entertainment, Great Literature (which includes Tom Sawyer), and social doctrine! When I reminded her that what I was teaching (mood, characterization, plot, etc., through inductive, experience-oriented lessons) is in the curriculum, she paused for a moment. But quickly coming back, she replied that those things were all right for average suburban kids, but it was over the heads of inner city kids, for, as she says, these kids are not only disadvantaged in environment but just don't have the mental equipment that regular kids have. She was also generally turned off by my discussion in Basic to get the kids interested in a topic for writing - she brought up her "read, write, no discussion" method again. I was boiling inside, discouraged, and left the school with the weight of the world on my shoulders.

September 18

Good day. Discussion went well in Basics and they turned in pretty good papers which at least reflected fairly cogent thought instead of mechanical mush. My Regulars class was super. Went from listing all problems kids had in common with Tom Sawyer, which they put in their categories, and led beautifully into my introduction of types of conflict in novels. They really understood, because they did all the work except adding formal labels. H. didn't say much except that the kids in my Regular class were much brighter than hers, who just sit like bumps on logs in sheer boredom. Outside of class, I had some great talks with Mrs. C. and Miss S., two top-notch English teachers. They made so many helpful suggestions, were very sympathetic to the trials of student teaching, made me feel part of the department and were generally encouraging. They're good people for me to know during my stay here, and will probably help to preserve my sanity.

September 19

I was absolutely infuriated today. After Basics class

which didn't run very well due to my mistake in organization, I tried to get myself back up for my Regulars class (a little hard to do in 3 minutes!). I got a good discussion going about the difference in Tom's and Huck's future growth to adulthood - would they be similar types of men? how might their lives be different? etc. Well, right in the midst of this well-rolling discussion, H. shoved a note on my desk saying "Huck Finn grew up to be a famous law man." I tried to pass over it lightly and get back to the discussion, saying I had just received a special news bulletin, and then read it. I no sooner finished than she was out of her seat saying she wanted to talk about this - how unruly boys often grow up to be law-abiding citizens, etc. (moral lecture) and that the real Huck Finn was an example, etc. I felt like exploding. The point of the lesson plan had been to have students speculate on the basis of material at the end of the book, treating the novel on a purely imaginative level. I had planned to get into Mark Twain's real life and characters he based the book on, on Monday, with a filmstrip, etc. At any rate, she blew the point of my lesson, squelched a very good discussion, talked up until the bell, I didn't get their papers handed back like I promised, and didn't have time to make the assignment. I was fuming but held it back. The day was saved by my getting to talk to almost all of the English teachers in the English office on a casual basis - they're a great bunch. I also learned a great deal by listening to all the discussion about faculty-administration problems, parent complaints, discipline problems, etc. After school about 25 of the younger teachers got together at a neighborhood cafe for a "faculty meeting," which was great. I even felt a little like a "real-live teacher" after my trying, but exciting first week.

September 22

I was nervous when I got to school today since it was the first day my teaching was to be observed. I found, though, that once I got in my classes I almost forgot my supervisor was there. When Miss S. asked Mrs. H. when she would be letting me take over the class completely (with her sitting in back instead of the front, etc.), H. said, "When she's ready." When asked how she would know when I'd be ready, she responded, "How do you know when you have a toothache?" Typical...I am enthusiastic about group work, as my Regular class really got involved and interested in group work. This, to me, was a definite demonstration that a quiet classroom is not always necessary for the learning process. I'm really anxious to hear the group reports tomorrow.

September 24

Today something happened that I never thought would. After my usual first period conference with H., I got so frustrated and angry inside that I had to go to the bathroom before my first class and have a little cry. Today for the first time I really aired my opinions and fought for the use of discussion in class as a teaching method. Well, H. is like a stone wall

when it comes to arguing this point - she is convinced that these kids know how to talk all too well and that classes must be devoted to their reading and writing and teacher lecturing. When she began to see that I was making some good points, she had me take out a piece of paper and write what she dictated (like a 3rd grader). Her dictation consisted of the results from a "Harvard research team" and was entitled "The Aim of Teaching English." This was not bad enough - the 3 main points were "Reading with Understanding", "Writing Clearly", "Speaking Succinctly." When I brought up the fact that a whole third of this research was devoted to student speaking ability, her only response was "--oh yes, but not on the 9th grade level. That's for senior honors classes." Help!

