

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

a piece of informed journalism it therefore provides many useful, if somewhat over indulgent insights as to the workings of the Open University. In particular much of what is written would be of interest to anyone embarking on the formidable task of obtaining a degree by part-time study at the University, giving some substance to the many anonymous figures which only appear as names on a course unit, or voices behind a television presentation.

John Ferguson clearly makes no claims to be doing anything other than presenting an informed personal view of the institution. However it is this which, whilst providing the book with its major strength, also contains its weakness. For one longs that the author would occasionally move from his anecdotal style of people, places and events, and consider in more depth many of the important issues he raises, but somehow treats as periphery to the main concerns of the book. How far, for instance, has the university, in its fight for institutionalized recognition, negated its innovatory potential for mass higher education? In what ways is the university attempting to overcome its image as a second time around chance for the middle-classes? What also, of the most challenging question, how far can the methods and ideas of the Open University be adapted to the ever growing desire for education in the third world?

It would have been interesting I think to hear from within the institution how such areas are being looked at. For whilst the birth pangs of any institution if viewed in detail, and from the inside, make interesting reading, it is only when they are related to wider understanding of problems and possibilities that they can be placed in a proper focus.

The relative newness of the Open University, together with the enormous impact it has had on higher education, make any book, particularly from someone within its structure, worth looking at. It is to be hoped however that in any subsequent books one will not only be given a breakdown of the journey so far undertaken, but where the guides think it ought to be going now.

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