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2. Reporter Phil Green (Gregory Peck) explains to fashion editor Anne Deffrey (Celeste Holm) why he changed his name in order to write a series of articles on anti-Semitism. Elia Kazan, *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947). From the core collection production photographs of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

2

Paradoxes

If we just take people as they are, ...we make them worse, but if we treat them not as they are but as they should be, we help them to become what they can become.¹

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people will think.²

Ralph Waldo Emerson

One does not have to adhere to middle – or upper-class etiquette — to live a civilized life. One does not have to speak the English language correctly to lead a civilized life. One does not have to be financially well off to impart civilized values to one's children. The ability to live a civilized life is not determined by believing in a special religion or coming from a particular branch of the human family. To believe otherwise is to be a racist or given to religious or class prejudice.³

Stanley Crouch

September 1958 and the first day of teaching! Even now, fifty-eight years later, I sense my excitement starting a career as a New Rochelle High School English instructor, "45 Minutes from Broadway" according to George M. Cohan, and the closest I ever came to an academic Camelot. Like Maurice Chevalier sings in Vincente Minnelli's *Gigi*, I remember it well.

I was only a few months out of Brooklyn, a time beautifully described in an HBO documentary, as a place where “people...talked a certain way, and never felt as if they were better in anything. We always considered ourselves underdogs in a blue-color borough.”⁴ Predictably, falling in love with an extraordinary woman who also had an affable brother, and both coming from a caring family made my move from Flatbush to Westchester painless. Not that there couldn't have been problems. For example, Larry Peerce's romantic screen adaptation of Philip Roth's novel, *Goodbye, Columbus*, in the film of the same name,⁵ sympathetically touches on the hiccups possible in such a transition. Now, however, I was in what James Agee called “the land of the safe.”⁶

I'm not sure what about NRHS is dearest to my heart: the principal who took me under her wing, the assistant principal who always had my back, the English Department chairwoman who encouraged me to grow, the students who made my classes so rewarding, or the colleagues who shared my passions. But what I do know is that I had no idea what was about to happen to me.

To simplify my steps from 1958 to 1963, let me set the stage by suggesting some stereotypical Hollywood teachers,⁷ and what I innocently thought back then about my profession heading into an unknown and unpredictable future. Of all the prized films from Sam Wood's *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, Stephen Herek's *Mr. Holland's Opus*,⁸ Richard Brooks' *The Blackboard Jungle*,⁹ James Clavell's *To Sir, With Love*,¹⁰ John G. Avildsen's *Lean on Me*,¹¹ John Hughes' *The Breakfast Club*,¹² John Hughes' *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*,¹³ Peter Weir's *Dead Poet's Society*,¹⁴ John N. Smith's *Dangerous Minds*,¹⁵ Ramon Menendez' *Stand and Deliver*,¹⁶ Steven Zaillian's *Searching for Bobby Fisher*,¹⁷ Alexander Payne's *Election*¹⁸ Brian De Palma's *Carrie*,¹⁹ Gus Van Sant's *Finding Forrester*,²⁰ Richard LaGravenese's *Freedom Writers*,²¹ Michael Hoffman's *The Emperor's Club*,²² Amy Heckerling's *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*,²³ Mimi Leder's *Pay It Forward*,²⁴ to Damien Chazelle's *Whiplash*,²⁵ only one movie comes close to what I recall of those first days: Robert Mulligan's *Up the Down Staircase*.²⁶

Based on Bel Kaufman's insightful 1965 book about life in an inner-city high school, Mulligan's 1967 movie, to me, realistically transformed the novel's memo style into a “real-life” narrative. “Be serious,” the reader might sensibly ask. “How can you compare

New York's 'problem schools' with NRHS, a powerful and prestigious institution that prides itself on meeting the needs of every student? The faculty at the fictional Coolidge High School was cynical and demoralized; the students unruly, the dropout rate depressing; and the building should have been condemned way back when. So what if Sylvia Barrett (Sandy Dennis) is a young, idealist English teacher who shares some of your literary heroes and values? You were teaching college-bound, grade-conscious, privileged students, not undisciplined, poorly educated, diverse teenagers from working-class homes. Moreover, why would you cite an unremarkable film to bolster a problematic academic argument? Most people today possibly have never seen the movie or read the book. Aren't you a responsible scholar who is supposed to defend film as art?"

