

“The Turning of One’s Soul”—Learning to Teach for Social Justice: The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education (1950–1964)

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This article explores one teacher education program’s experiment in “turning the souls” of its students to help them understand and care deeply about issues of race and social justice, including issues of environmental sustainability. The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education (1950–1964), a small “reconstructionist” program, was based upon Deweyan principles of choice, discovery, and student-generated learning and had as its underlying tenet a commitment to change the world. These goals created a tension between student independence and the program’s political commitments. Nonetheless, students discovered reasons for education that lay beyond themselves, their experiences, the classroom, and their traditional notions of school. By immersing students in experiences that moved them emotionally, students developed a willing accountability for changing their world.

INTRODUCTION

[Transformation rests] neither on an agreement about what justice consists of nor on an analysis of how racism, sexism, or class subordination operates. Such arguments and analyses are indispensable. But a politics of conversion requires more. Nihilism is not overcome by arguments or analyses; it is tamed by love and care. Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one’s soul. This turning is done through one’s own affirmation of one’s worth—an affirmation fueled by the concern of others. A love ethic must be at the center of a politics of conversion. Cornel West (1993), *Race Matters*

The time-honored term for preparing those who work in the field of education is “teacher training.” The term implies the acquisition of a

bag of tricks, the memorization of right answers and right methods, a concentration on techniques. In contrast, the Putney Graduate School uses the term “teacher education,” to imply not only great skill but the development of great love and great awareness. To prepare for teaching is a rigorous undertaking. (Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education Catalogue [c. 1950])

In this article, I explore one teacher education program’s experiment in “turning the souls” of its students to help them understand and care deeply about issues of race, social justice and environmental sustainability. The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education (PGS), which ran from 1950 to 1964, was a small program connected to the Putney School of Putney, Vermont. It was founded by Putney School head, Carmelita Hinton, and directed by Morris R. Mitchell. The program was based on John Dewey’s principles of learning through reflection on experience and Theodore Brameld’s “reconstructionist”¹ principles of education for social justice. Specifically, PGS students learned through direct engagement with “places of quiet revolution” (including Miles Horton’s Highlander School, Citizenship Schools on the Sea Islands, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Harlem settlement houses, and examples of sustainable land development), with the aim of making society a more humane and harmonious place in which all might live.² Significantly for PGS and its curriculum, the program was bookended by the beginnings of the civil rights movement in the early 1950s and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Through a program that included living together in a mixed-race, mixed-nationality, mixed-age, and mixed-gender residence, studying and meeting leading voices in the civil rights movement, traveling together in a van over a period of several weeks to various sites of civil action in the Deep South, and reflecting regularly on all these experiences, the program aimed to graduate “transformed”³ individuals, ready to act in the world to change it.⁴

In taking a radical stance, especially in conservative post-World War II America, the program operated within an environment of tensions. These tensions included educating teachers as autonomous agents of change in a context that rejected “soft” progressive education in favor of a “hard” curriculum that focused on the traditional disciplines in order to remain strong against our Cold War adversaries (Communist China and the Soviet Union); educating teachers to become independent critical thinkers in a context that favored efficiency and conformity; and educating teachers for personal transformation around issues of social justice in a context of fear that tended to value institutional authoritarianism and conservatism.⁵ More important, there were tensions within PGS between the more radical ideals of the program, embodied in the person of Morris Mitchell, and the more modest goals of his students, many of whom “just wanted to learn to teach.”

True, they had chosen a radical program, but in many cases, they were looking for a more interesting version of what society told them was needed—schoolteachers to teach school subjects in school buildings. But Mitchell had different ideas. In effect, there existed an ongoing tension between an *explicit* curriculum centered on contemporary issues and social change, and an *implicit* curriculum that assumed that students would learn to teach by learning to learn.

In this study I show that, despite a frequent lack of congruity between Mitchell's goals for his students and theirs for themselves, students' experiences in the program forced them to encounter themselves and the limitations of their understanding, and in the process assume an authority as both change agents and teachers. I show that, even though Mitchell's personality and commitments wielded a tremendous amount of influence over what and how his students learned, these factors were, ironically, counterbalanced by the very independence of thought and action that he nurtured in them and structured into the curriculum, and by his genuine love for and faith in his students.

In contrast to the Graduate School, whose explicit agenda was social justice, the explicit agenda of the times in terms of education was training large numbers of teachers in the core disciplines to teach in traditional ways. The implicit, or tacit, agenda of the times, however, *was* social justice—namely, the civil rights movement. It was this implicit agenda that Mitchell took advantage of. The vivid and often dramatic historical threads that wove themselves through the fifties and early sixties were integral to the personal transformations that occurred at PGS. Often to their own surprise, students discovered reasons for education that lay beyond themselves, their experiences, the classroom, and their traditional notions of school.

Finally, I address a gap in the historical literature that David Cohen has called “virgin territory”—“historical studies that can reference teachers' encounters with students over academic subjects . . . what teachers and students did together.”⁶ Though Cohen is talking about encounters between schoolteachers and their students, the same historical lack exists for teacher educators and their students. Through access to a number of documents, including students' Cumulative Files (which included journals, papers, study plans, schedules, responses from teachers, class notes, and personal and collaborative accounts of the trips south), letters from students, Morris Mitchell's papers, and interviews with graduates and others involved in the program,⁷ I have been able to develop an account of what Mitchell and his graduate students “did together.” The details of their encounters, as told through documents and interviews, paint a picture of teacher–student interaction and learning that bears little resemblance to the traditional teacher–student encounters that Cohen probably had in mind. Yet the record conveys the deeply personal, conflicted, and often dramatic nature

of a teacher education program that aimed at transformational learning and teaching for social justice. Direct contact between Mitchell and his students in the real-life context of compelling social issues engaged students and moved them to make transformative changes in the way they saw and understood themselves, the world, and each other.

TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE TODAY

Marilyn Cochran-Smith⁸ notes that society’s beliefs and values about the purposes of education provide the context for teacher education policy today. She observes that contemporary policies of accountability—particularly No Child Left Behind, mandates, and the “relentless focus” on high-stakes testing for both students and teachers—point to a number of assumptions: “teaching is a technical activity, knowledge is static, good practice is universal, being prepared to teach is knowing subject matter, and pupil learning is equal to higher scores on high-stakes tests.” Education is thus seen as the most efficient way to “grow the economy,” turn out productive workers, and compete successfully in the global economy, a policy strikingly redolent of the 1950s. Teaching for social justice, by contrast, emphasizes a different set of values. From this stance, the purpose of education is seen as preparing “all people for meaningful work and for free and equal civic participation in a democratic society,” and teaching is regarded as “an intellectual activity, knowledge . . . as constructed and fluid, good practice is contextual, and pupil learning includes academic achievement as well as developing critical habits of mind and preparation for civic engagement.”⁹

In contrast to “banking”¹⁰ models of teacher education, Cochran-Smith frames teacher education for social justice as a dual problem: a learning (vs. training) problem, and a political (vs. policy) problem. As a learning problem, teacher education is constructivist in nature, acknowledging the prior knowledge and experiences that teachers bring, the fact that it takes place over time, and the reality of its contextualized, nonuniversal, non-one-size-fits-all nature. In addition, because there is the assumption that education’s goal is successful participation in a democratic society, learning includes inquiring into the social and political structures that both support and deny access to power and opportunity within that society. Acknowledgment of these structures, the ideologies that infuse them, and the groups that perpetuate them thus casts teacher education also as a political problem.

Related to teacher education for social justice is an approach to teacher education that focuses on a “critical pedagogy of place.” David Gruenewald¹¹ challenges advocates of social justice teacher education to broaden their scope to include environmental stewardship. A critical pedagogy of place, writes Gruenewald, “aims to evaluate the appropriateness of our

relationships to each other, and to our *socio-ecological* places. . . [and] to pursue the kind of social action that improves the social and ecological life of places, near and far, now and in the future” (italics in original).¹² He advocates taking children and teachers out of the limited space of classrooms and immersing them in the spaces where they live. By creating a connection to a place (and, I argue, the historical events that are the lifeblood of a place), a commitment to the welfare of those who inhabit the place is created.

