double taxation. In the U.S. all private property owners must support public schools independent of whether or not they likewise help ot underwrite private ones and this is a contentious issue to those so affected. Though not major, this point is perhaps significant in denoting that the book is not a complete analysis of the issues. And, it is, in fact, a somewhat surprising omission for it could have been readily and quite properly dismissed by referring to its apparent violation of the U.S. Constitution if implemented.

In summary for readers seeking a comprehensive, objective analysis of the major issues regarding support for private schools *Public Aid to Nonpublic Schools* is not the book to read. For individuals seeking a rather comprehensive demographic trend analysis of recent public and private schooling costs and enrolments in the United States it should suffice.

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Phillip Lopate. *Being with Children.* Torono: Doubleday, 1975. Pp. viii, 392. $8.95.

Being with Children is an account of the experiences of a writer who taught creative writing in an inner-city elementary school. Phillip Lopate was one of the many artists and writers who were placed in American classrooms in the late sixties and early seventies in the hope that they would be able to rejuvenate lifeless curricula and revive listless children where teachers had failed to do so. Lopate headed a team of writers, working on a joint project of Teachers and Writers Colaborative and Columbia University, who found themselves teaching in a Manhattan elementary school.

As an outsider, Lopate's position at Public School 90 was a privileged one. He could be unconventional in his approach to teaching creative writing, and he could be objective about what was going on around him. These two aspects of his position, which are reflected in the book by fascinating descriptions of how he set about his task, and by commentary on the results of his efforts, are carefully interwoven into a lively narrative. In addition, the outsider's viewpoint allows the author a freer hand in recounting his experiences. Both the descriptive and the reflective parts of the book are written in a personal and often anecdotal style. The result is not only informative but also highly entertaining — a combination unfortunately all too rare in today's educational writing.

The bulk of the book is centered on the author's work with various groups of fifth and sixth graders over a period of two years. During this time, we witness a progression from early, rather nervous classroom lessons, where the children suspect that Lopate "is merely another in a long series of adult foremen", to experiments with theatre, sound and videotape recording, and finally to a rough and raucous, but triumphant performance of *West Side Story* with a sixth-grade cast. As Lopate gains confidence and maturity, and as he moves away from traditional approaches to teaching writing, we also witness the emergence of his belief that the "creative spark" is the same no matter what medium of self-expression is used to kindle it. Finally, we perceive the author's thinking developing in another direction. As he gets to know the children over the months, he rejects the idea of the innocent child easily and spontaneously producing poetry. The hard facts tell him that not

all children are poets, that few children are good poets, that most children will imitate what adults write, and that children need "the discipline of sticking to something" just as much as they need to exercise their imaginations. We are, in fact, watching the formation of philosophy of childhood creativity and self-expression which is born of two years of practical experience.

The emergence of a fairly coherent set of ideas on children's writing does not come about smoothly. By and large, the developments in Lopate's thinking and methods originate in various critical events from which he cannot turn back. There is almost something fatalistic about the way the children's enthusiasm, and sometimes pressure tactics, push the author further and further into innovative practices. The first of these turning points is the decision to experiment with theatre. Lopate had begun by using fairly traditional techniques for triggering the children's imaginations. No matter what he tried, though, the fact that it was a lesson stood in the way of truly honest communication between teacher and pupils. Writing plays and acting them offers the fresh approach Lopate felt was necessary. He begins by having the children write monologues to be acted out, then "radio plays" which are taped, and finally, using the soap opera as a model, the children in a group write complete stage plays. *The Typical American Family with Problems*, and *The Substitute Teacher* (which, incidentally, requires an actor to "fly" over the stage) are rehearsed and staged before the whole school. The writers and actors get more out of the plays than the audience. But that, for Lopate, is the way it should be.

Although these early experiments with theatre are not the hits that later theatrical undertakings are, they allow Lopate and the children to break out of the restrained lesson format. From now on, both teacher and pupils are starting out on an equal footing and learning together. So it is with the second turning point in Lopate's development. When they come to videotape, both he and his pupils are equally ignorant. Videotape has an even more powerful effect on Lopate's activities than he anticipated:

> "My whole mode of operating in the classroom and my relations with the kids changed after the introduction of the machinery, which pushed me into working with smaller groups on independent, longer-range projects. I was grateful to get out of that rut of delivering a different, unconnected writing lesson every week. It isn't that I abandoned creative writing, rather that I became interested in how to take the written word one step further — from script to another medium — and by so doing, convince the kids of the immediacy and practical application of their written ideas" (p. 92).

What theatre started, videotape completes. Not only is Lopate now wholly out of his "rut", but he is quickly realizing that the immediacy and practical nature of the television medium can add a completely new dimension to children's writing. Rapidly he gets to understand the nature of the medium and the differences between "a filmed play" and "a televisually conceived story". He becomes aware of the ability of the videotape to record reality, and soon documentary films are added to the repertoire. Equally important is the fact that videotape frees him not only from the classroom but also from the confines of the school. A lot of the shooting takes place out of doors.

