

# II

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## John F. Kennedy High School

### *Balancing Forces: Creating a Pluralistic Community*

#### THERE ARE MANY WAYS UP

When New Yorkers think of Riverdale in the Bronx, they usually envision its scenic beauty, affluence, and civilized inhabitants. Some people say it has the most spectacular natural terrain of any city neighborhood; that it is one of the last remaining "livable" urban communities where families can thrive in relative safety. Over the bridge from Upper Manhattan, Riverdale is viewed as sedate, pretty, and clean. Even though Riverdale is in the Bronx, people are likely to explain to a stranger that, "It's really not the Bronx, even though it's located here." They are eager to distinguish Riverdale from the rest of the Bronx which has turned Black, Brown, and poor faster than any other borough in New York. Riverdale's precious image is a far cry from the harsh, dangerous streets of the South Bronx. The image of abundance and civility refers to the people who live in the hills of Riverdale.

Some of the more prosperous residents live on "Millionaire's Row" in large sumptuous houses with manicured gardens and lush green

lawns. They enjoy a secluded and rarefied existence. Many more hill dwellers live in huge, high-rise apartment buildings that have recently been converted to co-ops and condominiums. In the last few years, prices of "units" in these buildings have soared. One advertises two-bedroom co-ops beginning at \$125,000. The buildings are guarded by uniformed, respectful doormen and elaborate security systems. The front halls, often mirrored to give a feeling of enlarged space, are decorated with large artificial plants and shiny chrome furniture. Many buildings have their own small parks for families with young children, and outdoor pools for swimming during the warm months.

The apartments tend to be small, but the views offer a wide angle on the beautiful scenes below. From some pictures windows you can see the majestic Palisades on the other side of the Hudson River, from others you can spot the silver shimmer of the George Washington Bridge, and from still others you can watch the Circle Line tour boat sailing slowly around Manhattan island. The tiny decks that protrude from almost every apartment are crowded with lawn furniture, barbecues, and carefully tended windowboxes. Many residents claim that even though they may not have much space, they can embrace the beauty that extends for miles. "Sometimes I feel like I own this view. Those rocky ledges across the river are mine," exudes the contented wife of a retired businessman.

The inhabitants of the hill tend to describe themselves as upper middle-class, although many find that the recent surge of inflation has deprived them of some of their most precious worldly pleasures. Families must choose between a trip to the Bahamas during the winter months and a series of Broadway theater tickets, and the high cost of college tuitions has caused many to be burdened by enormous loans. Residents recognize their common affluence, but tend to describe their enclave as "cosmopolitan." "There is a wonderful mixture of people from all over the world," says a mother who appreciates her child's exposure to "all kinds of people." A young teacher who recently "spent every cent of her savings" to buy a co-op, says that half of her building is Japanese. "The big Japanese companies buy up the units and shuffle their executives in and out." Despite the claim of heterogeneity, the overwhelming proportion of hill residents is Jewish, and people in the valley below bluntly attach "Jewish" to the habits and style of their more affluent neighbors.

As you drive down the winding hills of Riverdale into the valley below, the landscape shifts from the orange and yellow colors of fall to the gray concrete of city streets. You are in the valley of Riverdale when you turn up 230th Street towards John F. Kennedy High School. The texture and pace of life are transformed. The traffic becomes congested,

the sidewalks crowded, and the noise level increases. Five or six gas stations, their neon signs blaring, come into view. Fast-food joints, drug stores, dry-cleaning establishments, laundromats, and corner grocery stores line the streets.

Off this major thoroughfare there is another distinctive Riverdale neighborhood rarely included in the prosperous community image. In Kingsbridge, a largely Irish Catholic enclave, the small brick houses tend to be one- and two-family dwellings. The houses are older and more worn than the shiny high-rises on the hill, but most are lovingly cared for. They nestle close to the ground with little space between neighbors. Chain link fences and friendly hedges mark the boundaries between the small plots. Among the single-family dwellings there are also older, solidly built apartment buildings of several stories where many families have lived for several decades. Kingsbridge is a tightly knit, blue-collar neighborhood that is described by outsiders as "tough," "parochial," and "defensive." "They are meat and potatoes people—real homey plain folks," says a more sympathetic observer.

In the last few years, upwardly mobile, recently middle-class Black and Hispanic families have moved to Kingsbridge from the South Bronx, looking for better schools, safer streets, and a more comfortable existence. Their numbers are not yet substantial, but their presence feels threatening to the Kingsbridge old-timers, who value their "privacy" and "like-mindedness."

Just off 230th Street, Terrace Avenue leads you to one of the main entrances of John F. Kennedy High School. Road bumpers have been installed along Terrace Avenue in order to discourage students from drag racing their cars up this strip. Looming directly ahead is a large, eight-story, concrete and brick structure. Built in 1971, the school appears ageless and non-descript at first glance. It is distinguished only by its mammoth size, a hulking grayish structure. The doors are heavy and metal, making it seem unwelcoming and impenetrable.

Once inside, energetic human activity and a crescendo of voices bring the building to life. A friendly security guard, dressed in regular street clothes, inquires casually about my destination and writes out a visitor's card for me. As I try to follow his abbreviated directions I feel lost in the swarm of students moving through the halls. Bodies are pressed close. For a moment my feet are lifted from the floor by the crowd's momentum as we move en masse up the escalator.

There are 5,300 students in Kennedy High School, and during the changeovers between classes close to 4,000 students crowd onto the esca-

lators that rise two floors at a time. On each step of the moving stairs there are three, sometimes four, students packed together. When the escalator reaches a floor, hundreds of people get stacked up as they try to make the swing on to the next escalator. Along the walls above the escalators are colorful murals drawn by Kennedy art students. Painted signs direct you to various offices and activity centers in the building. Other murals offer words of encouragement—cheering students on in their pursuit of "educational excellence." The most prominent message, shouted in bold colors, says "Catch the Kennedy Spirit." The inspirational, lively drawings sharply contrast with the dull institutional grays and greens that dominate the building's walls and ceilings.

Since I have never been in a school of this large a scale and never seen an escalator in a school building, my first associations are of rising from underground at a subway station, or traveling upwards in a big department store. Although I feel vaguely displaced and uneasy, everyone else seems to be totally used to the body crunch and unconcerned about the crowded conditions. I see no pushing and shoving or gestures of impatience even though the momentum of the crowds often throws people against one another. A short, vivacious girl with a head full of tight curls and a ready smile may have noticed my disorientation and turns around to me as we reach the next landing. "There are many ways up," she says cryptically, and then inquires, "Why don't you take the teachers' elevator?" Her first comment, probably meant to convey modes of transportation to the upper floors, echoes through my head for the rest of my visit to Kennedy High. It seems an apt metaphor for the rising expectations and goals of Kennedy's teachers and students; a first sign of the optimistic, spirited references that pervade the language of the school's inhabitants.

In fact, there are three ways to go up and down at Kennedy. The escalators are by far the most crowded conveyance, but students can also ride elevators or climb the stairs. The most sedate way for adults to travel is via the teachers' elevator, which requires the use of a special key. Frequently, the escalators stop working and convert easily into steep, treacherous stairs. Although the building is huge, it is not difficult to negotiate because of its logical, straightforward arrangement. Explains one helpful student, "You know, it's like a big city, but easy to find your way around . . . you just got to get a few basic landmarks down." I discover he is right and quickly learn that the English and social studies departments are on the seventh and eighth floors; the sixth floor has the science department laboratories and classrooms; the fifth floor (better

known as the "Fiesta Floor") houses the foreign language department; the fourth floor all of the administrative offices; the math and business areas are on the second and third floors; and the first floor is a sprawling space that includes the auditorium, library, music department, boys' and girls' gyms, and the industrial arts shops. Art is the only department that is not neatly placed in an identifiable area of the school. Its classrooms are scattered on various floors throughout the building.

Although the floor plan of Kennedy is not hard to decipher, even a superficial tour of the building requires a few hours. On my first afternoon at the school, the principal wanted to give me a brief orientation and walked with me from top to bottom, stopping occasionally to peer into classrooms, meet various faculty members, and chat with students. In two hours we managed to see a lot, but we came nowhere close to finishing the tour. On the first floor alone, we saw a beginners' modern dance class of over thirty girls housed in a small studio that had been constructed by industrial art students. Some touches were still unfinished, but with the shiny wood floor, dance bars lining the walls, and full-length mirrors, it almost resembled a professional studio. In a small classroom down the hall, thirty-five students sat intently cradling guitars in their arms, awkwardly fingering them. The music teacher, dressed in a checkered cotton shirt and blue jeans, stood at the board pointing to notes on a scale, urging her students to concentration and precision. When we peeked in the door, she did not miss a beat as she invited us in. "Come and listen to the hard work of these brand new players," she said confidently. The sounds of thirty-five novice players fumbling for notes ranged from tentatively soft to excruciatingly loud, but the students appeared undaunted. At one point the players' attention began to lag and the teacher admonished them. "Don't get lazy. You have to work." In the auditorium, on the same floor, several students sat in small groups talking quietly with one another. Behind closed curtains we could hear the sound of an exercise class being conducted on the stage. For several periods during the day, classes are held on the auditorium stage because there is no other available space in the building. Referring to the open doors of the auditorium, the worn, slightly tattered look of the chairs, and the comfortable, unsupervised presence of several students, the principal explained, "I like auditoriums to be used, lived-in places. You know, in a lot of schools they are locked up tight and only opened for special events. They look prettier than ours, but I am not interested in maintaining a show place." Around the corner, the library has a similarly used appearance and the librarian explains, "We introduce the library to students in an active way." With 22,000 volumes, 140 journal subscriptions, and a

very large collection of media kits, the library seems adequately stocked. However, "The exciting part of this work," claims one of the three librarians, "is finding ways of making kids feel comfortable in places like this."

On our way out of the building, we pass by a coed beginners' gymnastics class in the girls' gym. There are at least forty students in the class, distributed in groups around various activities. Some students seem idle and bored as they have to wait their turn on the tumbling mats, the parallel bars, or the uneven parallel bars, but many are actively engaged in coaching one another and the tone is quiet and comfortable. It is only when the teacher approaches us to introduce himself that I recognize his presence. He seems undisturbed by the huge class and broad range of talents and skills among the students, and focuses instead on his expectation of student cooperation and collaboration. The tour takes us by many other classrooms, shops, and studios, and my initial, overwhelming impression is of a very crowded and comfortable environment where teachers appear active and unthreatened, and students seem to be engaged. "That's a given," says the principal on our whistle-stop tour. "If you have problems with discipline, you will not be a teacher in this school. These kids are good kids."

From the dark interior of the building, we move outside to a bright sunny day and I am surprised by the grandeur before me. Before I can take in the scene, the principal points to a large, elaborate mural on the back wall of the building, painted and designed by students. The bright red, imposing letters "J.F.K." are surrounded by images of sports figures in action. "Isn't that just lovely!" he beams. "Those kids do great work." Sprawling in front of us is a huge athletic complex and behind it the Harlem River, the beautiful golden hills of Upper Manhattan, and the George Washington Bridge in the distance. (As if by cue the Circle Line boat, touring around Manhattan island, comes into view around the river's bend.)

Built five years ago, the two-million dollar athletic facility includes eight tennis courts; a baseball diamond; and a football field of astroturf (costing \$450,000 to build), surrounded by a six-lane track. At any time during the day, you can look out and see three or four physical education classes spread out across the great field, actively exercising. When we arrive on this early October afternoon, the hot sun is beating down on a girls' soccer class in one corner of the field, a boys' football class in another area, and a group of coed joggers circling the track.