While an increasing number of teacher education programs today use the terms *social justice*, *diversity*, and even *critical pedagogy of place* in their descriptions of themselves and the courses they offer, too often (as has also been true with the terms *reflection* and *reflective*¹³) they are add-ons without the requisite deep-structure transformation necessary not just in a program curriculum, but in teacher educators themselves.

To be long-lasting, such learning requires personal transformation. Cochran-Smith, Linda Darling-Hammond, and others¹⁴ have noted that becoming a teacher or teacher educator committed to social change requires a fundamental shift in the way one views the world, one’s place in it, and one’s relationship to others. This is not accomplished in a course, or even in a year, but over a lifetime of conscious, mindful, inquiring, reflective teaching, not just alone, but in the company of committed others. To make a difference, teachers must care from the inside out—rather than because they should—about social justice issues. To educate teachers to care is the job that Putney took on. How they accomplished that is the story I tell.

If today’s programs take a lesson from the Putney Graduate School, it is that such learning is not limited to the classroom; it takes place in the real places and events of history. And commitment to issues of justice comes about not through persuasion or distanced study, but through personal, direct encounters with people and situations that both embody the ills of society and bring into relief one’s assumptions and the limitations of one’s experiences, and the very human attempts of others to overcome them. The Graduate School was an early example of a teacher education program that acknowledged the political nature of teaching and learning. Its progressive contemporaries, Bank Street College (under the leadership of Lucy Sprague Mitchell) and the Shady Hill Apprenticeship Program (under the direction of Katharine Taylor), for example, stopped short of a politically critical stance. Their focus was on the learner and the learning, within the context of their own communities, but not necessarily as agents of change.¹⁵

The ways in which learning happened at PGS offered a view of learning that reflects the constructivist, transformative modes advocated by Cochran-Smith today. These encounters often transported students beyond themselves to a place where they became willingly accountable for changing the world. Accountability became a personal matter rather than a matter of

policy. Their learning awakened a passion and vision within themselves, which are at the heart of good teaching—where souls are turned.

STRUCTURE OF THE ARTICLE

I begin with a brief portrait of Morris Mitchell and the Graduate School program. I then offer an analysis of the teaching and learning that occurred there, followed by an account of students’ experiences on the study tour. As a way of exploring the question of how students changed over the course of the program, I will focus on this piece of the Graduate School curriculum that embodied its learning and political commitments. Although the Graduate School curriculum took a number of forms (seminars, short field trips, visiting lecturers, and apprenticeships), the most powerful was the study tour. The object was to insert students into the midst of social problems—from racism to strip-mining—and to introduce them to contemporary institutions and public responses like Myles Horton’s Highlander School; the Montgomery bus boycott; Citizenship Schools on the Sea Islands off the coast of Georgia; Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) projects; and cooperative communities. I conclude with thoughts on what today’s teacher education programs might take away from the Putney Graduate School experiment.

MORRIS MITCHELL

Morris Mitchell’s philosophy of education and his ideas for its implementation were shaped by his family and his experiences as a young student, as a soldier in World War I, and as a new teacher in Ellerbe, South Carolina. These experiences were then given theoretical shape by contact with, both directly and through their writings, John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick, and Theodore Brameld.

Born in 1895, Mitchell grew up in a family of educators. His father, Samuel Chiles Mitchell (1864–1948), was a professor of history, first at the University of Richmond (1895–1908) and then at Brown University (1908–1909). He later became president of the University of South Carolina (1908–1913), and the University of Delaware (1914–1920). He was also a longtime trustee of the Negro Rural School Fund of the Anna T. Jeanes Foundation (1908–1937).¹⁶ He made his three sons and daughter aware of how their privilege—financially modest as it was—contrasted with those less fortunate than they, especially black people in the South. Their father’s conviction that it was the moral duty of educated whites to play an instrumental part in changing the lot of the Southern poor became their own. Morris Mitchell and his two brothers, both of whom became active in

education and civil rights in the South, committed themselves to making a difference.

Young Mitchell was not a strong student. He had difficulty doing the prescribed tasks, sitting still, and paying attention. In a diary entry, his mother tells the story of nine-year-old Mitchell's tale of his own misbehavior: "Today at school" [Mitchell said], "they were all making *more fuss!* And Miss Kate kept ringing the bell and trying to get order, and *trying* to get order; and you ought to've heard her calling, '*Morris!*' And they *wouldn't stop!*"¹⁷

He deeply resented "forced" education¹⁸ and was asked to leave two different schools, one public, and one private. Mitchell finally graduated from high school in 1912, after which he attended the University of South Carolina, the University of Virginia, and Delaware College. In April 1917, he entered the army and trained for service in World War I, returning after the war to graduate from Delaware in June 1919.

Mitchell's time in the army shaped him profoundly. "The *only* thing I know," he would pronounce after his return from the front, "is that I will NEVER have anything to do with war."¹⁹ While in France as a lieutenant, he saw many of his men killed and wounded. Mitchell himself nearly perished from gas poisoning and serious wounds. He was sent to Panges les Eaux and St. Armand²⁰ to recover, and although he begged his commanding officers to send him back to the front and believed strongly in the "priceless cause" of World War I, the experience transformed Mitchell into an ardent pacifist.

Mitchell returned to the States after the war and settled in the small town of Ellerbe, North Carolina, where he accepted his first teaching job. It was in Ellerbe that he first made efforts to blur the lines between community and school. Rather than teach "subjects," Mitchell asked his students to find out what their small town needed. Their curriculum arose from the needs of the town.²¹ This included constructing their own school. He and the town, including his students, raised money to buy the land and the materials for the school. They used shrubs from the surrounding forest for the school's landscaping. "Even the derricks by which they erected great scissor rafters, weighing a ton each, were of [the students] own contriving," recalled Mitchell.²² He gradually built the population of the school from a mere dozen students to enough to require three teachers in his first year there. According to his own account, about half of the graduates of Ellerbe School went on to become teachers. Mitchell felt that this was due to the fact that the learning that they had experienced there was laced with the purpose of improving the community. The method proved durable. A *Reader's Digest* article written in 1937 describes how, nearly 20 years later, the school's learning experiences and community's development still meshed. "They learn by doing," wrote the author, who had visited Ellerbe.

The curriculum wanders over into life, eats big chunks of it, and comes back into the classroom permanently enriched. I saw a class spending one of its periods giving blood tests to a neighbor’s chickens, and another which went outdoors to study Caesar and fight battles with the Helvetians in North Carolina’s sand. I saw an arithmetic teacher’s classroom, in which the children were about to start a bank with money printed by the school press [which also served as the town’s source of printed material.]²³

Such synergistic relationships between schools and communities, whereby the development of the community was the job of the school and its students, and the development of students the job of the community, remained themes throughout Mitchell’s career.

Mitchell earned a doctorate at George Peabody College for Teachers at Vanderbilt University in Nashville in 1926. During this time, he also studied for a year under John Dewey at Columbia Teachers College. It was his exposure to Dewey and Dewey’s ideas, and those of William Kilpatrick, that first gave Mitchell the confidence that the kind of learning he had facilitated in Ellerbe was not only legitimate but also was articulated and endorsed by the nation’s leading educational philosophers.²⁴ In particular, he drew upon Dewey’s belief that education was the reconstruction of experience through a process of reflection and upon Kilpatrick’s application of Dewey’s theory in the project method. The project method placed the “purposeful act,” an activity in line with a child’s own goals, in a “social environment” that looked toward the welfare of the group. Such views saw the world not as static, with a fixed set of facts to memorize, but as changing, whereby knowledge was constantly being reconstructed.

Later, Mitchell would meet Theodore Brameld, dean of education at Boston University and a social reconstructionist, who also inspired him. Brameld was one of the principal authors of post–World War II reformulations of progressive education.²⁵ Reconstructionism was based on Dewey’s progressive ideals, addressed social questions, and embraced the ideal of creating a better society and worldwide democracy.²⁶ In a philosophy that foreshadowed Freire’s, Brameld held that only through education could the common person empower himself or herself to understand, question, and ultimately challenge the power structures that decided his or her fate. It was the job of schools, he believed, to structure themselves so that such learning would come about.