September 25

The 8:00 teachers' meeting this morning was incredible - like something from Up the Down Staircase. The whole thing consisted of telling teachers how to fill out (in agonizing detail) a million and a half different forms. I realize this kind of paperwork is one of the more unpleasant aspects of teaching, but it seems to me at least half of it could be eliminated so that teachers could be freer to spend time preparing for the most important part of their jobs teaching. My Basic class was better today than it has been for a while. I managed to squeeze in a little discussion and found that the kids really liked talking about the old Greek gods, maybe because for them it's like a sophisticated fairy tale. My Regulars class is really grappling with organization in writing, but I think it will come because they're really putting in the effort.

September 26

I was really discouraged today with my Basic class. There was complete chaos just because I had them move desks in preparation for the role-playing. I know it's because they've been used to such structured routine in their classes and any change is confusing to them and makes them feel insecure. However, I can't take this initial experience, judge it as a failure, and give up trying to change the way this class is taught. I'm going to have to tolerate a little confusion until they get used to breaking out of their rigid pattern. I enjoyed going to the Creative Writing Club today. Of course, it's always kind of a thrill to see kids just wanting to write because they like writing, and not because they have to do it for a grade.

September 27

I really don't know what to do with three boys in my Basic Class who just refuse to do anything the class is doing. They really set a bad tone for the class and I've tried several ways of handling it, but nothing seems to work. Maybe I should try having individual conferences with them. I chaperoned for a while at the dance after school and I really liked being able

to observe the kids outside of a classroom situation. It's so amazing how some of the quietest, most reserved people in class are so free and bubbly the minute they get out of school. From what I've observed so far, teachers are the ones responsible for this stifling, oppressive atmosphere in the classroom, where students are either not free to respond to material in their own way or are not made interested enough in the material to even want to respond.

September 29

Today was a pretty good day. Managed to have a small discussion in Basics following our reading of a play about a jury decision. I asked the kids if they knew about a big trial just beginning in Chicago, and they were very eager to talk about the conspiracy trial since almost all knew about it, but only a few knew the facts underlying it. It seemed to be a good prelude to writing opinion papers about the jury system. My Regulars class was, as usual, responsive.

September 30

Today was, to me, a very boring and unproductive one as far as my classes went, having followed a suggested format of Mrs. H. Basic kids were bored to tears with the list of spelling words and the situation was similar in Regular with their exercises in Capitalization. I understand that a certain amount of fundamentally tedious groundwork must be done on a ninth grade level, but I don't understand why it must be covered all at once and with such a dull approach. I overheard one student in Basic say, "I think Miss Boosalis has turned on us" and I knew very well what he meant because in a way I not only turn on them in teaching in the ways I don't believe in, but I also turn on myself. It's a very frustrating position to be in when you can't justify to your students the relevancy or importance of what you're teaching them because you can't justify it yourself.

October 1

Day of days! The showdown finally came between my supervisor, fighting for my rights, and Mrs. H. I knew something big was going on when in the midst of my teaching my Regular class, I could hear raised and irate voices from the back of the room. They suddenly left the room, as it turned out, to go to speak to the principal. Of course, with the principal backing Mrs. H. one hundred per cent, not an awful lot could be accomplished except to put me under another teacher for one class; I was very upset by the whole situation, being in the middle under cross fire from all sides. And the thing that bothers me most is having to leave those Basic kids. It's true that I haven't produced any miracles with them but I was beginning to feel we were approaching the point of initiating good progress. Oh, to have my own class next year will be heaven!