Although the principal enjoys showing me the extravagant facility and assures me that it is unique among New York City high schools, he is quick to say that the physical plant taken alone does not create a good

athletic program. He points to the extraordinary efforts of the recently departed head of the physical education department, who in five years built a strong and dedicated faculty and developed a comprehensive curriculum. Everyone mourns his departure to a swanky, affluent suburban high school, but they hail his creative organizational efforts at Kennedy. Several students, all non-athletes, tell me that the best department in the school is physical education. Says one, "It offers an incredible variety of courses." Says another, "It's not macho. You don't have to be a big shot jock to get some attention." The principal admires the work of his former athletic head by reciting the impressive city-wide championships—five last year and eight in the past two years, and several semifinal matches lost by Kennedy in the last rounds.

#### LEADERSHIP AND COMMITMENT: A FAIR EXCHANGE

Several times a day, Principal Robert Mastruzzi glances out of his office window at the action on the athletic fields. From his fourth-floor office, at different times he can see bicyclists racing around the six-lane track, long-distance runners taking a slower pace, and city kids learning the rudiments of tennis. From faraway he can identify the teachers working with the various groups of students. "That is Johnson. I know his stance." The Kennedy football coach is preparing his team for their biggest rival, De Witt Clinton High School. He inquires of Mastruzzi, jokingly, "Is it true that you have been peering through binoculars from your window? Are you giving away our secrets to them?" Mastruzzi laughs, "You know I wouldn't do that." His place at the window is well known. Standing there with him is not so much like seeing a baron surveying his estate (although there is definitely a paternal pride), but more like watching an enthusiastic cheerleader. He seems to root for the sweating, driving athletes, for the city championships. But his encouragement has a much broader base: he watches the runners and jumpers and cheers for all of the students, for generations of Kennedy students.

One of the first stories Mastruzzi tells me is about Kennedy's hosting of New York State's Special Olympics last year. From all over the state, thousands of handicapped athletes and their escorts arrived to compete against each other in the Olympic Games. For eighteen months, Mastruzzi and his staff planned and worked on this gala event. Although the

games were the central event, there were also extravagant satellite events—a big parade, an evening of disco dancing, a fireworks display over the river, and games organized for participants who were not competing. Terrace Avenue, the street leading up to the school, was temporarily renamed with a street sign that read "Special Olympics." Hundreds of students, teachers, and parents volunteered their services; the event was extensively covered by the local media; and politicians and celebrities came to offer support and gain visibility. The film students at Kennedy documented the happenings through film and video, producing an inspiring short that brought tears to the eyes of faculty viewers when they saw it several months later. As he recounts the details, Mastruzzi beams with pride. He admits to liking the public relations and the community service aspects and feels glad that Kennedy has the facilities to accommodate an event of this great magnitude. But his passion seems to be reserved for the kids as he reminds me of the Special Olympics motto "You are all winners." "I believe that is true for all the kids here at Kennedy," he says forcefully. "Each year I tell the faculty to increase their expectations of students. You ask for more and you get more."

The football coach at Kennedy pretended to worry about his principal passing on secrets to De Witt Clinton because he knew Mastruzzi had once taught at the rival school and is friendly with Clinton's coach. Before coming to John F. Kennedy High School as principal, Bob Mastruzzi had been assistant principal for administration at Benjamin Franklin High School; and sometime before that, a physical education teacher at De Witt Clinton. It is not hard to imagine that Mastruzzi followed the path from coach to principal. Not only does he seem to have a special identification with his old department, he also exudes a kind of strong physicality that goes with the coach stereotype and his talk is laced with sports metaphors.

A man in his fifties, Mastruzzi stands at about five feet seven inches tall but appears to be much taller. He has a youthful, muscular look underneath a balding head and quick energy that keeps him on the move. Impeccably dressed, Mastruzzi appears at school each day in carefully matched color combinations. His ties are wide and lively, his short sleeve shirts are rolled up twice at his upper arm, and he wears a subtle gold chain bracelet. Although his individual features do not strike me as classically attractive, several women describe him as "very handsome." It is probably not his physical attributes that make him appear tall or handsome, but his energy, his confidence, and his vitality. He is described by his colleagues, one and all, as "dynamic," "charismatic," and "charming," and they speak about his forcefulness and power.

Some observers claim that Mastruzzi's compelling style is "culturally based." Born and raised in a first generation working-class Italian family, Mastruzzi has the grand gestures, passion, and sentimentality of his Mediterranean origins. One of his ardent admirers calls him "touchy" (in the sense of being a toucher), and says that his care in warmly reaching out to faculty and students with a hand of reassurance and affection has an "enormous impact" on the tone of the school. "He is very physical, very demonstrative and it affects all of us. Even the kids hold hands in friendship and support . . . it's amazing." Another teacher, who recognizes Mastruzzi's warmth, also traces it to his Italian roots, and says it mixes with the largely Spanish student body to produce a "wonderfully vibrant" ethos. She tells the story of Sophia, a Spanish speaking tenth-grader, who had recently arrived from Mexico and felt lonely and lost in the midst of the new and strange environment. The teacher asked a bilingual Puerto Rican student to introduce the new girl around, "and immediately she put her arms around Sophia and made her feel safe and welcome. Within a week, Sophia went from fear and tears to smiles." Another faculty member of Italian origins smiles when he says, "Bob's not Italian, you know, he's Sicilian and that is very different . . . good, but different."

Although Mastruzzi had climbed far from his modest beginnings, he still remains close to his childhood turf. He grew up in a predominantly Italian-American community in the Bronx and attended Christopher Columbus High, the neighborhood public school. Christopher Columbus is still seventy percent Italian and is one of two schools in the borough that has not "turned" minority. Now Mastruzzi and his family live in one of the string of suburbs in Westchester County, but he still seems to feel a deep connection to the Bronx. He knows its streets, its politics, and its neighborhoods intimately and has a keen perception of the great changes and subtle shifts that have occurred in the community during the last few decades. One of the first impressions I get of Bob Mastruzzi, therefore, is that he feels at home, comfortable in, and knowledgeable about the wider community surrounding Kennedy. More strikingly, he seems to approach his work with a sense of mission derived from memories of childhood and family, and a belief in public schooling as the primary avenue of achievement and success. With great feeling he says, "I believe in public schools . . . I think they face enormous challenges, but they must exist. We have to make them work."

When Bob Mastruzzi arrived at Kennedy in April 1971, the final touches of the building were still not complete. As he sat in an empty office, walls were being painted and carpets were being laid around him.

Used to being "the number two man," his principalship at Kennedy represented an enormous challenge. Not only was he going to test his wings as a leader, but he was inaugurating a brand new school. He was not encumbered by the long history and old traditions of an established institution, but neither could he feel the cushion of time and the safety of well-worn habits. His first task was to articulate, for himself, an "educational philosophy," a substantive vision that would guide and shape his administrative decisions. He remembers, "I was used to following the lead of the top man and now I had to construct my own plan." In his search for ideas, he visited many other high schools that "were doing things a little differently." His wish to be innovative was also influenced by the liberal, progressive rhetoric of the late sixties and early seventies that emphasized individual choice and "relevant courses."

When school opened the following September, Mastruzzi spearheaded an ambitious curriculum designed around a quarter system. Students could choose from an enormous array of electives; courses were designed to match the faddish wishes of adolescents; and material was crammed into a few short, intense weeks. "At first the kids loved it," recalls Mastruzzi. They were seduced by feelings of power and adventure. However, the individual freedom soon turned to chaos. "There was utter confusion, greater inefficiency, and unbelievable administrative hassle." In addition, "a lot of the courses had no substance. They were Mickey Mouse courses and our kids were being cheated," admits Mastruzzi. After two years of experimentation, Mastruzzi searched his soul and decided to streamline the curriculum and return to the traditional arrangement of semesters. He wanted to develop a core curriculum that reflected the essential building blocks of learning, "basic, substantive, no frills, all real." He lamented his earlier misapprehensions, his wish to be innovative and progressive, and sought to undo the havoc by a clear and decisive mandate. He was so sure of his decision that he took action alone, without the consultation of his colleagues. "It was the first time I had made an arbitrary decision. This is *very* uncharacteristic of me . . . but I didn't care about the outcry of teachers, parents, or kids . . . and after about six months, we began to see real improvements in the academic program." Mastruzzi recounts the story of his first administrative blunder without defensiveness. In retrospect he does seem amazed by his earlier naiveté and by his tentativeness, which seems to contrast sharply with his present certainty. It is not accidental that he begins by referring to problems of curricular design, because he believes those educational issues should always be at the center of his administrative concerns.

Even though the first years at Kennedy were marked by a direction-

less proliferation of courses, old-timers remember the "good old days" nostalgically. Sheila Ackerman, Mastruzzi's dedicated and gracious secretary, says proudly that she has been at Kennedy "since its inception . . . and being here from the beginning gives you a real sense of responsibility and connection." She too remembers working among the carpenters and electricians as they completed the new structure, and the feelings of joining in a pioneer effort. The building of a new school was an exciting adventure that took the coordinated efforts of many. The traditional roles and boundaries were blurred as people pitched in to ready Kennedy for its opening. Several faculty and staff, who have been there since the opening day, refer to the intimacy and optimism that characterized the first year. With less than two thousand students and a small, energetic faculty "rattling around" in a brand new school, "it felt like a country club . . . very swanky and elegant." But more important than the polished and roomy edifice, were the feelings of closeness among the faculty. "We were like a family then, very close," says a young woman who believes that much of the "family spirit" still survives today even though the school has grown very big.

The small scale of the school in its opening year had permitted intimacy among faculty and students, but the newness also offered opportunities for renewed energy and optimism. Many teachers arrived with the hope that they would be breaking new ground and would meet new professional challenges. "With a new slate, I thought I might be able to see my imprint," said a twenty-year veteran of New York City schools. A bright young teacher had become totally disenchanted with teaching after two years in a neighboring high school. She came to Kennedy because she "wanted to give teaching one last shot." With bitterness still in her voice, she described her earlier experiences. "After graduating from Lehman College I took my first job. I hated it. The principal had been a colonel in the army and ran his school like a military operation. It was a very uptight place with no room for growth. I wanted out. Then I heard about the Kennedy opening and I heard very positive things about Bob Mastruzzi. I thought there might be room for growth and creativity in my teaching. Kennedy represented a hope, a vision for me."

Principal Mastruzzi capitalized on the hopes for revitalization that accompany institution building by aggressive recruitment of his key staff. Having spent all of his professional years in New York City public schools, he knew the terrain, had developed important networks, and had a good sense of the reputations of his colleagues. He went after people with impressive and enduring track records and "charmed" them into coming to Kennedy. In New York City, department chairpersons are

given the label of Assistant Principals (A.P.'s). Mastruzzi searched out his A.P.'s very carefully, looking for people with solid ideas and leadership skills. One A.P. recalled her first meeting with Mastruzzi as "captivating." "My first impression of him is a lasting one. He was a human being who knew how to relate and listen. He really cared. Our interview was Friday afternoon and I was hired the following Monday. I've never regretted that impulsive decision." Another A.P., who had held the same position in another high school, responded to Kennedy's beckon because he "simply could not resist Mastruzzi. . . . He has an amazing quality of being able to get the most out of you. It is impossible to say 'no' to him. I work ten times as hard here as I have anywhere . . . and I have now discovered why I do . . . because I know Bob would do anything for me. . . . He gives of his full heart."

