



D&N TREADER: AN OLDER VIEW

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I am one of the oldest students at Elizabeth Cleaners Street School and therefore have made a large sacrifice in going there. I was a junior in high school and left, throwing my past records and everything else to the wind. I am now sure that this was a correct decision. There is a tremendous difference in almost every aspect of teaching and learning between our school and public schools. There are good and bad parts to Elizabeth Cleaners. The most obvious ones are the changes we have made from the public schools. The absence of marks, grades, tests, and strict regimental teaching promote a free atmosphere where real and valuable learning takes place.

Although it is not admittedly a problem, the fact that all the classes are held with the students in one room does create some uneven balance in the classes. With such a great age span, the classes are usually on a higher level than, say, the twelve to fourteen-year-olds would expect in a public school. Certain individuals adapt quite easily to these classes, while others are more left out, if not in body, then in mind. We have not yet turned down any student for any reason other than age. I do not agree with any age restriction because the come-and-go feeling that the classes run on is what makes for the uninhibited discussions that take place. We all agree that too much expansion would certainly be cutting off the limb upon which we stand.

Running a free school is a very delicate matter. The needs and desires of all the students must be considered and since there is not yet a bureaucracy (not that bureaucracy is bad by itself), there are no groups of students who make decisions alone; all decisions and policy are made by all the students at a weekly meeting. For a short time, there were factions in the school. Some students felt school policy was being dictated by certain individuals; some of the students wanted to break away and form the Viennese Sausage School. It could have been the downfall of the school; hostility increased and disrupted some

classes. But at one meeting most of the minds got spoken and our differences were talked out and about and soon withered away—the Viennese Sausage School and all.

Until recently our school meetings were a very strange thing. One must be experienced to fully comprehend the logic and illogic behind one. All in all, they are very educational.

There are two different types of meetings: one where no one has much to say and people just ramble on, not saying anything, and finally everything just dissipates like energy into space; the other, where everyone has something to say and, unless the meeting is “chaired,” everyone does speak and at the same time. But things eventually do get done.

The classes themselves are what really decides the value of the school to the students. Since we have no set curriculum, the classes are usually based on a book we are reading; sometimes they center around a teacher from whose personality the class develops. There are differences in all the classes, some involve more talking than others. In a number of classes the discussion sometimes ends up in the conflict between matter and consciousness, materialist and idealist. While the discussion takes place, I think most don't understand the subtle but great importance in this disagreement. Among these are some who don't take it seriously and don't think it worthy of repeated class discussion; nothing could be further from the truth. The matter should be discussed until it is fully understood. There are a few extreme examples of idealists or metaphysicians in the school. Their thinking has no place in the real world except so far as it is a phenomenon of mental aberration. Their method of thought is the opposite to that of science. They reason deductively out of their own subjectivity from theory to facts while (generally) a scientist reasons from facts to theory. Their ideas may have added to the gaiety of mankind, but what tangible good have idealists produced for all mankind?

I think a sad thing about the school is the disinterest many working-class kids who have visited have expressed. Much of this can be blamed upon their nonintellectual background and the rest perhaps to the school's lack of commitment to understanding them.

But with all the problems and mistakes we have made, from the schools where we came from, where the spirit was

killed, there is noticeable in every student, in some more than others, a slight but beautiful change. Most of the things we do are “new.” Some of them are really just things that the public school never really lived up to. For example, we try to take education out of the classroom and into the streets, museums, and parks, and make it fun too. After all, it is our school and it is our future, too; we want to have a hand in our own destinies and end up with more than ashes.