October 2

I went in for the fatal meeting with the principal this morning at 8:00. I had decided that this was one of the few situations in my life so far where it was imperative to stand up for what I believe in or not be able to live with myself. It's not that I had decided to "buck the system" or "down with the establishment," but I feel it is anyone's responsibility who is in the field of education and who sees deplorable things not only going on but being praised within it, to do all he can to at least call attention to these things if not attempt to eliminate them. This was my attitude when I walked into the office, when I was promptly greeted "Having troubles, Baby?". She was in a hurry, of course, but managed to inform me that she was not placing me under a different teacher, adding that although Mrs. H. may be a bit "up and down", she produces results and gets kids moved out of Basic. I interjected that, to me, in addition to considering the fact that the kids could superficially read and write better, one should also consider what attitude toward school and reading was being developed and, also, that along with reading and writing students should begin to learn to think for themselves. But oh no. It seems I am just full of theories about urban education and have no practice in coping practically. She said that she has received no complaints from students about Mrs. H. (she could ask any one of my kids and receive an hour and a half spiel, I know) but that she does hear complaints from students about young, liberal teachers who do nothing but entertain the kids and no learning takes place. In addition, I was informed that I was placed with Mrs. H. because of insistence by Dr. B. (whom I have never talked to, written to or seen), because since I was such a creative, innovative potential teacher, I needed to learn the "meat and potatoes" of education from Mrs. H. I need to become more didactic! Well, finding even the memory of the interview extremely distasteful, I won't bother to recount the whole thing, which got progressively worse. When I left, I felt I hadn't accomplished much (people like that rarely change since they're 100% right), but I also hadn't been walked all over either. I sincerely hope ACM never subjects its student teachers to the rigidity and staleness of that school's administration again.

October 3

Life with H. goes on and I continue to endure our morning conferences while thinking of other things and occasionally interjecting an "enthusiastic" uh-huh. I feel I definitely made headway with Basics today. I got chewed out for having conferences with my Regulars about their themes (wasting time), but I also found it to be very valuable for both students and myself.

October 6

A very dull day and bad way to start the week. I think it was a combination of dull subject matter and of my not feeling very well. Mrs. H. has become more rigid than ever and there's very little, if any, opportunity to "do my own things" in class anymore. I feel like such a traitor to the kids to drag them along by the nose into such unprofitable areas. The fight left in me is at a low point today, but I refuse to give in completely. Tomorrow has to be a brighter day.

October 7

Wrong, I stayed home in bed all day today with a sore throat and generally ailing. Must muster up my forces for a new day.

October 8

A quiet day today in comparison with last week's confrontation between Miss S. and Mrs. H. (not to mention M.). Mrs. H. was in her glory today after watching some T.V. show last night explaining the revolutionary new technique of teaching slow learners her old read-write routine, with next to no talking on the part of either students or teachers. If I had any glimmers of hope for breaking in a few new things with my Basic class, they are now sadly dispelled, for she is all the more certain of her method after last night's reinforcement. She spent my whole Basics class hovering over students' desks proclaiming her desire to help them and completely undermining my role as teacher of that class.

October 9

Today was great! Mrs. H. was busy doing some work in the office during both my classes and my classes were cut in half because of guidance testing so they were realistic, workable size groups. I'm convinced that the amount of learning in education would go up at least 50% with smaller classes, but I guess you have to do your best in the system as it exists under conditions that won't be changed for a very long time. The atmosphere of my classes was so much more relaxed today with Mrs. H. gone and it was one of my first opportunities to see how well I could actually relate to the students and them to me. I was very happy with the results: they were very open, exhibited good thinking, and expressed important concerns. Almost every student was involved and there were no discipline problems. On the other side, I think students were able to see me as a real person and not just one of those things called "teachers." I was grateful for this day to finally establish the kind of rapport with my classes that I have been restricted from doing from the very first.

October 10

I've been helping out with Guidance achievement testing for the last two days and I really feel sorry for those kids.

For most of them (all 9th graders), it was the first time in their lives they had to sit and work at something for a five hour stretch. I question the true validity of such a test, especially when so many teachers at that school judge the ability and potential of their students solely on the basis of how well they tested on these and similar tests. I suppose that's one of the real dangers of the tracking system - to categorize and fit everyone into his little niche and expect neither more nor less from him than what he has indicated he can do on one of these tests. Enough spouting for today.

October 14 - 17

Basic - Discipline was better this week after having private, individual talks with three of the main troublemakers. I found that previously when I tried to discipline these students in class, they were always coming back with smart answers. Since this was obviously for the benefit of showing off for their peers, I figured a one-to-one confrontation might bring better results and it seemed to work. When talking to them alone, I found them to be much more reasonable and they really have been making a better effort in class. Of course, I continue to have problems in the area due to Mrs. H.'s interference undermining my own attempts at discipline.