Not all of Mastruzzi's choices created such happy matches. I heard about one A.P. who never committed himself to his work at Kennedy, "always had one foot out the door," and another who relates poorly to the faculty who work in his department. There are also stories about a difficult and demanding A.P. whose personal qualities are "almost unbearable," but whose ideas, creativity, and energy are extraordinary assets for the school. Yet overwhelmingly, the voices of Mastruzzi's key staff sing his praises and exclaim great loyalty for him. Over and over again, superlatives are used. "He is the greatest human being I've ever known," exclaims one. "I feel a tremendous sense of pride, almost a rah-rah spirit, and I attribute that to Bob," exults another. A third speaks about Mastruzzi's "irreplaceable" qualities, "If that man were to leave this school and you were to come back three or four months later, you'd see a very different situation. The man is a great person, knowledgeable, wise, an extremely good administrator, and a beautiful supervisor of A.P.'s. I would say he enjoys the total loyalty of his cabinet and ninety-eight percent loyalty from the faculty. . . . The man's got charisma!"

Almost everyone points to the personal qualities of Mastruzzi when they are asked to identify the origins of goodness at Kennedy. His "spirit emanates" throughout the school, says one teacher with almost religious fervor. He is "the life blood of this organism," she continues as she switches to a medical metaphor. What is fascinating about Mastruzzi's bigger-than-life role and imagery is that his self-conception is based on very different views of his power and style. Listening to his admirers, one might at first imagine that Mastruzzi's seductions are too powerful to resist; that he reigns through mysterious, other-worldly attractions; that he is a guru of sorts. But listening to Mastruzzi's perceptions of his leadership role, one is struck by his notions of participation and collaboration.

He does not view himself as high on a pedestal, but as down in the trenches inspiring, cajoling, and encouraging people to "do their best and give their most." He rarely refers to the edicts and commands that he issues from his lofty station, but often to the listening, responding, and negotiating that are part of his everyday interactions. His charisma seems to derive less from his otherworldly qualities than from his very human qualities—his great ability to empathize and identify with others. When I ask Mastruzzi about his views on school leadership, he immediately refers to the collaborative dimensions of the principal's job. "First of all, I have a great concern for the quality of human relationships. I try to find ways of getting people involved in the process, using their strengths and assets. My big word is *participation*. I want to have as many people as possible join in deciding and acting. They must become responsible to something larger than themselves. If there is one fault some people say I have, it is that I try to involve too many people, and it is sometimes inefficient. But I'm willing to tolerate the inefficiency because in the end, people will feel more connected, more committed and pulled into the process."

Mastruzzi's strong and decisive views at first appear contrary to others' idealizations of him. But on closer examination, his words are echoed by the perspectives of faculty and students. Their loyalty does not seem to be an expression of idol worship, but a reflection of their connection to a communal process. When people refer to "feelings of connection," they often talk about the autonomy and independence that Mastruzzi permits and encourages. "He allows us scope, the space to develop our own thing," says one A.P. Another points to the way that Mastruzzi protects his faculty from "the arbitrary regulations of the central authority. . . . He serves as a buffer between outside and inside. If it weren't for him, we'd feel more constrained. We have a great deal of freedom here." Some observers believe Mastruzzi is able to encourage autonomy among his faculty because of his own deeply rooted self-confidence. "He is the most secure principal I have ever known. He likes to see strength, not weakness, in the people who work for him," says a relatively new faculty member who believes there is a "fair exchange" between the freedom the faculty enjoy and the commitment that Mastruzzi expects.

One enthusiast claims that Mastruzzi not only encourages faculty creativity and autonomy, but he also allows people the room to make mistakes. He is "forgiving" and believes that people often learn from repairing the damage they have created. The coordinator of student affairs, Pamela Gino, recounts the disastrous story of the first rock concert she organized for students at Kennedy. She had expected a couple of

hundred students and eight hundred showed up, many high on alcohol and marijuana. "A lot of those kids think you can't listen to rock unless you're high. Booze and rock go together." Not expecting the great number of students, nor their inebriation, Gino had not planned for adequate security; and it became a chaotic, treacherous evening. "After it all, I felt a tremendous letdown, a real sense of failure," remembers Gino. "But I also had learned a lot about how to plan for that kind of event. I knew I could do it better given a second chance." Mastruzzi greeted her request for a second chance with healthy skepticism and a battery of critical questions, but he allowed her to try again. The second rock concert was a "great success. . . . He's a generous man. He sees failure as an opportunity for change," beams Gino.

Just as Mastruzzi identifies his potential source of weakness as his unending attempts to be inclusive, to encourage all voices to be heard; so too do others point to the inefficiencies and ambiguities that this causes. But most do not identify the weakness as a problem of "participation" taken to its extreme; rather, they see it as Mastruzzi's difficulty in saying "no" to people. One sympathetic colleague, who sees many of the same traits in himself, justifies the weakness by saying, "There is something in Mastruzzi which won't let you say 'no' to him. Part of that is our expectation that he won't say 'no' to us. I think that's fair." Others identify it as his single "tragic flaw." Says a close associate, "If Bob has one fault, it is his inability to say 'no,' to act quickly and decisively when he sees something wrong." One critic believes that Mastruzzi is "smart and calculating," and always wants to be seen as "the good guy. . . . Saying no would tarnish that image."

An interesting analysis of Mastruzzi's ability to maintain his affirmative stance and still be ultimately effective, refers to his close partnership with Arnold Herzog. Mastruzzi and Herzog have been friends and colleagues for most of their professional lives and they share a rare and productive companionship. Before coming to Kennedy they both worked at Benjamin Franklin High School: Mastruzzi as A.P. for administration (in charge of bureaucratic details and regulations), and Herzog as A.P. for guidance (in charge of the counselling program). When Mastruzzi was offered the principalship of Kennedy, Herzog was his immediate, intuitive choice for A.P. for Administration. He chose him not only because of his comprehensive knowledge of the city system and its numerous regulations, and their deep trust and friendship; but also because he knew Herzog had important, contrasting temperamental tendencies that would combine well with his. Their partnership would work because in many ways they were opposites. Both Mastruzzi and Herzog are admired

by their colleagues, but everyone speaks of their differences. Bob is confident, unruffled, and charming, and Arnie is described as "abrasive, flamboyant, and overbearing." Even as people shake their heads at Herzog's exaggerated toughness, they recognize "the good heart underneath" and see his harshness as a necessary quality of his role. Says a Herzog admirer: "He does all the dirty work. He makes a lot of decisions and wields a lot of power, but he is greatly misunderstood. He's seen by many as a tough head-chopper, but he *has* to be. The position demands that." Another person says that everyone recognizes the distinction between Herzog's role requirements and his personal style. She points to his office and says it is always crowded with kids even though he does not need to see them in his official capacity. "The kids love him. . . . You know, this year he agreed to advise the cheerleaders because we couldn't get anyone else to do it." A few observers, however, view Herzog's toughness as the necessary foil for Mastruzzi's supportiveness. One is "bad guy" for the other's "good guy." "When Mastruzzi says 'yes,' he depends on Herzog to say 'no.' They complement each other completely," says a sharp observer. "Bob could not be seen as good if Arnie wasn't seen as bad."

Mastruzzi appreciates their different styles and approaches and admires his colleague's competence. He tolerates Herzog's ranting and raving with patience, understanding, and maybe a hint of enjoyment. To see them together is to witness the theatrical excitations of Herzog and the calm listening of Mastruzzi, knowing each expects and understands the other's response. Although the principal recognizes the temperamental partnership he shares with Herzog, he tends to point to their differences by saying, "Arnie is an administrator and I think of myself as an educator." He views the former as a narrower, largely bureaucratic role where the emphasis is on organizational details, rules, and regulations. Mastruzzi's focus as an educator, on the other hand, is with the learning and development of people. He seeks to establish an environment that will encourage teachers and students to thrive, and he does not want to become overly preoccupied with the detailed management of that environment. The educational core must always be kept at the forefront and the relationships among people must always be viewed as the vital dimension of the process.

When I ask Mastruzzi to define the criteria of an outstanding high school principal, he launches into an organized and articulate response without pause. He seems to have considered the elements of good leadership many times before. His responses are not facile or pat, but they are certainly premeditated. As he lists the ingredients of effective leadership, he points to the select few principals in New York's system whom he

considers "extraordinary" and uses them as prime examples. There are one hundred high schools in New York, eighteen in the Bronx, but few of their principals deserve Mastruzzi's highest praise. As the principal with the most seniority in the Bronx, he has seen many of his colleagues come and go, and believes that the top position requires a complex combination of intellectual skills, psychological capacities, and emotional commitments. His list has six explicit ingredients:

First, being a good leader requires a "tremendous sense of dedication . . . you don't even consider the dimension of time. You do everything you can, without limit, to do what's best for the kids and the school."

Second, a principal must be "humanistic . . . . There is not a biased bone in his body. He looks at a kid and sees a person, not his ethnicity, his race, or his class. He connects with the person, without prejudice."

Third, a good leader must be "knowledgeable." Mastruzzi speaks here of a knowledge gained through experience *and* reflection on experience. "He must have gone through the rigorous training of teaching and being an assistant principal . . . he must have had time to develop a sound educational and administrative philosophy. . . . He must have a vision, a game plan . . . but always be ready to alter the plan when conditions change."

Fourth, the leader must have intelligence, "an intelligence that is quick and intuitive."

Fifth, good principals must have a "strong physical presence." Mastruzzi assures me he is not referring to the superficial cover of a Hollywood star or a fashion model, but to qualities that run much deeper. "He or she must be able to command respect, to control a group . . . have a kind of dynamism and charisma." You can usually spot this self-confidence by observing others' reactions. "When he or she talks, people stop and listen . . . like the E. F. Hutton commercial on TV."

Finally, an effective leader must be a very "flexible person, open to compromise and suggestion. When issues get tough and hairy, a leader has to be able to appreciate the other person's point of view, put himself in the other's place." This empathetic regard sometimes leads to a surprising "meeting of the minds and no one has to feel he has lost."

Although Mastruzzi's list of leadership qualities paints an image of a bigger-than-life figure with extraordinary qualities and talents, he views the role as within the purview of dedicated and committed mortals. Most of the skills can be learned through long experience and patient practice. Even the more subtle temperamental qualities, he believes, can be developed through undefensive self-criticism. Mastruzzi begins by referring to the general dimensions of a good high school principal. He ends up describing himself. This does not seem to be a purposeful, self-congratulatory gesture. It is not so much an autobiographical statement as it is an echo of the countless ways he has been described by faculty, staff, and students at Kennedy.



## URBAN OASIS

Robert Mastruzzi's belief in the unbiased, colorblind stance of a good leader combines with his pride in the rich mixture of students at Kennedy High. Because students are drawn from a wide geographic area, the school population does not closely reflect the surrounding Riverdale neighborhood. In contrast to the Riverdale population, Kennedy is blacker, browner, and poorer. There is a sharp contrast between the complexions and lifestyles of people inside and outside of the school. Kennedy is a zoned high school and attracts students from as far away as West Harlem in Manhattan. When Mastruzzi describes the *mélange* of students he begins by reciting the racial and ethnic percentages: 40 percent Hispanic, 35 percent Black, 23 percent white, and 2 percent Asian. But those distributions do not begin to convey the heterogeneity at Kennedy. It is also a school that draws students from a range Mastruzzi describes as "the wealthiest of families to the most poverty-stricken, from the very rich to the indigent." Even though Riverdale is one of the more affluent communities in New York, Kennedy is designated as a Title I school. With 5,300 students in the school, about 3,000 of them are eligible to receive free lunches.