Okay, let's start with the last issue first. While here is not the place to layout a treatise on film aesthetics, a few random comments should suffice. Since childhood, I have always found movies mainly a social art, not primarily an art form for art's sake. Knowing what you do about my growing up, you understand why I value movies best as helping us become human. And not just human! That is, if you can study the poor decisions made by foolish characters depicted in significant movies in previous generations, it is possible, even probable, you will make better decisions in the future. At least, that's my theory. And more often than not, what brings about those changes is the impact the movie has on the audience.

Let me be clear on this essential point. I love the art of the film. I believe great movies must have both an intellectual and an emotional quality. Clearly, profound ideas don't go very far if the cinematic mechanics prove prosaic. Nor does great technique matter much to trite thoughts and clichéd themes. I have consistently argued that evaluating films is a difficult process. While many individuals strive to create noble works, critics and academics struggle to identify the good, the bad, and the ugly. The results are not always successful. I realize part of my job is to report the consensus of what are considered film masterpieces.

But because a movie lacks depth or vision, it does not, in my eyes, disqualify it from being influential, engaging, or entertaining. No less an authority than the fabled director Martin Scorsese makes a similar argument. Often, he insists, "I found obscure films more

inspirational than the prestige movies of the day. I can only talk to you about what moved me, intrigued me; and thus I cannot be objective."²⁷ In short, I believe any movie, depending on its chemistry with the viewer, can make a difference, and do either good or harm in society. A key caveat is context. What is the spectator's relationship to the film at the time of contact? That belief is central to how I see films and teach about them.

One last detail. Because I have spent so much of my time talking about movies and exchanging opinions with people across the intellectual landscape, I have adapted several specific defensive stances. First, I make a distinction between liking and appreciating a film. If you say you enjoy a movie, no one can say you are wrong. It is a psychological reaction. But if you say, you value a movie, then we are talking about standards. Here is the place for the disagreements.²⁸ Secondly, I find Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert's labeling certain films as "guilty pleasures," extremely useful. We all like films that we're embarrassed to admit to publically. I freely admit my weak choices, get bashed, and then move on. Finally, just as helpful is my belief some movies you should not examine closely. Poorly acted, lacking striking production values, and containing thoughtless messages, they nonetheless may have a sentimental and blind appeal. For example, despite all their silliness, I have always liked but felt embarrassed by Johnny Weissmuller's Tarzan movies, Randolph Scott and Joel McCrea westerns, Tom Tyler playing Captain Marvel,²⁹ and Buster Crabbe appearing as Flash Gordon.³⁰ Great villains like Ming the Merciless (Ray Middleton) and The Scorpion (Harry Worth) are priceless. *Up the Down Staircase* falls into the category of "Don't look too closely."

Now back to the relevance of Mulligan's film to this chapter. On the surface, there appears to be little reasonable correlation between the movie and my career. My college-bound classes could not have been more successful and enjoyable. Rarely if ever did they pose a problem. Even though the curriculum was insane—teaching on any one day, the history of English or American literature—I had all sorts of study guides to keep me one step ahead of the students. Even better, I was learning more than anyone. And not just about literature. I studied writing, taught reading comprehension, and experimented with different teaching techniques. Not

to be discounted in the mix, I learned to love dramatic readings on long playing records. Listening to Dylan Thomas or Robert Frost read their work, or hearing Hal Holbrook impersonate Mark Twain remains for me an irreplaceable pleasure.

Because I had mastered the basic rules of public school teaching—get your teenagers to like and to respect you, as well as be prepared for each class—I was successful. They saw me as authentic! They even rewarded me with several plaques that to this today adorn my office. In addition, my gifted colleagues enjoyed sharing my success. We fed off each other's ideas. Few, if any of us, bought into the status quo system that takes the fun out of teaching: middle school teachers are higher up the prestige ladder than elementary school teachers; high school teachers are the most important. But it is even more ludicrous than that. At the high school level, we were emotionally ranked in order of what classes we taught: topping the list were those who qualified for advanced placement courses, followed by those who were assigned ordinary college-bound classes. But at the bottom of the rung were those given the non-regents students (the undisciplined, ignored, and overlooked youngsters who were at the end of the educational spectrum.) You didn't teach them; you babysat them, and made sure they didn't destroy the school!