Role playing by oral play reading is a good way to draw students away from individual work into participation in an entire class effort. This week was our second attempt at this activity and students expressed their interest by enthusiastically volunteering for parts. I was really able to notice their progress in doing a class activity, because I think they've realized that if they want other people to listen to them read their parts, they have to listen to other people read, too.

Regular - I think my eye contact improved this week because I found myself looking at kids whom I realized I had never really looked at during class. Up until this week, I have been calling only on students who volunteered to respond by hand-raising, figuring I didn't want to embarrass people intentionally in front of the whole class if they didn't know the answer or had no response. However, this week I began calling on the non-participants and surprisingly enough most of them did have something to say, but maybe just weren't sure enough of themselves to volunteer. By the end of the week, a good number of these people were volunteering on their own.

I wasn't allowed to have group work this week, but the film on Friday proved to be a great class involvement technique. There was just a little time after the film for response, but almost everyone was fighting for recognition to express his opinion on the film. There was heated discussion going on among members of the class while I was rewinding the film and I had kids coming up to me all day (at lunch, in the halls) saying how they had been talking to so and so about the film and they didn't agree... and who was right? etc. I will definitely pursue and take advantage of their high interest in this on Monday.

SECOND SCHOOL

November 3

Wow! What a day. We got to our new school about 7:30 and waited to talk to Mr. S., the assistant principal, until 9:00. As we were sitting by the office, we noticed some boys clustered in a group - a few had parents with them. Something seemed to be up, but we didn't find out what until sometime later. Mr. S. spent over an hour with us, was very helpful and genuinely interested in preparing us to teach. He warned us about possible reactions we might provoke as White teachers in a Black school, but was encouraging about our ability to clear this hurdle. He also explained our student teaching experience as a chance to test our true interest and ability in teaching, and said that after it is completed, if we are not sincerely and wholeheartedly sold on the profession, we should stay out of it. All in all, he seemed to be a very enlightened, capable administrator. Mrs. K., the English department chairman, came to get me and to make my assignment. Mr. S. had said we were to teach two classes, observe two, and have one period in which he could assign us to counseling office, attendance office, etc. Mrs. K. is very nice and friendly; she said she would give me her 9th grade Honors class and let me choose whether I wanted to teach mythology or poetry. What a change - I actually get to choose what I teach! She took me to Mrs. B.'s room, where I will also observe one class and teach a senior Regulars class. I'm excited about teaching an older class and working with Mrs. B., who is young, liberal, and seems to be a very good teacher.

In the middle of this third period class, there was a lot of noise and confusion in the halls and kids began knocking on the window and telling kids there was a walk-out and to leave the school. I was amazed when the kids told them to go away, that they were having a discussion. One boy got up and locked the door. For a class of all Black students to show that much respect and concern for a White teacher and to ignore their peers is really saying something for Mrs. B.'s teaching. Well, the next period all hell broke loose and all the students walked out in support of student leaders who had made ten demands of the administration on Friday and who are faced with possible suspension. A few fires were started somewhere and some chemical was sprayed in the halls that made me cough. Many of the students were confused and didn't know what was happening, but walked out anyway probably just to get out of school. The faculty I observed seemed to take the situation calmly and many expressed their surprise that it hadn't happened earlier.

But despite all the confusion and early dismissal from school, I think I'm really going to like it here. What's really exciting is that I'm sure both Mrs. K. and Mrs. B. will give me the freedom in teaching I've been craving so long.

November 4

The atmosphere at school today was definitely tense after yesterday's walkout. During my division, one of the administration got up in front of the packed lunchroom of juniors and said no more games would be tolerated; anybody walking out again wouldn't walk back in without a parent. We'll see - the administration seems weak and scared, so I doubt if this will be the last of the trouble.

I observed my senior class for the first time today. There is a majority of girls and they seem rather quiet, but maybe I can fire them up a little. Mrs. K. introduced me to her ninth grade Honors class in a way that will make it very comfortable for me to take over for a while. The kids all said they wanted to start the poetry unit right away; I hope they stay that enthused once I do start it.