The poorest students at Kennedy travel the farthest distance to get to school. Most are Black and Hispanic and they board the Broadway subway in west central Harlem and arrive (2,000 strong) a few blocks from the school after more than an hour's ride. Another group of working and middle-class white and Hispanic students travel from the Inwood section of northern Manhattan. Their trip is shorter and they can continue to feel connected to their neighborhood by looking out the school windows at the Inwood hills in the distance. The largely blue-collar, Irish-American population from the Kingsbridge lowlands walk to school or take city buses. They are joined by a sprinkling of upwardly mobile middle-class Blacks and Hispanics, who are new arrivals to the neighborhood from other parts of the Bronx. The children of privilege descend the hills of Riverdale to come to Kennedy. With a largely Jewish population, Riverdale's upper middle-class families often have other attractive educational options. The very wealthiest neighbors usually choose to enroll their children in Riverdale Country Day, Fieldston, or other prestigious private schools. Others hope that their sons and daughters will pass the tough entrance examinations for the Bronx High School of Science, which is ten minutes away from Kennedy but light years away in prestige and reputation. However, the admissions standards of the Bronx High School of

Science and the elite private schools permit only a small percentage to escape the public school option. Those students whose parents cannot afford private school tuitions or who were denied entry to the more competitive schools come to Kennedy reluctantly, some with fears of big-city schools, a few with prejudice towards the racial and social class mixtures, and others with feelings of failure and defeat in being excluded from more privileged circles. Then there are some affluent families in the Riverdale hills who "believe in public schools" and are relieved that Kennedy is a viable and attractive school that allows them to match their ideological commitments with personal practice.

Despite the reluctance of some of Kennedy High's close neighbors, the great majority of students focus on the attractions and benefits of the school. They come gladly and feel proud to be attending one of "the best schools in the city." A photographic exhibit displayed just outside the principal's office shows black-and-white images of city scenes. The photographs, taken by students, reveal the subtle beauty in city scenes that are normally viewed as dangerous or grotesque. A back alley, photographed in deep shadows, is captured as a place of hiding and privacy, rather than being shown as menacing or threatening. The student exhibit is titled "Urban Oasis." For many students, particularly those traveling from long distances, Kennedy is an oasis; a place of safety and protection from the dangers and chaos of the big city. One of the guidance counselors tells me about a waif of a girl who travels an hour and forty minutes each way to come to Kennedy. Without a winter coat and no money to buy the glasses she needs to see the blackboard clearly, the girl has never missed a day of school. An A.P. points to high schools surrounding Kennedy that are half empty because they are not able to attract students. "They stand empty while we are overflowing with kids who are hungry for a decent education . . . some kids pass by two schools when they come to Kennedy." Principal Mastruzzi is aware of the numbers of students who lie, cheat, and give false addresses in order to be admitted to Kennedy. Many of them could be tracked down and sent away, but Mastruzzi admires their determination and good taste. "How can you say 'no' to a kid who really wants to be here?" he asks rhetorically. A bright-eyed Hispanic boy, who admits to me that he "lied his way in," says, "Listen, I vote with my feet. I come 'cause this is a good place, man." Not everyone is as enthusiastic about the school or makes extraordinary efforts to come. "There are hundreds of kids who never get here, some we don't even know about," admits the attendance officer. There are others who arrive each day and go through the motions without complaint, but also without generous praise for the place. But every student I spoke to at least

admitted that "if you have to go to school, you might as well go here."

One of the great attractions of Kennedy for students and faculty is the safety and discipline of the environment. Compared to the violence and chaos that characterize many big-city schools, Kennedy feels like a calm and productive environment. More impressive than the feelings of comfort is the recognition that the environment is truly and confidently pluralistic, that there is calm among groups that are often at odds in other settings. The visual *mélange* of color is unusual—black, white, brown, and yellow in all shapes and sizes. And the distinctions that people seem to attend to are not the gross and obvious ones, but more subtle differentiations. Hardly anyone I spoke to referred to Black/White differences, but several pointed to the distinctions between the Koreans and the Chinese, or between the Dominicans and the Puerto Ricans. Everyone seemed proud of the rich diversity. A veteran faculty member used to "warfare" in other schools in which he has taught exclaimed, "Isn't it beautiful the way everyone gets along!" Before coming to Kennedy, a senior whose family lives in the Riverdale hills, had heard rumors that the school was a "tough place with lots of gangs." He has discovered just the opposite. "I don't even think there are definable cliques, and I haven't seen a fight since I came here." Another student from West Harlem exudes, "It's like the United Nations, all kinds of people." One perceptive and soft-spoken Asian boy claims that most students "hang out with their own kind," but feel perfectly comfortable "mixing with other kids. . . . But that's only natural," he counters immediately. "That's human nature."

Pamela Gino, coordinator of student affairs, and a lively, gregarious woman in her early thirties, watches interactions among students very closely. She says simply, "There are very easy, natural relationships among the ethnic and racial groups. It is an *unimportant* matter. You just don't feel it." The only minor disturbances in the calm waters reflect highly specific perceptions of subgroups of students who she claims "tend to label themselves." For example, many see the "Riverdale Jewish kids as spoiled, ungrateful, indulged, and entitled." The Dominicans are viewed by their peers as "wild, menacing street kids." The Russians and Albanians are perceived as "volatile, emotional, excitable, and driven." And the Chinese students are seen as "closed and inbred. . . . The Chinese Club wanted to put up signs in Chinese so that no one else would be able to understand, even though the Club is supposed to be open to anyone who wants to join." But these vivid characterizations rarely lead to hostility or dispute. "They just make life interesting. They give the school character," claims Gino. The rarity of intergroup conflict is reflect-

ed in old-timers' remembrances of a single event that occurred several years ago, a "trivial" dispute that now causes people to laugh in disbelief. The Dominicans and Koreans began fighting over a name-calling incident. It seems that a Korean student had referred to a Dominican as "Puerto Rican," and in retaliation the Dominican had called the Korean student "Chinese." What began as a personal exchange briefly erupted into a heated fracas—but was squelched immediately.

Other adults who deal closely with the psychological, social, and academic dimensions of the Kennedy students observe the unusually positive feelings among racial and ethnic groups, but also can point to the distinctive and "colorful" qualities of some. The A.P. of guidance, who is referred to by some as "the heart" of the school, has a reputation as a gifted clinician who works equally well with all kinds of students. He believes that any clinician worth his salt should be able to cross the boundaries of class, race, and ethnicity and see the person underneath. "You see color at first, but once you get to work there is no difference." His words are tentative as he tries to express his complicated mixture of feelings. Origins and roots are important, but they often disguise universal human dilemmas. A good clinician, he believes, must reach beyond the initial boundaries to shared dimensions of human behavior. "I hope I'm better at doing it than talking about it," he says with a hesitant smile. As he probes his views on cultural differences, he discovers that the newest arrivals, the strangers to our society, have the most distinctive and vivid traits. Color and ethnicity are less important determinants of difference than the degree of assimilation and adaptation a group has made to contemporary American norms. "I see no difference in the Black and White students," says the guidance A.P. confidently. "The Hispanic kids, who are new here, seem more lively, real expressive. . . . The Russian kids are incredibly demanding and pushy. They yell loud and clear . . . maybe they were inhibited and repressed in the old country and they have grown used to fighting for everything. . . . Our school may contribute to their aggression because we listen. . . . They know they can get a response from us, so they take advantage of that."

A close colleague, who is also clinically trained, points to social class, not race, as the powerful differentiating variable. When he describes social class differences he seems to be referring to degrees of motivation and industry expressed by students and their families. He sees a stark contrast between the upper middle-class Jewish students and the newly middle-class Blacks. "The rich Riverdale kids are the saddest group of all—no drive, no optimism, too complacent." The seriousness, dedication, and shine of the middle-class Blacks remind him of his own Brook-

lyn upbringing in a working-class Jewish family. "To these Black kids, the value of education has become as important as it was when I was a kid. Like it or not, I had to go to school and achieve . . . even though my parents never finished high school and my grandparents were illiterate."

It is fascinating that the images of the different racial and ethnic groups at Kennedy do not seem to emerge as hardened caricatures. Different people offer different characterizations and most reveal the subtleties of observation and scrutiny, rather than the automatic responses of prejudice. It is also interesting that some claim that they see no differences, while others dwell on the detailed contrasts among groups. For some, therefore, Kennedy is special because people are "colorblind." For others, the school is extraordinary in its rich and diverse plurality. "It's so much better than flat assimilation," says an eager young teacher.

But whether people deny or underscore group differences, everyone seems to recognize and appreciate the harmony among students at Kennedy. There are several theories for why Kennedy is harmonious when other big city schools with similar populations are threatened by racial conflict. Mastruzzi, who relishes the mix ("I look out and see the pepper and salt and the amber in between. It's wonderful!"), claims that the harmony reflects the "humanitarian philosophy" of the school. Students feel they are being treated fairly and respectfully by their teachers and they respond in kind to one another. It is when students experience institutional inequalities or prejudicial attention from teachers that they form rigid and exclusive groups among themselves. "I don't know what racial tension is," claims Mastruzzi. "If a Black and White kid are fighting, we see two kids fighting—not race—and we deal with it that way. . . . I venture to say it is experienced by the kids that way." Several faculty and students point to Mastruzzi as the "perfect model" principal for attaining the goal of racial harmony. "He doesn't draw back from you," says a dark-skinned Black boy who claims that his junior high school teachers were often repelled by and afraid of students of darker hue. "They'd never touch you. Sometimes I felt like I was diseased. . . . But I've seen Mastruzzi reach out to all kinds of kids." The principal's powerful example makes it difficult for others to express their fears or distaste towards certain groups. "Mastruzzi is not just asking for tolerance among groups," claims an ardent admirer, "he's asking for respect and friendship."

Pamela Gino offers another explanation for the "natural" relationships among racial and ethnic groups at Kennedy. First, she points to the demographic stability of the school. When Kennedy opened ten years ago, there were roughly the same proportions of Hispanics, Blacks, and Whites. No one needs to feel threatened by the exodus of one group and

the take over of another. Territories have never emerged. "There is a balance . . . no real minority." She predicts that a noticeable shift toward imbalance would inevitably lead to conflict among groups. Second, she claims that the school's support of group affiliation has increased positive intergroup relationships. "Assimilation is not the goal and we say that in a lot of ways." A large proportion of the extracurricular clubs at Kennedy, for example, are "ethnic clubs." There are Korean, Chinese, Christian, Jewish, Hispanic, Caribbean, and Korean/Christian clubs ("not to be confused with the Christian or the Korean clubs"). "Pride," a club for Black students, was disbanded this year because no one was willing to volunteer as the advisor. Most of these clubs draw only a small percentage of students, but they serve as "home base" for those who need to feel part of an identifiable subgroup, and they symbolize a preference for diversity rather than sameness. By far, the Korean and Chinese clubs have the largest membership. With the smallest populations in the school and "tendencies towards exclusivity," their clubs make them feel less isolated and more confident in becoming part of the school community. According to the student coordinator, then, ethnic balance and group identification are essential ingredients of a good heterogeneity.

Gladys Jackson, the A.P. of foreign languages, a graceful and wise, middle-aged Black woman, is even more pointed in her views of cultural pluralism as basic to intergroup harmony. She believes that nothing should be lost, repressed, or denied when a student enters a new cultural setting. He should be encouraged to hold on to his rich past and embellish those roots with new experiences. She strongly believes that the bicultural person is the privileged one with more perspectives, choices, and options than his one-dimensional counterpart. "I am eager not to have kids lose what was once theirs," she says with quiet passion. Such a loss would not be good for the child or healthy for the school's culture. The harmony at Kennedy, she feels, springs from the support students feel for "being themselves. . . . The image of the all-American kid is all of us!"