Before finally coming to the Graduate School in 1950, Mitchell also taught at Florence Teachers College in Florence, Alabama; was principal of the Park School in Buffalo, New York; traveled to Europe, where he studied at the Institute of International Studies in Geneva; and participated in two intentional communities in Americus and Macedonia, Georgia. All these

experiences and his contact with the leading progressive thinkers of his time helped shape the school that the Graduate School would become.²⁷

THE PUTNEY GRADUATE SCHOOL

The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education, also known as Glen Maples,²⁸ was founded in 1950 by Carmelita Hinton, then director of the Putney School, a private, progressive college preparatory school in Putney, Vermont. Hinton conceived the Graduate School along the lines of the Shady Hill Teacher Apprentice Program in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she had taught. Shady Hill operated under the direction of Katharine Taylor, who came to Shady Hill from a teaching position at the Francis W. Parker School in Chicago. Shady Hill's model for teacher education placed student teachers in the midst of the life of the school. As a progressive program, discussion focused largely on children and their learning. As Taylor put it, they asked not "What did I teach today?" but "What did students learn?" and heeded the difference between the two questions.

Mitchell came to Glen Maples on the recommendation of Edward Yeomans, a Shady Hill colleague and friend of Hinton, who had met Mitchell at the Macedonia Cooperative Community in Georgia. To the surprise and often the chagrin of both Hinton and the board, however, once Mitchell started, he took the Graduate School in a different direction from what Hinton and her faculty had expected. This underlying tension between Mitchell and the Putney School undoubtedly added to the other tensions that the Graduate School students experienced during their time at Glen Maples. Mitchell sought to immerse students in experiences that would provoke them to reflect on themselves and their beliefs, schools, school systems, and, most important, society and its problems. It promoted self-knowledge, learning with others in community, working toward social change with a global perspective, and reflection on experience as a means of developing an awareness that lifted them beyond the boundaries of self and the comfort of the familiar. Hinton and the board were progressive but were looking for something more conventional and closer to home—a program that would prepare teachers to teach their students.

Mitchell recruited students from countries as diverse as India, Pakistan, Sweden, Kenya, Jamaica, and Haiti. Every class was multiracial and international, and included men and women, students from the inner city and rural areas, students from the Deep South, families and single students, and students from working-class and middle-class backgrounds. When students were unable to pay tuition, Mitchell found benefactors, arranged no-interest loans, or simply allowed students to attend for free.²⁹

Mitchell designed the program so that the curriculum was determined in large part by the students themselves and guided by their personal interests. But it was also determined by Mitchell and his vision of what the world needed. This remained one of the essential tensions in the program. He believed in a student-generated curriculum that adhered to the needs and interests of students, and yet he was passionately attached to changing the world according to his values. Broadly, he believed that the world was "in crisis": nuclear weapons were multiplying, wealth was unevenly distributed, exploitation of the land was rampant, and most important, people of color were oppressed. With the intensification of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, Glen Maples students had the opportunity not only to study racial prejudice and social change but also to live in the midst of both. Students were pulled into this curriculum and changed by it. At the same time, it often appeared to subsume their own desire to learn the "how" of teaching.

Mitchell believed that skillful teaching began with self-knowledge. To teach children in a "crisis world" demanded the traditional teacher skills and interests but also

new concerns and abilities: a wide knowledge of the world and its peoples, an involvement in human problems, and the skill to lead others to knowledge and involvement; a deep sense of the fundamental unity of mankind and at the same time of its vitalizing diversity, and the need and ability to communicate that sense; an informed understanding of the active nature of learning and of ways to encourage that activity; least tangibly but most importantly, such self-knowledge and awareness as will furnish a constant and secure base for the interaction of one human being with others such that they, too, will gain awareness and the security of deep self-knowledge.³⁰

Mitchell often said to his students that "a teacher teaches who a teacher is To know what he is purveying, [a teacher] must know himself as deeply and honestly as he can."³¹ To this end, he required students to "test their purposes by working to carry them out," documenting these activities in an ongoing portfolio called the Cumulative File and meeting regularly with both him and their classmates for "counseling sessions" focused on their work.³²

To prepare his students in the basic skills of schoolteaching alone was clearly too limited a goal for Mitchell. A degree from Putney, he wrote, "demonstrated [a graduate's] preparation and readiness for leadership in a school, a community project, a social agency, an industrial organization, or some other place where education can aid in the reconstruction of human society."³³

Mitchell believed that adults, unlike children, needed to be reminded that their actions could have an effect on the world. "Most children," he wrote, "can face and welcome the fact that they can change their environment, that their own actions can be those of social reconstruction. On the other hand, many adults find it almost impossible to accept the potential for change that lives within them."³⁴ He felt strongly that the way to educate teachers for such a role was to immerse them in experiences that would move them emotionally, compel them to understand deeply, and ultimately act to change the contexts in which they lived and worked.

The program, which generally ran from September to June,³⁵ included seminars in which students examined progressive, "reconstructionist," and traditional approaches to education, and big ideas like urban decay and renewal, environmental sustainability, and civil rights.³⁶ In addition, there were short and long trips to what Mitchell called "places of quiet revolution"—progressive schools, rural Vermont sustainable wood lots, and settlement houses in New York City. There were also apprenticeships of the students' choice. These took place in progressive elementary and high schools, like the Putney School; in nontraditional schools for adults like the Penn Community Center in the Sea Islands or the Highlander School; in social agencies like the settlement houses in New York; and other places where social change through education was a priority. The year ended with a summation of the students' learning through the writing of a master's thesis. The final days of the program consisted of in-depth group-generated evaluations of the program and suggestions for the following year.³⁷

Not surprisingly, there were no grades at Glen Maples. Instead, students kept portfolios that included autobiographies, outlines of short- and long-range plans, seminar papers, journal accounts of trips, and reflections on daily living and learning. Mitchell saw these Cumulative Files as the place where structured reflection on experience would happen. The following description mirrors closely Dewey's own description of the reflective process:³⁸

The cumulative file is of great importance. It documents for each student his own learning: the encountering of obstacles and their preliminary analysis; the choice of the most promising possibilities; the testing of one or several of those possible solutions; the eventual answer arrived at and the progress which that answer makes possible. As a reconstruction of such experiences, the writing of the cumulative file constitutes a vital learning activity in itself.³⁹

The file also provided a starting place from which to explore and articulate one's philosophy of education. Most important for Mitchell, it served as the

foundation from which students would take action to change society.⁴⁰ Mitchell wrote,

In arriving at his own philosophy, [the student] is expected to study and evaluate the philosophies of others, always in the light of his growing awareness of himself, of the world around him and its problems, of the potentialities of education to aid or lead in the reconstruction of society.⁴¹

While the curriculum was student-generated, Mitchell did have a method. It grew out of his understanding of Dewey and Dewey’s concept of reconstructing experience through systematic reflection.⁴² So while the experiences would shift according to the year and the group, the method of learning from them remained consistent.

Mitchell felt that all these learning experiences—the seminars, short and long trips, apprenticeships, meetings with him, and the cumulative files that documented them—constituted a foundation from which students would learn how to teach. He believed that “the method of teaching [was] in the learning.” He assumed that immersing his students in such learning experiences would naturally translate into an understanding of and skill in teaching, an assumption that seems shortsighted. His sights, it appears, were not set on preparing teachers as much as they were focused on preparing human beings. While it can be argued (as Mitchell did, persuasively) that there is no difference—that we teach who we are—there are elements of pedagogy that must be learned and not just absorbed through osmosis. The rudiments of teaching and an understanding of learning can be found in the phenomena of learning, but they do not announce themselves; they must be teased out with the guidance of those who have reflected on the teaching–learning relationship and see it clearly. There is ample evidence that Mitchell did see the relationship clearly, but his priority was that his students understand social issues rather than pedagogy. Given the emphasis of the curriculum on social issues, how can we understand the teaching and learning that did happen at PGS? I explore this question next.

WHERE WAS THE TEACHING AND WHAT WAS THE LEARNING?