Here's the rub. I cared next to nothing about this pecking order. I went merrily along teaching all my classes. Unlike some of my peers, then and now, I taught the students assigned me. I never schemed to get "the top" classes or the "best" students. It was like listening to music. I preferred the software to the electronics. You walk into a classroom, find out what the challenges are, and then motivate the kids to learn. Simple as that! And just as magnificent an experience.

Up the Down Staircase illustrates effectively what inner-city students were like, while also emphasizing how important learning was to their future. It shows Sylvia Barrett using books from the school storeroom—e.g., *Macbeth*, *Silas Marner*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*—and distributing them to the disorderly teenagers. It shows how creative she was in using the Socratic method, getting the youngsters involved, and in the end proving to be a very impressive teacher.

There the ties between Mulligan and Manchel take a different road. While I was using those same titles in my required non-regents classes, I failed miserably, in part because I was buying into a suffocating educational system. So what if the texts were hand me downs. So what if the adolescents didn't learn anything. I kept them quiet, filled their time with busy work, and made the school safe for the teachers and other students.

Then one day it all changed. I wish I could tell you why. I wish I could explain why even someone so naïve as I would give up his hard-earned status in the teaching chain for students no one cared about or who could not advance your career or bring you any apparent academic rewards. It may have been no more than I chose morality over self-interest.

But I did. One day in 1962 (four years into my career), I don't even know when, I changed. I didn't feel right about what I was doing with the non-regents students. So I broke the rules. Simple as that! According to school policy, no one was permitted to require students to buy their books. I did. No one was allowed to venture too far from the established school curriculum. I did. No one expected you to work overtime with discipline problems. You turned the hard cases over to the assistant principal. I turned my back on the land of the safe and entered an educational wasteland for no other reason than I wanted to. It wasn't that tough a decision since no one cared about the non-regents students. No one even paid attention so long as things were calm and quiet.

The essay that follows tells the story of what happened. While it would take years before the full impact of what I had done registered with me, I obviously still had a lot to learn. As you will see, my goals clearly outstripped my skills and my knowledge. My writing is weak, my ideas are untested, and there really is no appropriate measurement to evaluate the experiment itself. All that being true, it remains one of the great adventures in my career. It was like the old World War II song, "Coming in on a wing and a prayer." Or better still is the comment by Paul Boray (John Garfield) in Jean Negulesco's *Humoresque*: "It all seemed so simple once. You live your life. You do your work. As simple as all that. Then you find out that it's not so easy. Nothing comes free. One way or another you pay. You pay for what you are."³¹

Two anecdotes I do remember from those paradoxical times. First were the students' reactions to *Gentleman's Agreement*. The class—all male, exclusively white, and no Jews—had a hard time with Laura Hobson's book about Phil Green, the fictional reporter who decides to pose as a Jew in order to write a series of articles on anti-Semitism for a major New York magazine. Not only didn't the teenagers care about the issues, but also they blamed the Jews for America's "current" civil rights problems. But when they saw the movie, they became enraged at what was happening not to Phil Green, but to Gregory Peck, his family, and his friends. Now they had a lot to say about racism and bigotry. The second anecdote had to do with James Hilton's *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. The class had no feel for what an old-fashioned private school teacher like Chipping was about, nor did they see any relevance between his life and theirs. After all, these macho teenagers never dared show a sentimental bone in their makeup. Then they watched Robert Donat³¹ describe through flashbacks what teaching was about. As the film concluded, and Chips, near death, tells us that his students were "all his children," I went to put the lights on. And one of the toughest kids in the class, with tears streaming down his face, grabbed my hand, and said, "Don't touch that switch." In the discussion that followed, I taught them the difference between young and old teachers: the former know all the rules; the latter know all the exceptions.

In all my years, I have received my share of flattering letters and touching e-mails from former students sharing their memories. Only one non-regents student ever said anything to me. It was at a NRHS class reunion. A person I didn't recognize with a name I had long forgotten said, "Thank you, Mr. Manchel. If not for you, I would be long dead!"

Notes

¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprentice*. Translated by Eric A. Blackall. *Goethe's Collected Works* Vol. 9. New York: Suhrkamp, 1989. 326.

² Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance: Essay II," *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Volume II. Introduced and edited by Joseph Slater. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979. 131.