Jackson came to Kennedy when it opened in 1972. Although she was attracted by the promises and hopes of a new school and the "humanitarian" spirit of Mastruzzi, she was also running from an alternative school in Queens that she was "happy to leave." For fourteen years, she had been a guidance counselor committed to non-traditional approaches to education, to individualized instruction, to more open and equal relationships between teachers and students. But when the freedom and expression of the progressive philosophies turned to chaos and irresponsibility among the students, Jackson knew it was time to leave. When her stu-

dents came to school stoned on drugs; when she saw her first LSD trip, and "was horrified beyond belief"; she knew it was time to pursue other options. After the distortions of "liberal" education, Jackson was ready for a more structured, traditional school. She also was eager to leave the guidance counselling role and return to the curricular and pedagogical challenges of teaching. But she wanted to continue to express her commitments to "diversity among students"; to "responding to the 'whole child'"; to reinforcing the "individual strengths and capacities" of her pupils. In her initial interview with Mastruzzi, Gladys Jackson felt they shared a common philosophical vision, and she was eager to take on a leadership role in a department whose explicit purpose it was to celebrate cultural diversity.

With thirty-four faculty members (seventeen from foreign countries), the foreign language department inhabits the fifth floor of Kennedy. Called the "Fiesta Floor" by most insiders, its name reflects the special warmth and vibrancy that infuses interactions among students and faculty there. Several people point me towards the Fiesta Floor when they want to convey "how our school treats society's strangers," or when they want to establish "the character and passion of Kennedy," or when they wish to show me "the most motivated kids in the whole school." It is on the fifth floor that one feels the most vivid expression of cultural differences.

First, one is struck by the auditory display of languages. The predominant language is Spanish, but other tongues are also heard: Russian, Albanian, Chinese, Vietnamese, French, and so on. Most of the fifth floor students have adapted to the American teenage uniforms of designer jeans, classy sneakers, fancy decorated T-shirts, and down jackets. However, many reveal vestiges of their origins. Some of the Hispanic girls, for example, seem glamorous in their fitted skirts, high-heeled shoes, lace blouses, and bright red lipstick. In contrast, the Chinese boys are low-key and understated with their monochromatic dress. But it is in style, gesture, and nuance, more than dress, that a visitor to the fifth floor feels a striking contrast with the more usual American adolescent images.

The Fiesta Floor is not famous for its regular foreign language program, although the training is competent and the offerings diverse. Kennedy offers Spanish to 75 percent of the students enrolled in foreign language instruction, French to 15 percent, and Italian to 7 percent. There is one Latin course taught by a vigorous and rigorous Italian man at 8:00 in the morning, and there is a fledgling Hebrew class with eleven students whose parents pressured the school to keep the course alive. Up until two years ago, German was also taught but the decline in enroll-

ments and the retirement of the German teacher combined to eliminate the course from the language curriculum. Yet what distinguishes the fifth floor are its programs for non-English speaking students. It is the new arrivals, the eager immigrants, who give the Fiesta Floor its special flavor. Peering into the open doors of classrooms, the students' faces are intense as they listen. Many sit on the edges of their chairs, as if they are literally stretching to understand and reaching for the moon. It is rare that one sees such clear motivation, such visible willfulness. Everyone who teaches these newcomers comments on their civility, drive, and earnestness.

At Kennedy, the English as a Second Language (ESL) Program is taught in Spanish to 800 students. With funding from Title I and Title VII (the Bilingual Education Act), the ESL program must conform to a string of regulations from the federal government that are constantly being rewritten and revised. In addition, the ESL program receives funds from tax-levied monies collected by the city, and finally, the Aspira Consent Decree mandates specific approaches to language training. All of these sources provide a complicated array of offerings for the non-English speaking student. An ESL coordinator, who works under Jackson, seeks to keep abreast of the frequent changes in the law, acts as the primary interpreter of mandates, and translates the regulations into the realistic choices available to Kennedy students. For the most part, Jackson supports the "spirit" of the law, even though the shifting letter of it is a constant source of frustration. She strongly supports the prevailing paradox: that students should become bicultural and hold on to their cultural origins at the same time they should be moved quickly into the mainstream. "The ESL is a transitional program, not a maintenance program," she says with no ambivalence.

To achieve this transition, students move through four levels of the ESL Program (Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, and Transitional). There are ESL classes in science, math, and social studies. Along with the federally funded courses, ESL students take tax levied courses in music, language arts, fine arts, and business and office practice. Recently, an innovative writing skills course has been created for Transition level students. The brainchild of Ellen Hyman, a dedicated and able teacher, Writing Skills is designed to make students more comfortable with the expressive and descriptive dimensions of English. Using creative pedagogical strategies and curricular ideas, the course builds on the premise that language facility provides reinforcement for self-knowledge and self-confidence. Each class begins with five minutes of journal writing. Both teacher and students join in this activity and students are asked to write about "topics that are relevant" to their lives, such as "Describe your

next-door neighbor." Or "We don't have enough holidays. Invent one and tell why and when we celebrate it." Or "Pretend you cut class yesterday. Write an outrageous excuse to your teacher." In responding to these questions, students are encouraged to be spontaneous, truthful, and personal. The journals are not corrected for grammar or spelling, and if the student judges the content to be too personal for the teacher to read, she may fold the page for privacy.

Ms. Hyman, a quietly attractive woman, has a soft, soothing voice and a generous smile. Although there are thirty-two students in the class (twenty-eight Hispanics, three Asians, and one Russian), the intimacy and comfortable exchanges make the group feel much smaller. Students are attentive, but relaxed. They often speak out spontaneously without raising their hands and the dialogue is laced with laughter, but never does the organization, momentum, or focus of the class break down. The lesson centers on increasing the sensory word vocabulary of the students. It follows a series of lessons on learning how to describe "physical details" and precedes a segment on learning "emotional details." The sequence is designed to augment the expressive range of students; offer them more ways of discerning and describing events, people, and feelings.

As part of the lesson on sensory details, Ms. Hyman takes out a small bag of potato chips and says, "After today no more food, I promise." With slight melodrama, she holds the bag up and demonstrates. "I have here an ordinary brand of potato chips." The students laugh enthusiastically, as they appreciate the reference to television commercials. "Let's see if we can describe potato chips using sensory details. . . . Juan, how would you describe by *sight* this potato chip?" "It is brown, round, yellow, with a brown burn spot on it," responds Juan. "Maria touch it, feel it . . . what can you tell me about the feel?" Maria reaches for the chip and describes it as "a little hard, rough . . . I can feel the grains of salt." From the back of the room Roberto calls out, "Hey, over here, I'll try the taste." The class erupts in laughter as the teacher responds to Roberto's offer. The class quiets immediately when Ms. Hyman says, "Listen, boys and girls," and in the silence breaks a single potato chip. "Crunch," says one volunteer; "snap," says another as they try to match the correct word to the sound.

Up at the blackboard, the teacher writes three words on the board and demonstrates their meaning by crushing a potato chip in her hand, letting the pieces fall to the floor, and by shaking the bag. Together they identify "crunchy" (to crush noisily), "crumble" (to break into little pieces), and "rustle" (one thing rubbing softly against the other). Then they figure out which sense (sight, sound, touch, or taste) allows one to make those distinctions. Once they have written the words and meanings in their notebooks, the teacher asks them to repeat the words out loud. Their choral effort is vigorous. As they speak the words with a Spanish lilt, their voices begin to capture the sights and sounds of the potato chip demonstration. The lesson concludes with dramatic exchanges between Ms. Hyman and her rapt students as they collectively develop meanings for "mouth-watering" (something looks so delicious it makes you hungry), "thundering" (what word do you recognize in thundering—take it from there), "screeching"

(two cars approach one another—they put on their brakes and swerve away quickly), and "thirst-quenching" (picture yourself on a very hot day—you'd do anything for a cold drink).

The class closes with a brief review of what they have covered and an exclamation and big smile from Juan: "The more you see, the more you feel, the more you write!" The homework assignment is greeted with good-natured groans. With the sound of the bell, students immediately return to Spanish; the tempo is accelerated, expressive gestures reappear, and they feel at home. A dark-skinned, shiny-haired girl approaches me and is surprised when I do not understand her Spanish. A friend nearby translates: "Ms. Hyman is great. She gives us a gift."

The fifth-floor faculty feels fairly confident about the coherence and structure of the ESL curriculum. They admit that the challenge and difficulties of the program appear during the transitional phases. When students must move from the protective environment of the Fiesta Floor to the general high school classrooms, they often feel overwhelmed by the changes. All of the department A.P.'s I spoke with identified "the transition" as a vulnerable spot in their curriculum. The A.P. of English, who speaks four or five languages fluently, believes that the greatest challenge ahead will be the curricular integration of ESL and regular classes. For several years he has watched the casualties of "mainstreaming" and believes that all departments need to provide for a smoother transition. He has worked "hand in glove" with Foreign Languages and believes that the close, cooperative relationship between departments is essential.

In a recent effort to build bridges for students, a member of the English department has developed a course called "Intensive English Skills for the Foreign," which is designed to focus on the structure and grammar of English. The teacher, an enthusiastic grammarian, is fascinated by the connections between language and thought and manages to convey to students the dynamic, communicative aspects of language. He exclaims to me, "I love language. I find it fascinating. It's so interesting to think of ways in which language determines how we think. There are no tenses in Chinese, for instance. Can you imagine what a different view of time they must have!" In two sections (one dominated by Spanish-speaking students, the other by Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Russian students), the teacher displays the structure and function of language through active class participation. As he offers alternative modes of expression, he seems to be opening doors for his students, whose responses range from intense listening to exuberant participation. The teacher paces back and forth as he points to verbs written on the board. "Not only can you say, 'He should *walk*,' you can say 'He should be *walking*' . . . and

guess what? There is a third alternative—'He should *have been walking*.''' With each revelation, the students join in repeating the word, some laughing with amazement by the time the third possibility is presented.

This course, in its early experimental phases, seems to be responding to the problems of transition faced by many students when they leave the Fiesta Floor. But the A.P. of English points to the difficulties he will face in expanding this effort, which presently serves only forty-five students. First, there are few faculty who have the talent, dedication, and interest in language required to teach this course. At the very least, other teachers would have to be retrained and retooled as grammarians. Second, the pedagogy requires that classes be relatively small. With twenty students in each class rather than thirty-five, the course gets a disproportionate share of resources. If the department decided to offer several sections of the course, the staff time would have to be taken from other important areas and the A.P. of English would face the tough battles of resource allocation within the school.

Some other faculty members seem less interested in finding curricular resolutions to the transitional difficulties foreign students face and are more concerned about the limitations imposed upon teachers assigned to ESL transition classes. A social studies teacher with almost two decades of experience and "an enormous commitment" to her work, complained that the language barriers inevitably constrict interesting dialogue and make teaching "boring." She pointed to her colleagues who enjoy teaching ESL classes and claimed their pleasure comes from the combination of "docility and motivation" the students offer, not from the "real learning" that should be going on. Her colleague, who also recognizes the problems of curricular standards faced in transitional classes, believes those are balanced against the "cultural understandings" that flow from the rich variety of students learning together. In his "bridge class" in global history there are two Palestinians, four Haitians, twelve Dominicans, one San Salvadorian, four Koreans, three Vietnamese, two Chinese, and one student from Bangladesh. Although it does not resemble a traditional history course, the students' origins define rich reservoirs of exploration and examination that would not be available in a thoroughly assimilated, homogeneous group.