As a way of trying to unravel the learning and teaching that occurred in the Putney Graduate School, I will explore the various explicit (contemporary social issues) and implicit (learning and teaching) dimensions of subject matter that were present at the Graduate School, Mitchell’s role, and what and how students say they learned.⁴³

SUBJECT MATTER

There were three dimensions to the Graduate School's subject matter. The first was explicit, and the other two more implicit. The first dimension comprised racism, civil rights, nonviolence, sustainable development, and literacy education—in short, the subject matter grew out of the contemporary social context. Subject matter also consisted of more process-oriented content: living as a small community, living as a group of mixed race and nationality, thinking reflectively about experience, and examining one's personal history and beliefs. These areas are all clearly outlined in the school catalog and reflected in Mitchell's papers, students' documents, tape recordings of student autobiographies, and graduate interviews.

The second and third dimensions of subject matter, common to all programs of teacher education, were understanding how people learn, and learning how to teach. These two levels were part and parcel of the first dimension and yet remained largely unarticulated in the catalog, Mitchell's papers, existing curricular documents, or students' work. Understanding how people learn was to come about by being learners; understanding how to teach was, equally, supposedly embedded in students' learning experiences.

Students at the Graduate School were, first of all, learners—that is, learners of the first dimension of subject matter: social issues. Because, as Mitchell said, “the adult learns by the same process as the child,”⁴⁴ Graduate School students were learning in the same ways that Mitchell thought all students should learn: through direct experience with social problems that needed solutions. These experiences were profound confrontations with society, self, and one another that forced engagement at the deepest levels, both intellectual and emotional. The assumption was that to understand how people learn, one need only reflect upon one's own experiences as learners. Also implicit in these experiences were notions of teaching. “The methods of teaching are in the teaching itself” Mitchell wrote.⁴⁵ In other words, one need only examine the teaching that one experienced as a learner at the Graduate School to discern the proper methods of teaching to employ. Thus, what to learn and teach, how to go about learning it, and how to organize teaching it were all bound up in the experiences that Glen Maples students had.

It is clear from both written and interview accounts that what mattered most to Mitchell was the first layer of subject matter—those contemporary problems and their solutions. He also cared deeply about a particular way of learning that was informed by his own experiences as a learner and teacher, and by his mentors, including his father, John Dewey, Theodore Brameld, Myles Horton, William Heard Kirkpatrick, and other progressive/reconstructionist thinkers. His ideas about education existed in service to larger

ideals: namely, the transformation of society. Significantly, he also cared deeply about his students. Many of them recounted to me the “great love” that he showed them.⁴⁶

For the students at Glen Maples, the aims were generally more modest. Most wanted a teaching credential⁴⁷ and some skills to be able to teach effectively within the existing system—something in which Mitchell frankly had little interest. So for them, the subject matter they came for existed in the more tacit layers of Mitchell’s more explicit curriculum. Herein lay an essential tension. What Mitchell foregrounded (social issues) was, to many students, a vehicle, albeit an important one, by which to get at what mattered most to them: knowledge about teaching and learning. And what they valued most (knowledge of and skill in teaching) was, to Mitchell, a vehicle, albeit an important one, by which to accomplish societal change. Mitchell was frustrated at times that his students did not fully share his priorities. This is evident in a letter that he wrote to two graduates:

I have hoped for too much readiness on [graduates’] part to sense the importance of these emerging concepts that I am so confident should be latched onto by those who will help bring about the world we must have if we are to have an inhabited world at all.⁴⁸

While students acknowledged the importance of the issues that Mitchell cared so deeply about (and, frankly, a few came to PSG without intentions of teaching), most wanted to learn how to teach. The potential for such learning was tremendous because it *was* embedded in their experiences at Putney. Their experiences as learners on the study tour and in seminars, as well as their observations of classes at the Putney School and other progressive institutions, provided ample data for reflection upon learning and teaching. The might have explored with Mitchell and each other questions important to teachers that arose directly from their experiences: How do different people in our group learn? What is the process of learning experientially, outside the four walls of the classroom? How is it different from other kinds of learning? What is gained and what is lost with such learning? What is the structure and role of reflection in learning? And then, moving from learning to teaching: What are the implications of the answers to these questions for teaching? How does a teacher structure a successful experience? How can reflective thinking be taught effectively? Could such teaching happen in existing schools? If not, what kinds of conditions are necessary? What is the role of the teacher in this kind of education? How might the teacher-student relationship be changed? How does one go about working in tandem with the community? While there is evidence of learning about different approaches to teaching (namely Brameld’s books, some Dewey readings, and conversations with William Heard Kirkpatrick, as well as a psychology

course), there is less evidence of applying this knowledge to their own experiences as learners, making the implicit explicit.

These questions represent missed opportunities. While evidence of an integrated understanding of the issues exists, there is limited evidence of an organized and connected understanding among the issues, learning, and teaching. Students' experiences as learners lay scattered like so many bits of colorful cloth that too often were never sorted, organized, analyzed, or put together into any explicit pedagogical design.

AN EDUCATOR OF CONVICTION AND A CURRICULUM OF CHOICE

Mitchell struggled with two conflicting desires: that students take responsibility for their own learning and that they adopt his passion for changing the world. While students were certainly swayed by Mitchell's convictions and changed by their experiences, few ever explicitly took up the banner of reconstructionism once they left PGS, which ultimately left Mitchell disappointed even though commitment to social justice issues remained implicit in their career choices.⁴⁹ While he structured a curriculum that allowed students a great deal of freedom, he was as bound to achieving his own grand vision of a just and equitable world as he was to supporting students whose plans did not necessarily mesh with his own, perhaps because he seemed unable or unwilling to step back from his own practice and to reflect on that practice. He was less able to help students step back and reflect on the learning and teaching inherent in their own experiences at the Graduate School. He appeared at times to lack the clarity to allow students to reject what he believed in so passionately, understanding that that was part of what it means to take responsibility for your own learning. He needed to be able to hold simultaneously his commitment to change and his commitment to his students' learning. By committing himself to his students' learning, he risked never getting to the change he so desired. Yet, ironically, by holding too tightly to that desire, he risked its never being achieved.

This left students in the strange position of being both empowered and overwhelmed. Mitchell's niece, Ellen Mitchell, describes his ability to go right to the heart of her own learning and at the same time to drive her away:

He put you right at the edge of knowing. He taught you what you didn't know by asking the question that forced you into yourself to seek [the answers] . . . "What do I know about that? Nothing! How do I feel about that?" And then if you couldn't answer it you spent the next five years of your life trying to figure out how you would answer that question. . . . [And yet] I couldn't [go to his school] and I know it always disappointed him. He took it very personally. . . . But I knew

that he would just bowl me over; I would become a Morris carbon copy, and then have an even harder time finding myself.⁵⁰

If we return to Mitchell’s axiom that “ultimately every teacher teaches who he is,” we are left with a paradox. He passionately believed in a student’s freedom of choice and the importance of self-knowledge, but also insisted that they choose what he chose and seemed unaware of the impact that the force of his personality had on those choices. Still, there is ample evidence that Mitchell was no tyrant. He acted always from a place of love. One student put it this way:

He was a dominating person. He was very, very determined, [but] very gentle [too]. I would say that it’s sort of like the iron fists with the velvet gloves. He wasn’t that flexible. He knew what he wanted to do and he went ahead and did it. But he was an extraordinary person. There was [his] obvious love for humanity.⁵¹

WHAT STUDENTS LEARNED

Despite the tension described above, and also as a result of it, students indicated that they learned a great deal at the Graduate School. The evidence lies less in the work they did during that year than it does in their later reflections on the year and the sense that they made of its impact over subsequent years. Students indicated that their perspective on education and the world changed as a result of being at the school. Ironically, it seems that Mitchell, in many ways, got what he wanted in the end. This letter from one graduate is representative of many graduates’ experiences.

