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We Suggest

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Channon, Gloria

Homework!

New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970. Pp. 128.

After years of growing dissatisfaction with traditional methods of teaching, Gloria Channon, an innovative teacher, of independent spirit, has written this book which she labels "required reading for teachers and parents." In it she describes her experimentation with teaching in a freer, more open classroom. With courage and clarity of insight, in an honest attempt to discover what she, a teacher, is, she faces up to the restraints and constrictions she has brought to her own teaching situations. With positive attitudes and attention to improved practices in classroom teaching, she consciously confronts her fears, resentments, and anxieties, and restructures them into trust, appreciation, and some degree of confidence in mutual, spontaneous interaction and learning by children and teachers together. It is as if she agrees with the thesis that continued progress, both as individuals, and as a species, can only be brought about "by ever-increasing exploration by each of us, and ever-increasing communication between all of us. If we can take control of our own evolution, the rewards for all of us are incalculably wonderful."¹

She begins and ends her book with focus on "the teacher," a helpless victim of a system, a galloping masochist, a promoter of failure; but, in finality, "the teacher," a nurturer of the life-force in children which will set us free, and them free of us.

The author writes, too, of freedom, of planning, of on-the-job training, of discipline, of the classroom as a battleground, of the avoidance of failure, of the separation and fusion of the real world and the world of school, and of "taking stock," her words for assessment and evaluation.

Examination of school and teacher-made barriers to physical and psychological freedom of children leads her to an awareness of the degree to which she denies them the freedom she is sure she wants, but is equally sure they are not ready for. Experimentation with different kinds of planning and diagnosis brings her to the conclusion

1. Claire Russell and W. M. S. Russell, *Human Behaviour*, pp. 4 and 5. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961.

that effective teaching and learning cannot take place without constant communication with the children. Exceptions to "standard operating procedures," utilizing spontaneous ideas and offerings of children as a basis for teaching and pupil involvement, promote peaceful, intimate times for learning and further her appreciation of her pupils. Exposure to a relaxed classroom atmosphere, full of interactions, benefits both her and the children, as each one works at being a person among people. Expecting and trusting that children can, and will, take meaningful action towards their own learning, then freeing them to make mistakes, or fail, without censure, in the course of such action, she discovers that such learning can become permanent, and may be transferred to other fields of knowledge.

Expressing her assessment of the values of conducting a free classroom she states, "The free classroom *is* good for the children. It does not prevent them from being children. It does not stop them from learning in their own way. It teaches them *how* to learn, and not *what* to learn. It expands their curriculum to include the most important subject of all: themselves, as people learning to master their environment and thereby their lives."

If, like the writer of this book, each teacher had the courage to face his own insecurities, and the capacity to assume personal freedom:

. . . where can we not go on our own initiative? It would be strange if we failed to reach, in all senses, the stars. The stars are reached through steep places, and the problems of transition are great. They may take centuries to solve, they may, at our accelerating tempo, take years. The transition will be made when every individual is striving after his own freedom: from that turning-point, the new era of the universe will begin.²

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 456.