November 5

Tension in the air from the minute school opened today. Via the grapevine, I learned another student walk-out was scheduled for 9:00 today, despite a long, wordy bulletin from the administration instructing teachers to hold their classes back, if possible. Mrs. B.'s second period class was interrupted five thousand times by the "conspiracy 8" (the nickname of the eight student militant leaders who have what seems to be almost total control of the student body) and their parents, who were told to come to our room for a meeting. Of course Mrs. B. had had no word about this, so she continued with class, remaining incredibly cool and together through all the confusion. Finally, about 9:30 a messenger from the office popped in and said the parents had been misinformed about the meeting room number and asked them to come to another room.

During this class I made an interesting observation about student politics. The students were complaining about the poor quality work the photographer had done on their senior pictures. Mrs. B. reminded them that they had voted for this particular photographer last spring, but they said they weren't the ones who really decided. It was "the clique's" actual decision and everybody went along because whatever the clique says, goes. They were rather bemoaning this fact, and yet about 15 minutes later when Mrs. B. asked what had happened to the walk-out that was supposed to be at 9:00, the kids said they didn't know - they'd have to wait to hear what the "eight" decided. Which goes to show that although the kids don't like being so controlled by a small group, they put themselves in this position by not thinking for themselves; it's always easier to blindly follow than to think things through and come to individual conclusions.

Well, the walk-out did take place about 10:30 amidst a confusion of fire alarms and milling students. I went outside with Mrs. K.'s 9th grade class when the alarm sounded. I really felt sorry for those freshmen who don't know what's going on and are just concerned with staying out of trouble. When the bell sounded to go back in, they were really harassed by some of the older protesters who told them they were just a

bunch of babies doing whatever the establishment told them to. They managed to get about half the school to stay outside, but the rest went back in and attempted to settle back into some sort of order.

November 6

Today was a good day for me to observe and compare two teaching styles - Mrs. B.'s and Mrs. K.'s. They have such very different approaches, but each is so successful in her own way. Mrs. K. can get her freshmen excited about anything - even proper nouns. When presenting some new material, she always makes use of some knowledge the kids already have. This way they get involved by contributing and getting recognition for something they know, and this seems to really excite kids on this grade level. Mrs. B. takes a much different, more casual approach. She has all senior classes and talks to the kids on a very adult level, which they seem to respond to and appreciate a great deal. Unlike the freshmen, the seniors don't really show their involvement by getting excited, but they do show their interest by really holding up their end of the discussion. I can't wait to start working with these classes.

November 7

The day began with one of those infamous teachers' meetings. The principal got up and made some mealy-mouthed comments about the week's walk-out situation. He took a half hour and all he said was that the situation hadn't been pleasant, but that everyone would have to work together to move forward, etc., blah, blah. Then one of the assistant principals got up and really gave the teachers hell. He said that most teachers were being unprofessional - afraid to get involved or take any responsibility, and I think he was right to a certain extent. If a few more people had been willing to pitch in and give some directions to the students, I think a lot of the mass confusion could have been eliminated. He said he was expecting more trouble and that the teachers better get themselves together to better handle the next onslaught. He came down hard on the teachers in other areas, too - about some of the kinds of teaching he had observed on some pop visits, etc. Then the principal got up and meekly said he guessed Mr. S. had a stronger way of saying things than he did, and maybe he was kind of a sugar man. What a thing to say, especially at a time when a principal's leadership is so necessary. The teachers' reactions after the meeting were mixed - some who felt they were doing their job were offended, others thought it needed to be said.

Later in the day I got a hold of a green sheet that was being distributed by students. The gist of it was advocacy of getting rid of the principal and his five Uncle Tom assistants. So it looks like the action isn't over. We'll see.

June 30

This is where I rather abruptly stopped keeping my student teaching log, due to pressures of time and fatigue. I regret now not having kept it up during my last five weeks of student

teaching at H., because they were among the most rewarding weeks of my life. There is no way now to recapture the day-by-day trials interspersed with feelings of achievement as I approached "teacherhood."

My two classes at H. were unique and each stimulating in its own way. The ninth graders were lively, open, enthusiastic, and thrived on anything seemingly unroutine. I covered a poetry unit, which provoked a general groan on my first day of teaching the class, but which resulted in a truly exciting experience for me and the students too, I believe. I wanted to emphasize student-written poetry because at the ninth grade level I think appreciation is all-important as an introduction to poetry, and I don't know of a better way to gain the interest of students than to have them attempt and take pride in creating their own forms of the art.