The PGS experience was the most significant and most worthwhile [and] useful of all my formal education. The interdisciplinary, integrated program stressing sociological explorations and the freedom to follow my own interests . . . made my work at Putney part of my way of life. I apply my experiences constantly. . . . I am constantly challenged by the Putney concept of education as a tool for the definition and solution of the crises of the world.⁵²

In addition, students learned how to think for themselves and to take steps to answer their own questions. In the beginning of his first term at PGS, Arthur Meyer, a teacher on leave from the Park School in Buffalo, describes adjusting to the idea that he was master of his own learning. In the following Cumulative File entry, he clearly describes the adjustment he was making from responding to someone else’s “assignments,” “deadlines”

and “standards” to working for his own sake:

[In discussion with Mitchell] it was decided that by tomorrow I should have written up an autobiography, self-analysis, long term plan and short term plan. . . when I went up to my room to work after dinner, I was still thinking of the above written work as an assignment rather than as a part of my own thinking or what I myself wished to do. I was also still thinking in terms of a “deadline” for this work as the seminar tomorrow morning. In addition, I was looking at the other guidance folders as the standard I had to achieve immediately rather than just starting with where I was at this point and having it actually reflect my growth. . . I read several folders, and then began thinking of my own position and analyzing the reasons why I was here and what I really hoped to accomplish. . . . I soon found I was able to begin organizing my thoughts and felt completely free to let out my true feelings about myself and this work.⁵³

Another alumnus, John Stevens, went on to teach engineering at a university in Florida. In an interview nearly 50 years later, he described his learning and how he passed it on to his own students.

There was a confidence that came out of having that one year—reading, and realizing that I could learn on my own. That confidence of learning what I wanted to learn at Glen Maples and having the freedom [to do so] . . . gave me confidence that it would be a worthwhile experience for [my] students to share learning with me. I was primarily interested not in the facts and figures, as much as I was in their learning to think and to understand bigger pictures . . . to be able to integrate information.⁵⁴

Alumni also consistently commented upon the link between education and life, and Mitchell’s philosophy of reconstructionism. Mary Guftason, who spent part of her apprenticeship in a Tennessee jail after an encounter with the local Ku Klux Klan, emphasized her appreciation of the distinction between Glen Maples’s brand of education and the more traditional accumulation of techniques. She confesses to having become a “reconstructionist:”

PGS helped break down many walls in my thinking to focus directly on *education* rather than techniques and methods as Lesley College had as a four-year curriculum. Thus I was able to integrate much of my life into an educational focus. . . . PGS changed me into a reconstructionist! It was the most important educational experience I’ve had, basically shaping my total perspective.⁵⁵

The following section explores students’ experiences in one aspect of the PGS curriculum, the study tour, which illustrates the kind of learning and teaching experience that happened outside the walls of the classroom.

THE STUDY TOUR

For this study, I interviewed eleven Glen Maples alumni from the first (1951) to the last (1965) class, and many classes in between.⁵⁶ Which alumni I interviewed was largely determined by whom I could locate after nearly fifty years. However, I believe that the group I interviewed is broadly representative of those who attended Glen Maples. The group consisted of men and women, U.S. citizens and foreign students, black and white, those who loved the program and those who had a harder time with it, although I usually could find both in the same person.

The study tour brought together all aspects of the program. It forced students to live and travel and make decisions together as a community, and it brought them face to face with social problems like racism and environmental devastation, but also quiet yet powerful efforts at social change. Inevitably, it put students in contact with themselves—their beliefs and assumptions, both noble and disturbing.

The study tour usually headed to the Deep South. While no two trips were the same, they shared the theme of social change through education. In the pages that follow, I give a brief overview of the fall term and preparation for the tour and then patch together episodes from several different trips, drawing on Mitchell’s records and material from students’ Cumulative Files and interview accounts.

The study tour served as a testing ground for the ideas introduced in the fall (namely, an introduction to reconstructionist education—Brameld, Dewey, and Kilpatrick—and an overview of current social concerns) both in terms of the social movements the tour explored and the educational structure that the tour represented.

Cynthia Parsons, a member of the sixth Graduate School class, and her cohort traveled south in the spring of 1956, not quite two years after the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision had been rendered (May 17, 1954). She and her twelve classmates⁵⁷ loaded into two Volkswagen vans to see what that decision meant for the South.

According to Parsons, before setting out on the trip, the group, along with Mitchell, had agreed to several things: any place that they ate or slept would have to accept the whole group; they would always eat inside a place rather than settle for a takeout meal; and they would encounter any racial aggression with nonviolence.⁵⁸ In this group’s case, they did not wait long for an opportunity to put their resolutions to the test. The chef in their first

restaurant in Maryland, according to Parsons, burst from the kitchen and headed toward John F., the African American member of the group. Waving a long butcher knife in John F.'s face, he yelled, "Get your f - - - black ass out of here!"⁵⁹ Rather than risk putting John F. and themselves in danger, they left the restaurant.

Later, in a separate incident in Georgia, white men driving a truck full of manure followed Parsons and John F. The men threw manure at the couple by the shovelful as they drove by John F. and Parsons, clinging to their promise of nonviolence, kept on walking.

Parsons said that Mitchell used these incidents and others like them to "push the borders" of the group's understanding. He constantly asked probing questions: What would make a man do something like that? What are the forces of the community that may have influenced his behavior? How did it make you feel? What are the different ways we might have responded? ⁶⁰ Questions like these put students "at the edge of their knowing," drawing from the emotional depths of their recent experience. There was, in the words of one, "a felt need" to put meaning to such experiences.

On that second day of the trip, the group covered 240 miles, from Bergen, New Jersey, to Washington, DC. They started at 7:30 in the morning and ended at 9:30 that night, with visits to four separate towns. The previous day, the group drove to New York City from Putney, visited the United Nations, attended a briefing there, met with William Heard Kirkpatrick in his home on Morningside Drive, dined at Teachers College, and met with a gentleman named Mike Giles in Englewood, New Jersey, to talk about "conflict episode analysis with reference to present racial tensions in the South." They finally arrived, exhilarated but exhausted, in Bergen.

Two regular study tour destinations were Myles Horton's Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee, and the Citizenship Schools along the coast of South Carolina. Mitchell admired Horton's approach to education. It represented to him the best kind of marriage between education and social change—a reconstructionist ideal. Myles Horton was a man of principle combined with action. Horton's most significant work was with labor unions in the 1930s and 1940s and with the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

Study tour groups met with Horton, sat in on his seminars, and listened to tapes of seminars. One was one of Rosa Parks, who was trained at Highlander, "telling how, being tired and disgusted, she took that first step which resulted in the Montgomery bus boycott."⁶¹

Highlander was also responsible for helping to found the Citizenship Schools of the 1950s and 1960s. Citizenship Schools were started so that adults, primarily Southern blacks, would have a place where they could come to learn to read so that they might be able to vote.⁶² Bernice

Robinson, a beautician⁶³ and participant at Highlander and the niece of Septima Clark,⁶⁴ was the first teacher in the first of these schools. Building on Clark’s pedagogy that sought to “teach [children] the words that they used every day,”⁶⁵ she single-handedly developed an approach to literacy instruction that is still considered innovative today, though never attributed to her. Horton wrote of her work:

Bernice and the students developed the curriculum day by day. They learned to write letters, order catalogs and fill out money orders. They made up stories about the vegetables they grew and the tools they used.