The third turning point in the author's decision to produce *West Side Story*. It is a decision reluctantly made, one he was pushed into by the children. Lopate's reluctance is understandable. Even with professional actors and a professional producer, *West Side Story* is a difficult production to put on. So

how would twelve and thirteen-year-olds cope with singing, dancing, memorizing lines, and acting dramatic roles? Remarkably well as it turns out, but only after Lopate steps in to save a production organized by the children themselves and beset with defections from the cast, lack of knowledge of the play, and just general lack of experience.

It is in the author's account of rehearsing and staging "The Big Show" that his skill in working with children and his affection for them becomes most apparent. It is a long and detailed narrative, occupying a large central portion of the book, that reflects the joy and frustration, comedy and tragedy of such an undertaking. It is full of insights into the way children act and think, as when the author has to do some cajoling to get one or two children onto the stage after they balk at the last minute. It also shows the affection that the children feel for him. A twelve-year-old takes Lopate aside just before the big performance and tells him, "Just cool down! You're way too nervous." It appears that he has at last become accepted as an equal by them. "Not only had I taught the children, but it had been 'a mutual learning process' (as educational textbooks say) and my mind had gone into a twelve-year-old orbit." Clearly, a high point has been reached.

The descent on the other side of this watershed is a little anti-climactic. Lopate returns to a discussion of more traditional ways of teaching writing. The re-establishment of semi-normalcy in instructional practice after the adventure and triumph of *West Side Story* is the fourth turning point in the book. Lopate describes seven lessons he typically gives, each based upon a particular technique for getting children to write. These lessons are prefaced by a series of honest, if slightly unfair, observations on the state of the art, pre-Lopate. Traditional techniques are variously dismissed for encouraging cuteness, imposing rhyme and metre, according the writing of children "the ethnopoetic dignity of a lost tribe whose songs have been discovered", writing to a formula, and so on. Lopate's own lessons are attempts to get his pupils to write "Open Poetry", the type which does not require them to impose order on their ideas, but rather allows them "to discover the poem in the act of writing it." This is all very well, but it leaves little room for learning anything new beyond what comes out of practice. Repetition is surely not the best way to achieve progress. Some aspects of creative writing can and should be taught. Happily, Lopate admits two limitations: the very nature of his method prevents him from ever really knowing if he is succeeding; adult influence is still very evident. He also concedes that he was never able to "bring about a fusion of descriptive and narrative styles." It is probable that he, in his own way, like those before him, expected too much.

If these observations suggest some slight disappointment, they should not suggest failure. They seem to spur the author on. For example, the question of adult influence on children's writing inspires further detailed reflection in the final chapters of the book, and is thus given a positive twist. By and large, though, Lopate was highly successful in his job. Part of this success is due to the school in which he worked. Descriptions of the other teachers and especially of the principal reveal an innovative, tolerant and open group of individuals, who do not resent his presence nor his popularity with the children. Also, his project is well funded, in spite of an unsuccessful attempt to get foundation money which left him bitter but wiser. But Lopate's success is not all good fortune. He emerges as a dedicated and hard-working fellow,

who succeeds primarily because he knows and respects children and is prepared to work with them on their terms.

It would be wrong to look for too many how-to-do-it statements in Lopate's book. He is descriptive, not prescriptive. Yet from his development, and especially from the turning points and crises that he experiences, we can get an idea of what to expect if we undertake a similar approach to teaching children to write. We could even try some of the techniques he describes in the seven lessons. But we will do best to read the book for our own enjoyment, and feel our way, with the author, into the world of children. If we can succeed in understanding, through Lopate, how a fifth or sixth-grader feels, thinks and imagines, then any instructional technique he proposed becomes of secondary importance, something mechanical, something at times hostile to creative writing. A pupil indicts the author for trying to teach writing in class: "My mind is wiped clean by this idiot who comes here once a week and sucks my head clean of ideas by putting my ideas on paper and printing them and handing them to other students for their knowledge improvement." The child's imagination must not be broken open for public scrutiny. If we learn nothing but this, *Being with Children* has still taught us a great deal.

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John Ferguson. *The Open University From Within.* London: University of London Press, 1975.

Since its inauguration in 1969 the Open University has developed from a position somewhat on the periphery of mainstream higher education, providing a second chance to many for academic fulfillment, into one of the major educational establishments of the country. It has provided leading innovation, in both academic re-orientation of subject matter, and the development of material for correspondence and media presentation. It has been a pioneer in Britain at least, in the development of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary enquiry at degree level. The variable use of media, has not only given a wider scope to the term 'teaching', but generated such a level of professional competence in the presentation of material, that some broadcasts are now occasionally recommended in the press, as worthy of more general attention. The careful preparation of units has also reached such a high standard of presentation that educational institutions, oriented towards a unit based system, are purchasing sets of units to use on their own courses.

It would seem appropriate therefore, that after five years of development and operation, and at least one book reflects the views of an outsider (Tunstall's — The Open University Opens), that a member working inside the Open University should attempt an appraisal. This book by John Ferguson is just such an account.

John Ferguson was appointed as the first Dean and Director of Studies in Art and has therefore been actively involved in the development of the university in its most formative years. His experience ranges from an active participation in the preparation of the various course units in his faculty, to valuable inside knowledge of the many teething problems that an organization has to cope with in developing such a mammoth communications network. As