I began with haikus, hoping they would provide just enough structure so that the students wouldn't feel lost in their initial efforts, but at the same time allow freedom from the restrictions of more exacting forms. We continued with the writing of descriptive paragraphs which were lined-out into poems after a process of work and rhythm selection, condensation, discussions of connotative words, etc. This activity produced one of those days when teaching seems like the only profession. The students were so excited about having written real-live poems that I couldn't let their enthusiasm die. I sent them home over Thanksgiving vacation to bring back with them on Monday a project complementary to their poems but of a different medium - music, collages, art work, etc. The two days of our "mixed-media" poetry reading were out of sight - each kid could hardly wait to make his presentation and the applause and enthusiasm after each one were very warm and special. By the end of six weeks I was able to compile a good-sized book of student poems, including numerous ones students wrote on their own, just for enjoyment. I think the students' own efforts and successes at writing not only added appreciation to their reading of other poets, but also taught them a great deal about themselves and other students in the class and gave them the very important sense of pride and accomplishment.

My senior class was a different breed altogether from the freshmen. That first week I was amazed that I could actually talk and improvise beyond my lesson plan in an attempt to fill in long gaps of silence and unresponsiveness. I realize now in hindsight that I was being tested and closely scrutinized; as a White teacher in a very socially and politically aware group of seventeen-year-old Black students, trust and rapport was not just important but all-essential if any student response was to be kindled.

Needless to say, those first days were uncomfortable, but during the second week something happened which restored a little of my fast-ebbing confidence. The seniors had just finished reading a segment of Don Quixote and I wanted to provoke a discussion about heroes and heroic qualities, especially in reference to our modern society and literature. Somebody

in the back of the room was causing a disturbance but before I had a chance to say anything, one of the students whom most students seemed to admire and respect said to the disruptive student, "Shut up - I'm listening." It would be a gross exaggeration to say that it was smooth sailing from that moment on, but it was a definite turning point in the development of a trusting, working teacher-student relationship. I found as time progressed that, unlike the freshmen who gloried in individual attention and achievement, the seniors did particularly well and seemed to enjoy group work, whether it was group efforts at role-playing or developing arguments for group debates of central problems in our world literature reading.

Being a White teacher in a school of 3600 Black students presents special problems from time to time, in addition to the traditional problems a teacher must face. For instance, I was very uncertain what classroom approach I would take the day after Fred Hampton, the Chicago Black Panther leader, was killed - an event which provoked deep and hostile feelings in much of South Chicago. My ninth grade class expressed unanimous approval of a student's suggestion that they spend the class period writing poems about the situation - poetic elegies for Hampton. The poems turned in that day were dramatic proof that real poetry springs from the heart and from deep-felt feelings to create something that nice-sounding words and rhythm alone could never do.

The senior class, however, presented a more difficult problem; I knew that their need to discuss with each other the recent happenings would be of uppermost importance that day. Yet, I knew they would be hesitant to direct their deepest thoughts and feelings through me - a concerned individual but White, nevertheless. I spent hours that evening reading, and found what I thought (guessed, hoped) would be an appropriate short story from a modern African anthology which centered around racial issues in South Africa. I ran off copies for the class and after they read it, asked for volunteers to discuss the story in any way and context they wished. The result was more than I had hoped for: an excellent discussion led by three rather quiet students who managed to totally involve the entire class in a well-paced, organized, and provoking exchange of ideas. Even though my part was no more than listener from my back row seat, I felt that we had all participated in a remarkable learning experience.

I'm not certain how one goes about winding up a log of student teaching. I suppose that's because a record of teaching experiences has no ending, just as a deep involvement in the teaching profession does not stop at the end of each day or year. It is a constant, exciting process which builds and develops with each day's rather special conglomeration of frustration, joy, and hope.

My students introduced me to a very fine singer, Nina Simone, who says in one song: "It's the morning of my life." My student teaching in Chicago was indeed my awakening to the morning of my teaching life. I wonder now what the day ahead will bring.