Although there are differing views on the quality and substance of learning in transition courses, most faculty agree that the bridges are difficult to build and that large numbers of students fall into the chasm between two worlds. Paradoxically, the great success stories told at Kennedy often refer to students who arrived at school with no proficiency in English and went on to win the most prestigious academic prizes. Gladys

Jackson loves to tell these stories as evidence of the intense motivation of foreign students, the rigor and dedication of her faculty, and the open doors of Kennedy. She tells about the stellar careers of a Vietnamese boy who arrived in the country a year and a half ago and was recently offered a full scholarship to study mathematics at Cal. Tech., and a Russian boy who became the school's valedictorian after two years in the country and went on to study at M.I.T. Three years ago, a Dominican boy delivered the valedictory address. Speaking in English and without notes, he stood as a symbol of "the best of Kennedy and the best of America. . . . Mastrozzi had tears in his eyes as he listened to this kid speak," recalls Jackson. The individual stories of achievement are amazing, but the A.P. of foreign languages wants to leave me with even more captivating evidence. "Last year, seven out of the top ten students graduating had been in the ESL program. The year before, we saw the same statistics . . . the secret is motivation. With all their hearts, these kids want to succeed and they believe it can happen through education."

For many, the ESL program at Kennedy stands as a symbol of the school's best attempts at inclusion. Through ESL, the school represents the Statue of Liberty reaching out to incorporate society's new arrivals and offer them the best opportunities. Some observers, however, believe that the real symbol of Kennedy's humanitarian tendencies lies not in how the strangers are treated, but in the ways the school resists societal imperatives. "It's relatively easy to offer special attention to the folks from foreign shores. It's much more difficult to be as generous with regular kids who are less privileged," says one faculty member who believes that Kennedy is special in its "non-hierarchical" arrangements. In most high schools, he points out, the "tracks" directly correspond to the social stratification in the wider society. "Poor kids, Black kids, are always on the bottom. Rich kids are on the top. There are no surprises." In Kennedy, the correspondence is not erased, but it is purposefully challenged.

Everyone admits that there is homogenous grouping at Kennedy, and that once assignments are made there is little movement among levels. But the majority point to the ways in which Kennedy is different from most high schools in trying to resist stereotypic assumptions about different groups of students. Only one teacher I spoke to claimed that the three levels (Remedial, Average, and Honors) are actually "tracks" mirroring social class designations in the wider society. "The Riverdale kids from the hill are in the Honors courses, the Kingsbridge kids are in the 'on level' courses, and the Black and Brown kids from Harlem are stuck at the bottom." An upper middle-class student from Riverdale, who "missed getting into Bronx High School of Science by two points," ech-

oed the teacher's observations with a sense of relief. "Even though Kennedy is a mixed bag, our classes separate the wheat from the chaff. . . . In most of my Honors classes, the kids are white. They're the better students. . . . They deserve to learn at a higher level." But for the most part, the observations and rhetoric of students and faculty point to the ways in which Kennedy seeks to undo the "social pyramid" while still recognizing differences in ability and achievement among students. "You see, usually the pyramid is totally based on social class and racial dimensions. We say that the pyramid's okay, but we base it on ability and disregard social class," explains one teacher. "I think that is both educationally sound and ethical!"

Throughout my visit, I was continually struck by the mixtures of students in classes. Although I could not be sure of their social class origins, the visual display of students showed unusual combinations of racial and ethnic groups. Certainly Black and Brown students predominate at the lowest levels, and proportionately more White students appear in advanced classes. But the pleasant surprise comes in seeing the more than token representation of minorities in Honors courses and their active participation in those classes. In no classrooms did I see segregation by seating patterns. Even when students chose their seats, they tended to arrange themselves in ways that did not reflect group affiliation. Even with my antennae poised to pick up the discriminatory behavior of teachers, I never saw evidence of biased or prejudicial responses to students, and not once did minority or majority students complain of subtle abuses I might not have seen.

In an advanced Honors English course, entitled "Creative Man," most of the almost forty students were White; but there were seven Blacks, five Hispanics, and three Asians sprinkled throughout the classroom. A sophomore Honors course in English showed even more balanced proportions of students. Eleven of the twenty-eight students were White, seven were Hispanic, seven Black, and two Asian. By far the most energetic and talkative student was Anthony, a dark-skinned Black boy. After him the student responses seemed to be equally distributed among the class. By the end of the hour, everyone had spoken either by his own initiation, or because the teacher had deftly managed to spread the opportunities around by calling on the silent ones and offering the immediate rewards of praise. When I asked her whether her efforts at inclusion of *all* students were purposeful, the teacher spoke about the need for teachers to model unbiased behavior. "There is no tension among the various groups in our school," she said matter of factly, "and it is because students don't perceive anyone as being against any group. After all,

prejudice, classism, racism are not intrinsic. . . . They are defense mechanisms that arise when people feel threatened, and this environment doesn't cause people to feel worried or defensive."

In the Law Program, a special Honors specialization in the social science department, the ethnic and racial groups were equally represented with a third each of Hispanics, Whites, and Blacks. With almost forty students, the forceful and intense teacher orchestrated a wide-ranging, sometimes chaotic, discussion on the origins and purposes of law in society. Although he encouraged the participation of more than two-thirds of the class, his questions were tough and probing, and he offered discriminating, judgmental responses to student contributions. To a White girl with a long mane of blond hair, he said, "You are having a problem in expressing yourself. Think about it further." To a large Black boy in the front row he prodded, "Can you illuminate the point you raised earlier? I think it may be vital to our understanding of the issues." To a brooding Hispanic boy who accused his teacher of forcing him into a position he did not want to take, he exclaimed emphatically, "No, I'm not trying to get you to say something. I'm trying to get you to convey your point of view. *Your* point of view. Now what do *you* think?" In each of these high-powered, advanced courses teachers seemed to believe in the capacities and potential of all their students and pushed them to think hard and talk clearly. There seemed to be no distinctions made among groups of students. All were treated as if they were expected to perform. The teachers would remark on individual differences among students, but rarely take notice of group characteristics. Said one, "I get tough with Frank because he's smart and lazy. I want him to work harder. He gets mad at me for landing on him. But I don't view his laziness as a quality of Black people and he doesn't think I'm picking on him because he's Black."

Within classrooms, students appear to be treated with unusual fairness. Their individual dimensions are noticed and responded to by teachers, while their group identification seems to fade away. Although students within classrooms seem to receive evenly distributed and unbiased attention, the differences between the levels of instruction at Kennedy are vivid. Honors students have a dramatically different school experience than the Remedial students. Faculty describe the contrasts as the difference "between night and day, black and white, not even in the same ball park." Mastruzzi speaks proudly of the range of abilities and the school's attempts to "meet students where they are." At one point he worries that I am only getting a chance to observe the high level courses and says, "You have to see the Remedial kids—see how the teachers give them the same energy, effort and respect." Mastruzzi seems just as enthusiastic

about the wide range of student abilities as he is about the great sweep of social classes represented or the mixtures of racial and ethnic groups at Kennedy. /

Even though most of the faculty to whom I talked did not speak in degrading or disrespectful terms about teaching the "low level" students, they did not support Mastruzzi's claim that their work with all students inspired in them the same energy and excitement. Almost all of the teachers I spoke with admitted a preference for "the bright kids." A.P.'s, recognizing these preferences, have to carefully plot the assignment of courses so that no one gets a disproportionate share of the Remedial courses. The requirement of course rotation is written into the regulations of the teachers' union contract. The A.P. must distribute "the desirables" among his various faculty members; and "desirables" include a reference to high ability and "upper-termers."

There are a few teachers, however, who find it more interesting to develop courses and pedagogical approaches that will appeal to and energize the less capable students. "That's the real challenge," claims an energetic pedagogue. "It's easy and boring to teach bright and ambitious kids. It's hard and exciting to light the fire in the kids who have been turned off." A science teacher, known for his persistent optimism and creativity, has developed electives that are purposefully designed for students who usually feel threatened by science. In his courses, "Geology" and "Weather and Climate," he tries to "seduce kids" into becoming curious about their environment. But he is also interested in conveying attitudes towards learning, in undoing patterns that have often built up in response to the student's persistent experience of academic failure. He does not permit lateness, disrespect, or laziness in his classroom. "There are certain things that are just not allowed, without question. . . . No one is allowed to wear hats in my classroom and they can't leave to go to the washroom at the climax of my lecture!" he says with a wide grin.

The rich variations in abilities and origins among students make the Kennedy faculty and staff appear relatively homogenous. In comparison to the browns, blacks, and yellows represented among students, the faculty seem monolithic in their whiteness. There are the exceptions: the tall, attractive Black man who heads the music department; the gracious and kindly Black woman who is A.P. for foreign languages. Both are described by their colleagues as extraordinary professionals with high standards and good "human relations skills." I am surprised when Mastruzzi proudly proclaims that the minority representation on his faculty is twelve percent and that he has worked diligently over the years to increase those numbers. He compares that figure to other city high schools

where the typical percentage of minority teachers is closer to one percent. After the principal points to the comparatively large proportion of minority faculty, I begin to notice more of them; a young Asian woman teaching computer programming; four Black counselors in the fourteen-member guidance department; seventeen foreign-born teachers in the foreign language department, many of Hispanic origins. However, a few teachers reluctantly admit that the minority representation among faculty should be higher. One says, "It would be nicer to have more role models for the Black kids. I think they can still get a distorted message about Blacks' abilities with so few of them on our staff." Another points to the negative effects of tokenism on the faculty members. "In the teachers' cafeteria they all sit together at one table. No one is unfriendly to them, nor they to us, but with so few they must feel they have to band together."

Most teachers that I spoke with, however, were adamant about their abilities and talents in relating to students from all backgrounds. Some of the statements were amazingly bold, "I don't think you will find one racist, or anyone with racist tendencies, in this whole faculty." Others were more measured, "I think people were attracted to this school partly because they felt comfortable working with all kinds of kids. The teachers who came to Kennedy did not feel threatened by Blacks or Browns." Most teachers responded to my inquiries with some surprise and claimed that race and ethnicity were not the critical dimensions. "The point is, are you a good teacher? If you are a good teacher, you can teach anyone."

In general, there is pride among the faculty. Many spoke to me about the unusual collection of able teachers at Kennedy by offering comparisons. "The level of teaching is much better than in the suburban schools. I am impressed with the laziness of the suburban teachers. They can look good without even trying. But we have to work hard." By far the most vivid contrasts were made with the Bronx High School of Science, the neighboring school of high status. Said one A.P., "Bronx Science rests on a reputation that it no longer deserves. Are we to call it a good school because it gets its kids into Harvard and M.I.T.? Look what they have to work with! No, a good school has to do with the quality of teaching and learning and it's much better here at Kennedy." Another A.P. was more balanced in his appraisal of the Kennedy faculty. "Every department has a couple of duds, lazy and selfish teachers who couldn't care less about the kids. Then there is a broad range of dutiful and competent teachers . . . and a few inspired teachers. They give with their full heart. They are amazing and can be like catalysts for the whole department."

An old-timer claims that the good teaching has cultural origins. "We Jews are natural pedagogues, and we work very, very hard," he says,



only half joking. He points to the names of the faculty in his department, at least two-thirds of which have "a Jewish flavor": Greenberg, Silverstein, Weiss, Rosenberg, etc. A young woman of Italian origins counters, "Yes, it used to be Jewish, but now the Italians are taking over! Look at the chancellor, at our principal, at a lot of the department heads." Finally, someone offers an observation that a stranger might make. "Listen, you can't tell one from the other, a Mastruzzi from a Herzog—it is New York. We all have a style that only New Yorkers have."