³ Stanley Crouch, *Always in Pursuit: Fresh American Perspectives*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998. 25.

- ⁴ Major League Baseball, *Brooklyn Dodgers: The Ghosts of Flatbush*. USA: Major League Baseball Productions 2007.
- ⁵ Larry Peerce, *Goodbye, Columbus*. USA: Paramount Pictures, 1969.
- ⁶ James Agee and Walter Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1941.
- ⁷ I'd like to acknowledge a debt to K. Krugelis' "Best movies about teachers," IMDB (August 2011), and Nicholas Provenzano's "20 Movies Every Educator Should See," *Edutopia* (August 26, 2011). Both these helpful lists are readily available on your web browser.
- ⁸ Stephen Herek, *Mr. Holland's Opus*. USA: Buena Vista Pictures, 1965.
- ⁹ Richard Brooks, *The Blackboard Jungle*. USA: MGM, 1955.
- ¹⁰ James Clavell, *To Sir, With Love*. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967.
- ¹¹ John G. Avildsen, *Lean on Me*. USA: Warner Bros., 1989.
- ¹² John Hughes, *The Breakfast Club*. USA: Universal Pictures, 1985.
- ¹³ John Hughes, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. USA: Paramount Pictures, 1986.
- ¹⁴ Peter Weir, *Dead Poet's Society*. USA: Buena Vista Pictures, 1989.
- ¹⁵ John N. Smith, *Dangerous Minds*. USA: Buena Vista Pictures, 1995.
- ¹⁶ Ramon Menendez, *Stand and Deliver*. USA: Warner Bros., 1988.
- ¹⁷ Steven Zaillian, *Searching for Bobby Fisher*. USA: Paramount Pictures, 1993.
- ¹⁸ Alexander Payne, *Election*. USA: Paramount, 1999.
- ¹⁹ Brian De Palma. *Carrie*. USA: United Artists, 1976.
- ²⁰ Gus Van Sant, *Finding Forrester*. USA: Sony Pictures Entertainment, 2000.
- ²¹ Richard LaGravenese, *Freedom Writers*. USA: Paramount Pictures, 2007.
- ²² Michael Hoffman, *The Emperor's Club*. USA: Beacon Communications, 2002.
- ²³ Amy Heckerling, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. USA: Universal Pictures, 1982.
- ²⁴ Mimi Leder, *Pay It Forward*. USA: Warner Bros., 2000.
- ²⁵ Damien Chazelle, *Whiplash*. USA: Sony Pictures Classics, 2014.
- ²⁶ Robert Mulligan, *Up the Down Staircase*. USA: Warner Bros., 1967.
- ²⁷ Martin Scorsese, *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies*. England: British Film Industry, 1995; USA, 1996.
- ²⁸ Frank Manchel, "Movies and Man's Humanity," *Teaching the Humanities: Selected Readings*, Ed. By Sheila Schwartz. New York: Macmillan. 1970. 192-200.
- ²⁹ William Whitney, *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*. USA: Republic Pictures 1941.
- ³⁰ Frederick Stephani and Ray Taylor, *Flash Gordon*. USA: Universal Pictures 1936.
- ³¹ Jean Negulesco, *Humoresque*. USA: Warner Bros., 1946.
- ³² This was the role that won Robert Donat the 1939 Best Actor Award over Clark Gable in *Gone With the Wind*.

The Universal Classroom¹

Did you ever stop to analyze what your students will remember most from this past year? Did you ever stop and ask yourself why students remember some things more than others? Have you examined your relative position to the student as regards the knowledge he is exposed to? I wonder for instance, what has made a greater influence on him: the textbook account of World War II or the television coverage of programs about war, the motion pictures like *The Longest Day* and *Judgment at Nuremberg*, and recordings such as *I Can Hear It Now*. I wonder which has had a more lasting effect: the textbook accounts concerning scientific development or the television coverage of rocket adventures into outer space; what has had a more profound influence on our young people: the provisions of the 14th Amendment or the mass media coverage of the Civil Rights movement?