“They tell me a story,” Mrs. Robinson told us [at Highlander], “a story which I write down, then they learn to read the story. It’s their story in their words, and they are interested because it’s theirs.”⁶⁶

Graduate School students visited one of these schools in Frogmore, on St. Helena Island, off the north Georgia coast. Peter Terry, a member of the class of 1963, wrote enthusiastically of his experience at the school in Frogmore, sponsored by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), explicitly making his own connection between what he experienced there and the ideas he got from his studies at the Graduate School:

Classes of the SCLC Teacher Training program were such thrilling exhibitions of the real dynamics of teaching that I could scarcely believe my eyes and ears. This is exactly what we have been talking about at Putney: This *is* the reconstruction of education. A purposeful, direct approach to the educational problem at hand with forceful, clean, step-by-step procedures toward getting the job done with no deviation and no claptrap. The intriguing technique of teaching by asking, not telling, is beautifully demonstrated by Dorothy Cotton. She said, “Teachers do not tell but ask; this is the art of teaching. Let students agonize over it, with the teacher to only guide them to stay on the point; let them testify and teach themselves. Then they will never forget.”⁶⁷

It is not difficult to understand that participation in such a historically and personally significant event, whose purpose reached beyond those involved to the very shaping of society, would make an impact strong enough to radicalize participants. Being there mattered. Terry was able, in Woodhouse and Knapp’s (2000) words, to “connect place with self and community.”⁶⁸

Another regular stop on the tour was Ducktown, Georgia. Ducktown was a ruined copper mining town. By all accounts, the devastation of Ducktown, by then abandoned and bleeding from the erosion of its red clay soils, was

horrifying. "Caverns of hell!" wrote Hugh Corbin, a student in the class of 1956. No vegetation, little life of any kind, and terrific poverty. The injustice of the plight of those living in Ducktown compared with those who had come, mined, and grown rich, leaving little of the wealth behind, made Corbin's group intensely angry. "No amount of reading," they wrote, "could leave such an impression If a picture is really worth a thousand words, then an experience is worth a thousand books."⁶⁹ They continued,

As we drove over the red and dry plains of Georgia, we saw the dark faces of intimidated Negroes who lived in poor unpainted sheds, the sun shining through the rotten boards. But less than a hundred feet from these miserable dwellings we saw the beautiful brick house of the landlord.⁷⁰

This experience was countered by visits to the Guntersville Dam of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). The access to electricity that resulted from a sustainable use of natural resources, as well as the natural beauty of the area, contrasted with the ecological devastation and economic disparity of Ducktown. However, there is evidence in the record and in interviews that his students did not always share Mitchell's passion for the TVA. "Those damn dams," as one alumna put it. Environmental issues resonated less with students than did civil rights, perhaps because civil rights were more obviously human in dimension and directly applicable to their own experience, whereas dams and strip-mining seemed too big and too far from their own lived experience.

One of the most powerful of the group's experiences with civil rights was their impromptu trip to Montgomery, Alabama, in December 1956 to participate in the one-year anniversary of the bus boycott there. Apparently, one member of the group took off to visit Montgomery on his own.⁷¹ Inspired by the interracial workshops on nonviolent protest that he had witnessed at Highlander, the student felt moved to see the results of such work up close. He not only witnessed the bus boycott, but he also had the chance to talk directly with Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ralph Abernathy. He was so excited by this contact and by what he found happening in Montgomery that he came back and asked the group to return with him. In their group Cumulative File, students wrote of the group process by which they decided to go to Montgomery and the experience itself. The process of democratic group decision making and student-generation of curriculum represented two other aspects of the experience of the study tour, as the group noted in their collaborative account of the trip:

When this message was brought back to the group, a situation developed that is indicative of the kind of education that is offered at Glen

Maples. . . . The group sat down and weighed [reasons for not going] against the reality of the opportunity to study concretely how a creative principle, the principle of non-violent resistance, was being applied in a constructive way and how it was being effective in bringing about social change. . . . We felt very strongly at that moment the value of an education where students and teachers in a given and very real . . . situation together take on responsibility for the formulation of the program. The curriculum is "emerging," it evolves out of circumstances and is adaptable to the needs of the student group. This particular instance is only an example of what happens fairly often within the general structure of the Graduate School's program. Thus it was that Dr. Martin Luther King became the teacher of this school for a few days.⁷²

This is compelling evidence of students assuming agency first for their learning, second, for the curriculum, and third, for effecting change in the place and times that they inhabited. And yet, as powerful as this experience surely was, whether the decision-making process was truly democratic was called into question by at least one graduate. Corbin confides that when it came to "decisions," the word should always be put in quotes. "Morris made the decisions and then spent sometimes hours or even days trying to get the one or two dissenters to agree. We quickly learned to go along and save the time."⁷³ This could be evidence of Mitchell's strong will, or it could also be Corbin's misinterpretation of a consensus method that grew out of Mitchell's grounding in Quaker practices and beliefs.

Still, this appears to have been a moment in which students felt that the mission of the school and reality merged. The following quote from the Group File contains King's words, but they have the ring of Mitchell (and therefore perhaps of this time in history) to them:

[Dr. King's] understanding of history and his interpretation of the present situation were surprisingly in line with this school. "Those of us who live in the Twentieth Century are privileged to live in one of the most momentous periods of human history. This is an exciting age filled with hope. It is an age in which a new social order is being born. We stand today between two worlds—the dying old and the emerging new."⁷⁴

Clearly, there was an evangelical language and spirit of the time not unique to Mitchell. To his credit, as powerful as an encounter with King was, Mitchell was careful that his students talk with proponents of opposing views, or perhaps it was a way of underscoring the importance of King's work. To this end, he arranged a meeting with Sam Englehardt, Alabama

state senator and executive secretary of the state's White Citizens' Council, which was formed to oppose integration of schools after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Students found the meeting "more than overwhelming." They characterized the senator as "arrogant, ignorant, suspicious and extremely defensive" and found the visit "disconcerting and pathetic."⁷⁵ It appears that, rather than rounding out their understanding, the encounter seems to have drawn a stark portrait of good and evil. Although no one would argue about who was on the right side, the complexities of the issues—fear, economic threats, threatened social order, or unwitting complicity—apparently went unexplored. Yet the emotional impact of the visit is undeniable.

Mitchell followed up these visits with discussions with two local scholars, one a sociologist who was studying the effect of nonviolent protest on the people of the civil rights movement, and the other a professor of religion who discussed the role that Christianity played in the movement.⁷⁶ In addition, the group was housed with "prominent Negro families" in the city. Discussion with these men and women, all involved with the civil rights movement, added yet another layer to students' understanding. They left Montgomery with the feeling that the success of the civil rights movement depended not on any particular group but "with the masses of the people who have found new dignity and unity in their constructive protest against injustice. The buses run empty through the streets of Montgomery, and only the masses can keep them empty."⁷⁷

For one member of the group, Anne Fines, the trip to Montgomery was the most significant visit of the study tour but still took second place to her experience traveling through the South in a van in a mixed-race group. As a Southerner herself, the "laboratory of human relations" that the "race relations" part of the trip represented held special meaning. It related to her personal past, to her present sense of herself, and to her future teaching. (Fines taught for 40 years in a southern Vermont elementary school.) The depth of the emotional content of the experience caused her to "re-construct" her past as a Southerner, and in essence, to change her relationship to that old self. In the passage that follows, she makes sense of that past and her own reactions. She states the importance of bringing long-held assumptions to light, stressing the role that emotion and genuine interracial interaction played in her transformation.

[The racial situation] was, for me, a truly educational experience. By racial situation, I do not mean just Montgomery. Montgomery, as an isolated experience, would have had much less meaning. My "education" came from experiencing Montgomery in the context of our entire experience as an interracial group. Growing up as a Southerner, I absorbed as a child the Southern view toward the Negro. However, a change such as [I have experienced] seems to involve the

emotions far more than the mind. . . . When [growing up], I lived within a group for whom discrimination was a basic assumption. I had never been able to know or even meet the Southern Negro in a social situation.

She goes on to describe how she was brought out of herself and the sphere of her past experience by having to live and work closely with people different from herself. In addition, she was able to connect the “stultification of the Negro” with the social context—segregation and racism—that caused it.

This trip introduced me, for the first time, to a direct experience of the tragedy and stultification of the Negroes caused by [segregation and racism]. For the first time I have an emotional understanding of the effect of segregation on a human being’s view of himself. This came through both the experience of living and traveling as a Negro [lives and travels] and through coming to know some of the members of the Negro community of Montgomery, and discussing their own experiences with them. Such experiences could not help but bring about a personal change.

Finally, she links her awareness with the imperative to act.