Their likeness may have something to do with the blending of cultures and the powerful overlay of a "New York style," but it also may have to do with their similar social class origins, attitudes towards teaching as a profession, and their educational training. Although I was able to trace the story of only a handful of faculty, they all reported that their family backgrounds were modest. For many, their parents were illiterate or barely schooled but had an intense, uncompromised desire for their children to be educated. Teaching was seen as a respectable and honored profession, a reachable goal. Not able to afford the costs of elite, private schools, the parents sent their offspring to colleges that were part of the city university "at a time when these were the most competitive places in the country." Says a middle-aged English teacher, "Maybe I had a secret desire to go to Columbia and hang out with all those blond, blue-eyed, all-American kids, but I felt very proud of going to City College and all my family wept when they came to my graduation." When he looks at his colleagues in the English Department, many have similar histories. They are graduates of C.C.N.Y., N.Y.U., Fordham, Lehman, and Manhattan College. They grew up as working-class city dwellers and visit their parents, many of whom remain in the area, in rent-controlled apartments. "They're still proud of my accomplishments," says one teacher with a satisfied smile.

Even though a large proportion of the Kennedy teachers grew up in the Bronx and Brooklyn and may make Sunday excursions to visit their parents there, many of them are raising their families in the suburbs of Rockland and Westchester counties. Their commutes to and from school range anywhere from a half-hour to an hour and a half; and some see it as "a great escape" while others argue it's "the great mistake." Rockland county, with real estate prices somewhat less burdensome than Westchester, has become known as "Teacher County" because of the great influx of city teachers. One teacher exults about the tremendous advantages of the suburbs, "My kid can have a horse and feel some grass under her bare feet in the spring"; while another worries about the creeping changes that make it less idyllic, "We have the same problems in the

suburbs, except they come ten years later and everyone is too shocked to do anything about it." A commuter, who hates the forty-minute drive each way, points sadly to an apartment building where he lived until four years ago, a ten-minute walk from the school. With the steep condominium prices, he can no longer afford to live in Riverdale. His nostalgia is echoed by a senior colleague who has lived in the same Riverdale apartment for almost thirty years. From his office window he can see his home, and he deeply enjoys the close connection between family and school. With his two children now in medical school, he believes that it is possible to get a superior education in New York City public schools. As he watches the caravan of cars heading out to the suburbs every afternoon, he is glad that he was never seduced into believing that green grass and horses were better than neighborhood roots.

With a large proportion of students and staff coming to Kennedy from far away, the school does not feel deeply embedded in the surrounding neighborhood. For the students who travel great distances to get there, Kennedy is seen as a very special and attractive place. And most teachers proclaim their pride in being associated with a school of high quality and standards. Some students will brag, "Kennedy is the best school in the city. Do you think I'd bust my butt to get here if I didn't think it was real good?" Others admit it is "among the top ten" in the city. But Kennedy's city-wide reputation is very different from the way it is perceived locally. A teacher who lives in a co-op close by and hears the local gossip about Kennedy says, "City-wide, Kennedy has a very positive reputation. In the neighborhood, it's negative. The Riverdale parents with money look down on Kennedy and the ones without money are afraid of it." In order to drive home her point of community fear and negativism she tells me the story of "The Fourth-Floor Incident," a tale I am told several times during my visit. Described as "the biggest sore spot at Kennedy," the story highlights the extreme case of community-school conflict.

Each weekday morning two thousand Black and Brown students ride from West Harlem to Riverdale on the Broadway subway. At 8:00, they pour out of the subway and walk the several blocks to school. Because of the school building's structure and the topography of the land, the street from the subway leads into the fourth-floor entrance of Kennedy. The community the students pass through is a blue-collar, largely Irish community known as Marblehead. Last year battles erupted between the Marblehead residents and the school when the locals claimed that the students were destroying their property and threatening their neighborhood. The residents demanded that the Kennedy students take another

route to school; one that would not feel like an invasion of their privacy and property. The only other school entrance, on the building's first floor, would require the subway riders to hike almost a mile out of their way before arriving at Kennedy. Mastruzzi thought that the residents' request was unreasonable and reflected their racist fears of the "ghetto kids." He could understand their wish for the quiet solitude of the old neighborhood and their frustration with the strangers passing through. He could even sympathize with their worries about adolescent rowdiness. But he was shocked by the irrational threats and vehement attacks some of the residents hurled at the students.

Several weeks of intense negotiations between the school and the residents culminated in a series of compromises. The hostility was poisonous as each side took its case to higher borough and city officials. Finally, Mastruzzi worked out a settlement with top officials which would increase the possibility of an orderly procession of students through the neighborhood. He bargained, "You build me a wide sidewalk on one side of the street and I'll get the kids to walk on that side." The other side would remain free for resident pedestrians. When the city officials expressed skepticism about Mastruzzi's power over the adolescents' movement, he shot back, "You build the walk. I'll take care of the kids." A wider sidewalk was built and the students dutifully walked on one side.

Most of the residents were appeased, but a few "die-hards" continued to battle; telling the city officials that they wanted those kids off their streets. When the students continued to walk the Marblehead route, the few angry and resistant residents began to retaliate by letting their dogs litter the new sidewalk. Mastruzzi was furious. As he tells the tale to me his blood seems to boil, his face reddens, and it is the only time he admits to losing "his cool." Because they had reached an agreement, Mastruzzi decided to hold up his end of the bargain despite the outrageous behavior of the angered residents. Each morning a few members of his staff would be out on the sidewalk "scooping the shit" in order to make it passable for students. This lasted until June. When school opened this fall, Mastruzzi felt he could no longer ask the students to be dutiful when neighborhood adults were behaving abusively. Neither could he ask teachers to do the humiliating task of cleanup. Again students pour out of the subway and onto the streets and sidewalks; the battle is joined and feelings are raw. "Let's call it for what it is," says Mastruzzi finally. "If these were the White Riverdale kids walking through their streets, there would be no complaints."

Although many point to the Fourth-Floor Incident as a "sore spot," Kennedy people express a range of views about who the aggressors are in

this battle. Some are even more vehement than Mastruzzi about the underlying motivations of racism. "These are the most bitter people I've ever seen," says one observer. "They are impossible to satisfy. They get into hate trips and it is so racial. Every time we reach out to them, we get slapped in the face." Yet there are others who do not believe that the residents' concerns are necessarily racially inspired or unreasonable. They can see how the daily influx of adolescent droves would feel like an invasion, and they claim that the handful of students who have damaged property and threatened neighbors have made it hard for all of the well-behaved and honorable students.

The morning that I arrive in time to see the hundreds of students walk from the subway to the fourth-floor entrance, the community looks closed down. Windows are barred, shades are drawn, and almost no one is out on the street except the students, who by their massive presence seem to own the territory. I spot one elderly lady, dressed in a faded, blue cloth coat and dark hat. She is leaving the corner grocery store, clutching her pocketbook close to her body. Four Black girls crowd behind her because their gaits have suddenly brought them close and they are trying to figure a way to pass. As they chatter casually, the old lady's body seems to crouch in fear, and she ducks into a nearby doorway. In the vestibule of a square, four-story brick building across from the school I see a small group of Black boys lighting up reefers. My companion says, in the residents' defense, "Now you know those boys don't live here. They've camped out there and they're getting high. Who knows what they'll do next. You can't blame the neighborhood for being up in arms."

Although the Marblehead-Kennedy exchanges are bitter and fester like an open sore, no one seems to fear the eruption of violence. The Fourth-Floor Incident remains complicated and unsolvable because it represents the broader problems of oppression and racism in society. Explains one teacher who feels sympathetic to both sides, "You see, these working-class Irish folks are barely making it. All they have is their worn-out piece of property. It scares them to death to see those Black kids getting an education and moving ahead while they stay still." Given the deep and intense feelings on both sides and the meanings attached to the symbols of territoriality and invasion, Mastruzzi's handling of the situation has been smart and judicious. (He is described by many as a very political animal, and they point to his patient and calculating moves in the Marblehead affair as the best evidence of his political knowledge and intuition.)

Mastruzzi believes that city high school principals must be political; that their connections to networks of power and decision making, and

their understanding of the political process, are essential to a school's survival. More than any Bronx principal, he is known for his close association with political leaders. He is on a first name basis with the most minor council members and the most prominent state officials; with the fire chief and the police captain; with store owners in Kingsbridge; and businessmen in the high-rise apartments on the hill. He has developed a comfortable rapport with the local press. "How you are perceived is often as important as what you do, and many folks in the community never have direct contact with the school. The only way they can know us is through the press. So I go on television a lot."

His associations of "trust and mutual responsibility" with various constituencies have not magically appeared. Mastruzzi describes the "cultivation" of relationships as a slow and laborious process consuming a great deal of his time. He is also quick to assure me that his political activities are not inspired by personal gain or a need for flamboyant visibility, but by a very sober assessment of the community-school symbiosis. Particularly when school populations are not limited by neighborhood boundaries, the principal must convince the community of the cultural values and social benefits of a school in their midst. The principal, as the school's primary symbol and interpreter, must bear the responsibility of winning friends and building trust.

Mastruzzi has dedicated himself to the task on many levels. He walks the streets and meets and greets the locals. He lunches with businessmen in swanky private clubs, and he builds connections with politicians based on the promise of reciprocal benefit. All of this calculated groundwork pays off. When the Special Olympics were about to be held, Mastruzzi had to call in many of his chips. A call to the fire chief, and permission was granted for the elaborate fireworks display over the Harlem River. Another series of convincing conversations led to changing the street signs for the occasion—from Terrace to "Special Olympics" Avenue. And sports figures, well-placed politicians, and dignitaries appeared in force during the weekend of the great event.

Mastruzzi is aware of some muted rumblings about his public relations tactics and his not-so-subtle efforts at self-aggrandizement. But as I watch him in action, I become increasingly convinced of his honorable and generous motives. Certainly his style, energy, and enthusiasm are captivating, and he enjoys center stage, but his cheering is for Kennedy, not Mastruzzi. And his cheers sound engagingly authentic because he deeply believes he has something to cheer about. Perhaps worried that his political behavior and acumen will be interpreted as crass manipulation, he rephrases his extra-school affairs by saying, "I believe high

school principals should be community leaders. That is our responsibility to the school and to the community."

## SAVING SOULS

The attendance figures at John F. Kennedy High School reflect its attraction to students. In September 1982, the attendance figures reached to 84.5 percent, and the morning that I arrive in early October, the principal has just offered his effusive congratulations to the students over the public address system. "I got on the P.A. and told them how great they are. They should be rewarded for their sense of responsibility and commitment." The cumulative attendance records from last year were also above 80 percent and were seen as a strong indication of Kennedy's success. Mastruzzi watches the figures carefully. He admits that attendance rates are "a fetish" of his, but he regards it as the most tangible evidence of goodness. "It's very important. If the kids don't come, they can't be educated."

Each afternoon Mastruzzi receives the hand-computed attendance figures hot off the press from his record keepers. He writes the percentages on a pad that has a prominent place on his orderly desk, and then worries about each decimal. During the first few days of October the percentages have declined slightly and this causes a worried look on Mastruzzi's face. He points to the figures hovering close to 83 percent (Monday, 82.96 percent; Tuesday 83.05 percent, etc.) and begins by telling me that the percentages are probably ten points higher than city high schools with comparable ethnic and social class distributions. "Our attendance figures are more like the upper middle-class schools on Long Island." He ends by trying to account for the slight dip from September to October. "One of the problems is that these figures include lost kids on our rolls who never appeared in September. . . . If those kids were excluded from our count, the percentages would go up about two points."

Mastruzzi knows that there are ways to inflate attendance figures and that many schools report percentages that have been deftly doctored in order to give the illusion of success. There is always the temptation, but Mastruzzi believes that the "real figures" need to be faced. "What is the purpose of pretense or illusion?" he asks rhetorically. So he uses the hand-computed figures because the school's computer tends to falsely

inflate the numbers. The machine counts full attendance when a teacher forgets to send down absence cards. The person, on the other hand, whose job it is to keep close track of the records, searches down the teacher to make sure that no attendance reports in fact means no absences.