As a teacher of literature, I find myself involved very often with theories concerning the psychology of learning and causal relationships. With your indulgence, this talk will encompass several hypotheses to be tested. (1) I believe that in the comprehensive schools of our country the term "slow learner" is not justified in referring to students with I.Q.'s ranging from 75-95. Rather, based upon an admittedly limited observation, these children should be called "The Tolerated". They have been conditioned to accept 2nd class citizenship in a society sometimes governed by grade-conscious fanatics and college-orientated snobs. (2) I believe that textbook knowledge is being treated as if it were actually in keeping with current and recent information about the various disciplines. When you consider the rapid growth of knowledge and the great differences involved with the storage and recovery of information, you recognize the problem of hard-covered textbooks. Our students need to know that many concepts once held sacred are now being questioned.

They also need to know that change is not necessarily good or new. By studying both the old and the modern it is possible for teachers to help shape rather than conflict with student thinking. (3) I believe that ethical, moral and esthetic values are the property of all and not of a select few. That every member of our culture can and should learn responsibility to his family and society remains a fundamental obligation of our educational process. (4) I believe that the teaching profession instead of being the recipients of a traditional, textbook educational system are in the position of pioneering a new age in education; an age not of a provincial, walled-in environment but of universal horizons which know the value of the past in its relationship to the present technological and scientific achievements of modern man.

Again, I am not advocating throwing out textbooks because of modern society. Only a fool would remove Homer from our classrooms because that poet wrote of pagan gods; only a pseudo-intellect would remove *Huckleberry Finn* from the library shelves because he thought Sam Clemens was degrading Negroes; and only a slow-learning teacher would think that it was more important to study Shakespeare in the books rather than see *Hamlet* performed by Richard Burton or Christopher Plummer. All I ask is that literature is studied in all its forms: in books, on television and stage, in magazines, journals and motion pictures. I ask that literature be experienced as well as read. Remember Sherlock Holmes constant rebuff to Dr. Watson: "You see my dear Watson, but you do not observe." Let us help the students to get their rights in the schools: the right to learn what is most useful to them; the right to learn without fear of frustration; the right to develop a healthy and useful self-concept; and the right to learn how to use and handle controversial, provocative ideas

Let me suggest one area, which might be beneficial in implementing the aforesaid ideas: motion pictures. Remember this program is in addition to books and not a replacement for current practices. If we want to teach our students the values of science and medicine, why not show films such as *The Story of Louis Pasteur*, *The Sea Around Us*, *Madam Curie*, and *Sister Kenny*? If we want to teach about American History, show the motion pictures *Wilson*, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Watch on the Rhine*, *Drums Along*

the Mohawk, and *The Buccaneer*. If we want to teach our students an awareness of contemporary problems and issues, show films like *Rebel Without a Cause*, *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *Cry*, *The Beloved Country*, *All the King's Men*, and *The Ugly American*. If you feel as I do that it is important to acquaint our students with the pleasures of knowing about foreign lands, exotic places, courageous men and exciting adventures, why not show *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, *El Cid*, *Tale of Two Cities*, *Spartacus*, *Ben Hur*, and *Cyrano de Bergerac*? Some of us feel it is important to show our students how men are influenced in their lives, how it is that in different generations men have different aspirations. In this connection you could show films that discuss the relationship between students and teachers: *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, and *Passion For Life*; films that show the relationship of man to man: *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Miracle Worker*, *The Defiant Ones*, *The Life of Emile Zola*, and *Exodus*; the relationship between parents and children: *Cheaper by the Dozen*, *The 400 Blows*, *I Remember Mama*, and *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*; and the relationship between man and government: *Trial*, *The Ox-Bow Incident*, *Sunrise at Campobello*, *Twelve Angry Men*, and *Mein Kampf*.

If you believe as I do that the good teacher is involved with providing the student with the meaningful experience that will be useful in helping to make sound ethical and social judgments, why not have a unit based on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *David and Lisa*, *On the Waterfront*, *High Noon*, *Room at the Top*, and *An American Tragedy*?

If you feel that it is impossible to bring these films to your classroom, then take your students to the theatres and have them see current films such as *Tom Jones*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *No Exit*, *L'Avventura*, *This Sporting Life*, *The Servant*, *Hud*, and *A Tribute to Dylan Thomas*.

You see Ladies and Gentlemen, I am of the school that believes that you cannot teach literature; literature must be experienced. Now some of you will be skeptical. You will say that the students wouldn't be able to understand the concepts; you may argue that it isn't possible to do this within the confines of your school. But I am here to report not only can these things be taught but also they can be taught effectively.