I think that the average person will resist any threat to the status quo. He will not change his attitudes unless forced to by some type of pressure. An unbelievably immoral situation is now existing, which must be corrected. It is not only right to do so, it is a grave responsibility.⁷⁸

On the trip Fines not only encountered the realities of the situation, but she also encountered herself. She told me the story of being asked to cut the hair of her African American classmate, Corbin. “I caught myself feeling revolted, and I was so ashamed,” she recounts. She and Corbin were close friends, and yet this old and deep response, learned from years of listening to other voices, put her in undeniable contact with the truth of her own prejudice. But what mattered was not so much the fact of the prejudice as her acknowledgment of it, and her pushing through and beyond it, with the love and respect she felt for him. This, it seems to me, speaks of the real work of turning the soul: putting students in relationship with others different from themselves, within the context of compelling places and events (outside the classroom), and ultimately with themselves. Clearly, Fines, as a result of her experiences, felt accountable from within rather than because of externally imposed standards of accountability.

In a concluding section of the group Cumulative File on the fall 1956 study tour, students listed the ways in which the trip had been valuable.

Among a list of 22 items were the following: (1) the comprehension of the imperative need of conserving our natural resources as a responsibility to future generations; (2) the awareness of the glaring discrepancy in side-by-side wealth and poverty; (3) the realization that education is as broad as life and an ever-continuing process; (4) the belief that school and community are interacting [and that] each should build the other.⁷⁹

The group concluded their evaluation of the trip by noting that it had been transformative. Not only did they have knowledge that they did not have before, but they were also changed as people and as learners by the knowledge they gained and the ways in which they gained it:

Our whole beings have reacted in this intensive learning experience. We have strengthened our belief in considering both sides of questions, and in working out solutions through understanding and cooperation. The effect on us is so complex and profound that it is impossible to convey it completely by the written word.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION: LESSONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION TODAY

To educate a teacher is an enormous and always incomplete endeavor. The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education did not provide a solution to the problem of how to educate teachers for social justice, but it gives us insight into how teacher education might teach teachers to care about teaching for social justice.

While many teacher education programs today advocate a critical stance, insisting that their teacher-students be committed to looking at the “social and political consequences of [his or her] teaching,”⁸¹ how teacher-students come to hold these commitments remains a question. What if teachers don’t care? Is in-depth consideration of such issues enough to awaken a dormant social consciousness or create one where none existed? The Graduate School experiment suggests that commitment to issues of social justice comes not from program requirements but from a place of internal authority that is the outgrowth of personal transformation, and that such transformation is the result of personal encounters with issues of the time through direct contact with the people and places that embody those issues.

For change to be lasting, for souls to be turned, teacher-students must have direct experience with compelling contemporary issues, engage in internal and communal reflection, articulate their own needs and plans, and be guided by teacher educators and mentors who are doing the same—all of which will give them insight into themselves, the society in which they live, and institutions in which they work, and ground them in the authority of their own experience.

Notes

1 Theodore Brameld, *Toward a Reconstructed Philosophy of Education* (New York: Hugh Holt & Co., 1955). *Reconstructionist* education was Brameld's term for his educational philosophy. *Reconstructivist*, as a term, was never used by Brameld or his disciples.

2 See Carol Rodgers, "Defining Reflection: Another Look at John Dewey and Reflective Thinking," *Teachers College Record* 104, No. 4 (2002): 842–66.

3 Transformational learning is a theoretical domain that is more recent than the Putney Graduate School itself, though its contemporary definitions are compatible with Morris Mitchell's use of the word. Jack Mezirow, a leader in the field of transformative learning, suggests that transformational learning involves the reconstruction of the self and its frames of reference, a process that entails critical reflection on the assumptions that comprise self and the knowledge that it accepts as true. "Transformation," he writes, "refers to a movement through time of reformulating reified structures of meaning by reconstructing dominant narratives" (19). These narratives necessarily often point to narratives of privilege. The process of transformation is therefore not limited to internal processes, but also involves taking autonomous action in the world for positive change—an "actualization of perspective." "[Transformational learning] demands that we be aware of how we come to our knowledge and as aware as we can be about the values that lead us to our perspectives. Cultural canon, socioeconomic structures, ideologies and beliefs about ourselves, and the practices they support often conspire to foster conformity and impede development of a sense of responsible agency" (8); Jack Mezirow & Associates, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000). Robert Kegan sees transformation as the movement of the self from subject to object, from being unconsciously "embedded" in a context to being able to see the self, context, and the assumptions that defines them objectively, and to act autonomously on that awareness; Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). Alison Cook-Sather uses the metaphor of translation to understand the transformative nature of learning. She sees the self as an evolving entity, continuously constructed and reconstructed by the conscious aspect of self in response to the contexts and relationships within which that self operates; Alison Cook-Sather, *When Education Is Translation: Changing Metaphors, Changing Selves* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). David Kolb also sees the self as a work in "process," in which knowledge, and therefore the self, are continuously reconstructed through a process of reflection; David Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984).

4 From "Report to the Trustees: Putney Graduate School," for the Meeting, March 28, 1953, 6. The Mitchell papers, #3832 in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

5 David Tyack, *The One Best System* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 270, 275, 276; David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 52.

6 David Cohen, "Practice and Policy: Notes on the History of Instruction," in *American Teachers: Histories of a Professional at Work*, ed. Donald Warren (New York: American Educational Research Association & Macmillan Publishers, 1989), 394, 398.

7 These "others" included colleagues of Mitchell's from Putney and Friends World College, the Putney town moderator when the school existed, an alumnus of New College at Columbia Teachers College where Mitchell taught, Putney School faculty, and Mitchell family members. See Carol Rodgers, "Morris Mitchell and The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education, 1950–1964" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1998).

8 Marilyn Cochran-Smith, *Walking the Road: Race, Diversity and Social Justice in Teacher Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004).

9 *Ibid.*, 161.

10 Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970). “Banking” models of education see teaching and learning as a matter of depositing information into a student’s “empty” head, where it is presumably available for withdrawal at any time. Questions of whose knowledge and for what purposes go unexamined; the assumption is that once “deposited,” the knowledge is available.

11 David Gruenewald, “The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place,” *Educational Researcher* 32, No. 4 (2003): 3–12; David Gruenewald, “Teaching and Learning with Thoreau: Honoring Critique, Experimentation, Wholeness, and the Places Where We Live,” *Harvard Educational Review* 72, No. 4 (2002): 515–41.

12 Gruenewald, “The Best of Both Worlds,” 9.

13 See Rodgers, “Defining Reflection.”

14 Linda Darling-Hammond, Jennifer French, and Silvia Paloma Garcia-Lopez, eds., *Learning to Teach for Social Justice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002); Gloria Ladson-Billings, *Crossing Over to Canaan* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); Sonia Nieto, “Placing Equity Front and Center: Some Thoughts on Transforming Teacher Education for a New Century,” *Journal of Teacher Education* 51, No. 3 (2000): 180–87; Kathleen Weiler, “Teacher Education and Social Justice,” *Radical Teacher*, Fall 2002, http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JVP/is_2002_Fall/ai_92840302; Daniel Liston and Kenneth Zeichner, *Culture and Teaching* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1996).

15 Carol Rodgers, “Reflection in Teacher Education: A Study of John Dewey’s Theory and the Practice of Katharine Taylor and Lucy Sprague Mitchell” (unpublished qualifying paper, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1996).

16 The Mitchell papers, #3832 in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

17 From Alice B. Mitchell’s record of her children, September 3, 1899. Personal Collection of Alice Blachly.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Interview with Mitchell’s niece, Alice Blachly, daughter of his sister, Mary Clifford, February, 1997.

20 This was probably a conflation that should have been St.-Amand-les-Eaux, a picturesque village with thermal baths, located in the département du Nord, not far from the places of battle.

21 Morris R. Mitchell (aka B. J. Chaffee), “Mine Own People,” *Atlantic Monthly* 136, No. 4 (1925): 496–502.

22 *Ibid.*, 499.

23 Robert Littell, “Ellerbe Learns by Doing,” *Reader’s Digest*, June 1937, 39–41.

24 One assumes that he was also in contact with George Counts and Harold Rugg, both of whom were at Teachers College when Mitchell was there as a student, and later as a teacher at Columbia’s experimental New College, though there is no evidence in the record of direct contact. There is also no evidence of contact between Mitchell and Rachel David DuBois, who was also at Teachers College during this period, although one wonders how they could not have crossed paths. DuBois, like Mitchell, was extremely interested in intercultural education and group relations, both across nations and between races at home. They were contemporaries at Teachers College.