In the fall of 1962 my students contributed money from their allowances so that they could get the type of education that we were both interested in their having. They bought their own books because we felt that if they owned their material the learning situation would be more meaningful. Everyone agreed that books would be read prior to the viewing of any motion picture. The books had to be chosen considering price, accessibility, ease of reading; had to deal with topics the students were interested in, and the story had to have been used in a motion picture which was now available in 16 mm film at a reasonable rental.

That first year we saw *Mister Roberts*, *Shane*, *Lost Horizon*, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Detective Story*, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, *The Bad Seed*, *The Ox-Bow Incident*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *Gentleman's Agreement*. By the end of the year, the students were discussing current problems, personal obligations, man's relationships, techniques, point of view, setting, characterization, language, structure, audience, theme, special effects and style. We had arrived at a point in their lives when for the first time that they could remember, they enjoyed English. If you are interested, I refer you to the *English Journal*, March 1964 for a short summary of the program.

The next year 20 teachers and 800 students became involved in the program. This time, students who had never read saw *Light in the Forest*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Ox-Bow Incident*, *Shane*, *The Citadel*, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* [sic],² *Beau Geste*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Magnificent Obsession*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Cheaper by the Dozen*, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Detective Story*.

In an evaluation sheet filled out by the students, teachers found out that 90% of the students said they felt that the program was worthwhile and made for better writing, for better reading, for better listening, and for more enjoyable learning experiences. Then came the next stage in the program. To prove to other members of the faculty that the motivation, transfer of knowledge and the learning experience were valuable, I had the students make their own films.

In addition to the regular problems connected with teaching the slow learner, I had the added problems of technical knowledge and financial support for the making of the movies. The school system

did not have any 8mm film, and the department was not willing to finance the venture. The principal suggested calling the Paillard Corporation in New Jersey and asking them for assistance. The company graciously lent us free of charge approximately fifteen hundred dollar's worth of equipment including cameras, tripods, editors, splicers and projectors. I was working with three slow learner groups, and together they were able through individual contributions to raise one hundred fifty-eight dollars and seventy-five cents.

Each group spent approximately four days in discussing an appropriate, original story to film. First, we decided on the type of story we wanted to write, and the various ways we could develop the plot. Each night students would watch television programs and note down interesting techniques. In addition to their homework assignment, they would write a two to three paragraph prose script based on the type of story we decided to film. The following day students read aloud their scripts and various parts were written on the blackboard for class discussion.

In this way we were able to develop creative thinking, literary appreciation, better television viewing habits and useful composition techniques. The latter approach, in particular, was used as early as 1915. When the three stories were completed, they were mimeographed for class distribution. An important point is that we were using different approaches to the same problem of educating the slow learner. He needs to relate what he already knows to new situations. His having to write, to assemble information and to create a film involved his potential and his ability. Developing these areas are most important for the student if he is to achieve success in the school and in society.

Once the stories were distributed, we concentrated on writing a shooting script. Here we incorporated what we knew of various camera shots, making good use of filming techniques employed in evening television programs and in motion pictures. The actual writing took four days. Particularly helpful to an untrained teacher in making a shooting script is Stanley Solomon's doctoral project; particularly Unit XII which concerns film.

Both the writing of a prose and a shooting script involved taking the slow learner at his present level, and by using the mass me-

dia as an aid, trying to improve the students' taste and judgments. That this is a primary job of an English teacher cannot be stressed enough. In a recent textbook concerning the teaching of English, the following was noted:

Listening and viewing are the most popular means of receiving communication in contemporary culture. This recognition neither depreciates the value of reading and the permanence of the printed word, nor ignores the fleeting nature of much that appears in radio, television and motion pictures. Rather it admits that adults devote far more time to those media than they spend with books, magazines and newspapers. High school students alone pass from fourteen to twenty-four hours a week before a television set; junior high, twenty-five to thirty. Since the communication of ideas is a major instructional concern, teachers of English cannot ignore the impact on modern minds of these carriers of the idea and image.

On the ninth day we went about discussing and selecting people to perform various services. Students volunteered to be cameramen, prop men, actors, actresses, set designers, lighting technicians, film runners (purchasing and processing film) and assistant directors. Here the students learned about production in mass communication, particularly about the division of labor and the importance of working together.

During the next week the students *saw* two short movies, *The River* and *The Hunter and the Forest*. Both films used different techniques in filming a story. Mr. Charles Houtenmouser of the Pailard Corporation gave a demonstration on how to use the camera equipment lent to us, and answered questions on making a motion picture. The remaining two days were involved with acting out the shooting script, and having the professional advice of drama coaches who kindly came into the classroom to aid in the project. During these sessions the students learned about the differences between stage and film acting, the advantages and disadvantages of stage and screen production.

The shooting of the film was, at first, done on Sunday. Every-

thing that could go wrong in the filming process went wrong for us. We had double exposures, lighting difficulties, poor ideological and temporal content, bad focusing, faulty equipment, and very bad processing arrangements. Nevertheless, the students were not discouraged. It is to their everlasting credit that they refused to be defeated, and began over again to film their story. The second shootings took place on school days and were concluded in spite of a seasonal blizzard.

The importance for slow learners in learning about films, the use of camera equipment and judgments in producing plays and films lies not in the technical application but rather in the personal and social kinetic activity. Marshall McLuhan makes a similar point to teachers when he writes, "The educational task is not only to provide tools of perception but also to develop judgment and discrimination with ordinary experience." Neil Postman in describing television and its value as a means of studying English communication writes, "...taste and critical judgment are learned habits of mind. As a consequence, Education, as in most things, is the decisive factor." By having students write, view, perform and criticize, the English teacher develops the student's tastes and judgments, not toward mass media specifically but more significantly toward better mental and social judgments and tastes concerning his peers and society.

When the raw film was finally acceptable, we worked on the editing process. Here the students learned much about the role of an editor, and significantly, about the process of obtaining a finished project. A strong argument can be made for the correlation between film editing and composition. Both involve the need for revision, accuracy, precision, and total effect.

As a result of the movie program, the students were written about in the school and local newspaper. They learned about the content of the newspaper article, how much information is included and omitted, and how news photographs are slanted. The films were also shown to approximately three hundred teachers and student teachers at Teachers College, Columbia University and Smith College. A further tribute to their effort was the showing of the films on the NBC program "Education Reports."

It became apparent as each month passed that the instruction

for slow learners should begin at their level and that these students should be made to feel a part of the total community. A major part of a comprehensive school's objectives should be to help each child to adjust and to assume his role in society. To do this you need to start with what is familiar to the student and then proceed to the unfamiliar. The slow learner is very familiar with motion pictures and television, not with books and texts. The film-book program and the making of theatrical films is an area where the slow learner can achieve legitimate success; and, as educators know, very few things contribute to an interest in an activity as well as success. Throughout the past two years, the students really proved that the films and books they were studying had value and meaning, and by reading and viewing the materials the learning process was repeated and practiced which insured retention. The instruction provided almost immediate transfer to school and extra-curricular activities, particularly because the material was taught in concrete, socially meaningful situations.

There are many areas that need to be watched in programs such as this, and, competent adequate supervision is a must. One major problem is that there should be professional presentation of the material; specifically, the planned approach to a film unit and not merely the showing of a film to pass class time. Books need to be provided in an accessible manner, and adequate time has to be given in order to read the story prior to the showing of the film. Rooms, projectors, and projectionists have to be scheduled far enough in advance to insure an intelligent and useful experience. Encouragement has to be extended to all teachers involved in the program, and sufficient departmental time has to be allocated to discuss and develop a sequential program that will benefit all concerned. Enthusiasm and concern for the work and the student should be recognized as important prerequisites for participating in the program, and slow learner classes should not be given to individuals who are uninterested in the problems of the slow learner. The department should have a basis for evaluating the work of the student, and should not as is the case in some areas, be a "touch and go" situation.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that mass media presents a challenge to teachers which they cannot neglect. Our students are

spending a major proportion of their time in trying to understand current problems and forms of communication. These students need direction and the experience of the educated citizen. Literature, in all its forms, can provide experiences which will be lasting and beneficial.

Notes

¹ Frank Manchel, "The Universal Classroom," Conference on Teaching the Slow Learner. New York: Metropolitan School Study Council (October 31, 1964). Part 3: 1-10.

² The correct title is *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.