25 Theodore Brameld, *Ends and Means in Education* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950); John L. Childs, *Education and Morals* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1950/1967); Isaac B. Berkson, *The Ideal and the Community* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1958/1970). Brameld, Childs, and Berkson were the most ardent voices of the reformulation of progressive education following the World War II; Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

26 Deborah B. McKay, “New Foundations,” 2001, <http://www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/Brameld.html>

27 After his 15 years at PGS, Mitchell accepted a position as president of the newly founded Friends World College on Long Island, where he remained until his retirement in the late 1970s.

28 The Graduate School was located on a piece of property called Glen Maples. Many of its alumni still refer to the school by that name. In this article, I use *the Graduate School* and *Glen Maples* interchangeably.

29 The Mitchell papers, #3832 in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill. This was another source of friction between Mitchell and Hinton and the board.

30 From the Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education Catalog, (n.d.), 3, 4.

31 Interview with John Stevens, February 20, 1995.

32 From the Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education Catalog, (n.d.), p. 8.

33 *Ibid.*, 1.

34 *Ibid.*, 4.

35 The program had many different configurations, including a two-summer program and a January–September option, and probably graduated about 150 students. Because virtually no enrollment or graduation records were kept, it is hard to know precisely. In the end, the program was never accredited, a fact that caused its graduates some grief; several went on to complete degrees at other master’s programs. In about 1953, the program divorced itself from the Putney School and was regarded by others as a noble experiment but a somewhat less-than-effective place to educate teachers for the classroom. When PGS was bought by Antioch College in 1965 and became Putney-Antioch, it dropped its strong emphasis on social justice and turned its sights back to pedagogy within the four walls of the classroom.

36 See Theodore Brameld, *Ends and Means in Education*.

37 Some of these evaluations were taped and are part of the historical record. In all cases, they were used to plan the next year’s program.

38 See John Dewey, *How We Think* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1933); and Rodgers, C., “Defining Reflection: Another Look at John Dewey and Reflective Thinking,” *Teachers College Record* 104, No. 4 (2002): 842–66.

39 Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education Catalogue, (n.d.), p. 8.

40 The portfolios are now housed in the archives of the registrar’s office at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. They served as a significant archival source for this study.

41 *Ibid.*, 14, 15.

42 Dewey defined education as “that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases [one’s] ability to direct the course of subsequent experience.” Dewey essentially defines education as a verb rather than a noun. In doing so, he has also given us a definition of *learning*. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Free Press, 1916), 74.

43 I borrow this framework—student, teacher, subject matter—from David Hawkins’s classic article, “I, Thou, and It” which represents each element respectively. David Hawkins, “I, Thou, and It,” *The Informed Vision: Essays on Learning and Human Nature* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2002).

44 Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education Catalog, (n.d.), 4.

45 “The Purposes and Principles and Hope of this School” (a report written for potential funders, June, 1958). The Mitchell Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

46 The force of Mitchell’s love was stressed by nearly everyone with whom I spoke. Two of the graduates I interviewed admitted to being learning disabled and referred to Mitchell’s faith

in their abilities and the hands-on learning of the program as turning points in their learning and their images of themselves as learners.

47 Under Mitchell, the Graduate School was never accredited.

48 Morris Mitchell to Happy and Jane Traum, January 31, 1964. Morris Mitchell papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

49 Of the eleven alumni I interviewed, five taught in K–12 public or private schools, three taught at the university level, two were political activists, and one became a reporter in education and then started her own arts-in-education foundation.

50 Interview with Ellen Mitchell, June 1996.

51 Interview with John Stevens, February 20, 1995.

52 Joyce Gammon, class of 1960, letter to Todd Bayer, May 29, 1968. From Gammon's letter to Todd Bayer in response to a May 3, 1968 request for information from alumni. Morris Mitchell papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

53 Arthur Meyer, Cumulative File, Entry, July 6, 1953.

54 John Stevens interview, February 20, 1995.

55 From Gustafson's letter to Todd Bayer in response to a May 3, 1968, request for information from alumni. Morris Mitchell papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

56 From the anecdotal data in the record, there appear to have been about 10 to 15 students each year, nearly always a mix of race, nationality, age, and gender, including many men taking advantage of the GI Bill who came with their families. Because there is no Graduate School alumni association or any ongoing documentation of what became of students after they graduated, finding alumni was an exercise in detective work. I was able to locate eleven in all during the year in which I did the research. These eleven former students represent nearly all the years during which PGS functioned.

57 These included five women and seven men; one Indian, one African American, two Swedes, and one Swiss; graduates of Hunter College, Bard College, Goddard College, Principia, the University of Chicago, McGill, Sarah Lawrence, Brooklyn College, the University of Basel, and Case Institute of Technology. All students were between the ages of 24 and 39.

58 Interview with Cynthia Parsons, March 1997.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 From the "Reports on the Southern Study Tour of school, community, and regional development, November 1 to December 8, 1956" (3). Rosa Parks, the black woman who refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and who sparked the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, has popularly been portrayed as a lone, tired black woman who finally got fed up and took action. In fact, she had been to Highlander not two weeks before she took action in Montgomery. She had been trained there in nonviolent forms of protest and had an entire grassroots organized movement behind her, many of whom also had a Highlander background. Myles Horton, *The Long Haul: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

62 Tests requiring voters to be "literate" before they could vote were established by state governments and were among the group of laws known as Jim Crow laws designed to keep African Americans from being able to exercise their right to vote. Literacy tests often required black voters to perform absurd tasks like pronouncing fictitious words or reciting state capitals. Reciting the entire U.S. Constitution by heart was one of the more demeaning tests that existed as late as 1960.

63 The schools were initially run by black beauticians. Beauticians had a great deal of status in the African American communities of the South. They were generally educated, and their self-run, self-owned businesses were community hubs. Horton, *The Long Haul*.

64 Septima Clark was a key figure at Highlander. She was a black woman from the Sea Islands who was educated at Teachers College in the 1930s and later at Highlander. She worked tirelessly for Civil Rights and eventually helped Horton to direct the Center (Horton, *The Long Haul*).

65 Septima Clark, with Cynthia Stokes Brown, *Ready from Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement* (Navarro, CA: Wild Trees Press, 1986), 115. As cited in Daniel Perlstein, “Minds Stayed on Freedom: Politics and Pedagogy in the African-American Freedom Struggle,” *American Educational Research Journal* 39, no. 20 (2002): 249–77.

66 Horton, *The Long Haul*, 103. The approach described here is today a key aspect of the whole language/language experience approach to reading and writing.

67 Peter Terry, “The Sea Islands,” Group Cumulative File, 1963–1964, 92. Personal collection, Todd Bayer.

68 J. Woodhouse and C. Knapp, Place-based curriculum and instruction (2000), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EDO-RC-00-6.

69 Terry, “The Sea Islands,” 92.

70 From the “Reports on the Southern Study Tour of School, Community, and Regional Development, November 1 to December 8, 1956,” 10.

71 This taking off in the middle of things was characteristic of the Graduate School. The trip itself was chock-a-block full, with nearly every instant preplanned, but there also seemed to coexist an understanding that one could pursue personal interests.

72 Anne Fines, Cumulative File, “Reports on the Southern Study Tour, Nov. 1 to Dec. 8, 1956,” 17. Antioch College Records, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

73 Hugh Corbin, e-mail correspondence with author, May 15, 1997.

74 Anne Fines, Cumulative File.

75 Ibid.

76 That Mitchell was able to call upon these people on such short notice is testimony to the fact that he seemed to know everybody. Students often commented that he had connections all over the place, particularly in his native South.

77 Cumulative File, “Reports on the Southern Study Tour, Nov. 1 to Dec. 8, 1956,” 19. Antioch College Records, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

78 Anne Fines, “Evaluation of the TVA Study Tour, 1956,” 4. Antioch College Records, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

79 From the “Reports on the Southern Study Tour of School, Community, and Regional Development, November 1 to December 8, 1956,” 25, 26.

80 Ibid., 26.

81 Kenneth Zeichner and Daniel Liston, *Reflective Teaching: An Introduction*. (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1996), 59.

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