In order to keep the attendance rates high, Kennedy offers students bold incentives. Most of the incentives refer to the negative repercussions of non-compliance. For example, if students have ten homeroom absences, they will automatically fail their subjects for that semester. If they miss twelve recitation classes, they will fail the subject. Both of these harsh warnings are followed by a softening clause which reads "unless there is approval of the assistant principal/supervisor to give a passing grade." The attendance rules are prominently displayed in the orientation folder that all Kennedy students receive each fall, and they reflect the school's serious intentions in this area. As one junior boy said to me, "About attendance, they simply don't play!" In the midst of all the negative warnings, there is one positive enticement. Each month the homeroom classes in each grade with the highest attendance scores receive a prize of MacDonald's hamburgers for lunch. Mastruzzi explains that this may appear to be a trivial gesture, but for many students it works as a powerful incentive.

In general, Mastruzzi believes that the biggest draw for Kennedy students is the good education the school offers. The negative and positive rewards would not make a dent unless there was something worth coming to school for. Beyond the general attractions, the principal points to the inspired work of the attendance office as the reason for the high attendance figures. The office is run by David Epstein, an energetic, empathetic figure with an unusual magnetism. "He is the kind of person that kids trust immediately," says an admiring colleague. "He is the opposite of your stereotype of a truant officer" explains another colleague. "He has none of the tough, hard, militaristic tendencies. He truly believes in the capacity and potential of all kids." During my conversation with Epstein, he exudes enthusiasm as he responds to my questions. He is relieved not to have to rehearse the rules and regulations of the official attendance policy. He is much more interested in using the occasion to think out loud about the philosophical stance that guides his behavior with students, particularly those who resist or refuse to come to school. Epstein feels greatly influenced by his own early antipathy for school ("I hated school. High school was the most unhappy period of my life"); and his parents' insistence that schooling was more important than anything

else. Born and raised in Brooklyn, the son of Jewish immigrant parents, he remembers the burdens and inspirations of their great expectations and love. In his extended family there had been teachers whose work was considered honorable and worthy, and Epstein became excited about teaching as a way to recast and rework his wasted years in school. After graduating from City College in 1958, he entered teaching and spent his ten "most influential" years at a vocational high school that specialized in automotive skills. In this all-boys school that drew its population from working class Black, Hispanic, and Italian communities, Epstein began to develop his views about the ingredients of a good school. "It has nothing to do with the kids who go to it," he says forcefully, "It has to do with our *response* to the kids. The people I worked with were so into children that categories didn't matter." With 1,100 students and 87 faculty, Epstein's old school felt like a large and caring family. "When we saw a fight, we considered it a disruption to our house." When Epstein came to Kennedy to teach science, he was nervous about getting lost in its hugeness. He feared the anonymity and worried that it could be a great hiding place for students and teachers who resisted the essential human encounters of education. How could he recreate in this new environment the intimacy, visibility, and caring of his old school? Many of his fears were allayed by watching the ways in which teachers created feelings of family in their classrooms; the way they "saw each other face to face" and in that moment forgot the mammoth structure of which they were a part.

After teaching science for several years, David Epstein decided to take on the challenge of the attendance office; a job that still allows him to teach two periods of science each day. With an office that is often crowded with students in trouble, Epstein is in perpetual motion. He is helped by two para-professionals—an attractive Hispanic woman and a mature, benign-seeming white woman who do a range of supportive tasks and often talk to desperate students when Epstein is not immediately available. Epstein speaks about his approach as a dynamic mixture of toughness and sympathy. He admits that his toughness is rarely expressed in an adversarial mode. "I'm not confrontational," he says thoughtfully. "My strategy is to kill them with love. I do not view that as capitulation. . . . I want to make my office a place where kids can come and feel they will be listened to and trusted." The toughness is expressed in the persistent and uncompromising message that "there is no excuse not to come to school." Instead of searching for the reasons why students do not come to school, Epstein believes that faculty must find ways of getting them there. Teachers must "badger kids into coming. . . . They

must tell kids that if they are late, they are disturbing others. . . . They must insist upon the good citizen approach . . . if you mess up, you hurt all of us . . . attendance is an important self-discipline."

Throughout the day, teachers work closely with Epstein's office; corroborating student stories, calling Epstein when crises develop, and leaving notes on his desk requesting follow-up action. His partnership with teachers is essential. Without their responsible collaboration and support, Epstein could never identify the trouble spots or help a student become re-engaged in school life.

But Epstein looks to parents as his most important allies and reports that a great deal of his energy is consumed by establishing relationships with families. His message to families is double-edged. First, he wants to convey his respect for the hard work and passion of parenting. "Whoever they are, I want to say 'you are good, qualified parents and you have the most important job in the world.'" Second, Epstein wants to underscore the essential function of school as a window on the wider world, a place to expand life's options. "Many of these kids come from families where generations have never been schooled. In working with parents, I try to establish the value of education." Epstein is careful not to promise mobility, success, and profit to the parents of his charges because he knows in his heart that a responsible and mannerly school career may not culminate in those rewards. Besides, he seems to believe that schools should be devoted to reinforcing the more essential human qualities of kindness, generosity, and responsibility. If these altruistic dimensions get well established, students are more likely to become "good husbands, parents, and neighbors . . . and I regard that as at least as important as becoming a nuclear physicist."

In his conversations with parents, Epstein deliberately rearranges the traditional patterns of power and exchange. In most schools that serve poor and minority communities, parents have been systematically excluded from meaningful participation and made to feel powerless and "dehumanized." This imbalance discourages parent involvement, responsibility, and wisdom; all key ingredients to the successful education of their children. Because he believes that parental authority is essential for his work, Epstein strives to achieve balance between families and schools. "In some real sense, I am their servant . . . I establish with pride the fact that I'm working for them (the parents)."

To see Epstein in action is to witness his honor of parents, his integration of empathy and toughness, his belief in the capacities of each individual student, his awareness of the developmental cycles and crises of adolescence, and his boundless energy. Mostly one is aware of his

sense of urgency, his impatience with human defeat. His favorite reference is to "The Marva Collins Story," a television movie that portrayed the fighting spirit of a Black teacher in Chicago who built a successful, alternative school for poor, Black children who had been considered hopeless public school failures. With relentless hard work and grit, Collins transformed her students from the depths of self-degradation to proud and competent achievers. Epstein offers a wide grin as he retells the story and rehearses the questions that formed the script's litany: "Who is the most important person in the world?" asks Marva Collins. "I am!" the children respond in chorus. "When is the most important time?" demands Collins. "Now!" chant the students.

The attendance office is located on the fourth floor of Kennedy at one end of the guidance suite. The principal claims that its location makes an important symbolic statement. Attendance is not to be seen as a disciplinary function; rather it should be linked with the programmatic and psycho-social issues of guidance. Along the corridors of the guidance suite, counselors work behind closed doors with students. The traffic in and out of the guidance offices is minimal compared to the congested scene at the attendance office. The morning of my visit, I arrive about an hour after the peak period of attendance business and see several students moving in and out of the small corner office and four "hard core" truants lined up outside the door. As they wait to see Epstein, they brag to each other about their accumulated absences last year. At first they boast about their truancy, but quickly the conversation shifts to defending their records. Each claims the others have been more delinquent. Only the subdued, motionless Black boy says nothing. Only his eyes reveal that he is listening to the banter of his peers. A Chinese girl, petite and tough-talking, brags, "I was only three months truant last year . . . but I passed anyway, didn't I?" Raphael, a Hispanic, admits to being absent only a month. "Compared to you guys, I'm a good kid," he laughs. Cindy, the most talkative, wears her blond hair in a shaggy cut and covers her face with layers of make-up. She wears tight jeans, a shiny red jacket, and chews her gum vigorously. At first she denies that her attendance record has been "all that bad," but then admits to five months of truancy last year. However, her terrible record allows her to brag about her close connections to Epstein. "I have him in the palm of my hand," she says almost defiantly as she makes a gesture of ownership. "Sure it's not the other way around?" asks Raphael teasingly. Cindy's last defense is poignant: "He talks to my mother more than I do . . . He's always on the case."

Inside the cramped office Epstein is seated behind one of the three desks in the room. He leans forward on his folded arms and looks intently into the eyes of the round, middle-aged Hispanic woman who is sitting across from him. Her hands are tightly clasped in her lap; her heavily accented voice is hesitant as she says about her seventeen year-old son, "I am suspicious . . . I don't know. He don't never talk about school. He don't never have any homework." Epstein seems to shut out the ringing telephones and office clamor as he listens only to the mother's voice. She continues, ". . . and he says he wants to go to college, but he does nothing." Epstein's response is a mixture of sympathy, advice, and admonition. "Yes, they have great fantasies. He's going to college and he can't get through high school . . . but we'll have to be patient. This may take a long time. There is just so much pushing we can do. It has to come from within him."

He tells the mother about his plans for checking the attendance records, tracking down her son, and speaking with his various teachers. He needs more information before he can act. Just before departing, the mother's body slumps forward as she wipes away her tears with the arm of her sweater. It is the first time she has conveyed her desperation and sorrow. "I worry . . . I always worry," she says with a choked voice. Epstein's response is reassuring and firm. "Okay, I'll speak to him and follow up on this. Give me a call on Tuesday . . . but listen, don't take off more days from your work. It won't help anyone if you lose your job." At the door he shakes her hand gently and says, "We'll work together on this. . . . Try not to worry too much. Try to have a good weekend."

Before Epstein can return to his desk, Raphael is already seated in the empty chair just vacated by the mother. He is a handsome, muscular sixteen year-old whose voice reveals a trace of his Puerto Rican parentage. This is early October and Raphael has missed all but a few days of school. The note that he hands to Epstein claims he has been sick with a stomach virus for several weeks. With a look that is both skeptical and caring, Epstein asks whether the note is true. His eyes remain fixed on the boy who squirms under the scrutiny and finally admits that he was not sick during all of his days of absence. "Some or a few?" asks Epstein. "A few," Raphael says quietly. His whispered response seems to reveal a mixture of resignation and relief. Epstein shifts the conversation away from the note and begins to ask about Raphael's experience in school last year. Last year Raphael had been enrolled in the Mini-School (a small, alternative program within Kennedy for students who have trouble adapting to the demands and structure of the regular curriculum), but had been transferred out against his will at the beginning of this year. He had come to school for a few days in early September and had been overwhelmed by the rigors of regular school. "It's too much. . . . It's too hard . . . can't do it, man." After weeks out of school, he had returned with the hope of getting into the Work-Study Program at Kennedy. Every sentence he speaks suggests his ambivalence about returning. His plans are vague as Epstein tries to help him articulate his next moves. When they reach a dead end, Epstein offers his final challenge, "Raphael, listen, you have a problem, right? . . . You are doing some good things in trying to solve it, but you still have a ways to go . . . I want to help you with this, but you've got to help yourself." Epstein waves the phony note. "And this is not the way to work this out." Before Raphael leaves, he points him towards the people he will have to contact to apply to the Work-Study Program and he makes an appointment with him for early the fol-

lowing week. "You'll have to come to this appointment for yourself first, but also for me . . . if you don't show, you'll be taking some other kid's time, so you have to come." Raphael tears out of the office, his face flushed and confused. He reappears ten minutes later and blurts out in frustration that the work-study people can not see him until the afternoon. The couple of hours delay seem to be enough to destroy his momentum. "I'm ready to give it up, man," he says with bitterness in his voice. Epstein, who is in the midst of another appointment, gives him the full responsibility. "You have to decide how important it is to you, Raphael." Just as the boy turns away in disgust, he says brightly, "See you next week."

At Epstein's desk a quiet, shy Black boy is trying to get permission to re-enter school after several weeks of absence. His mother has been in a serious car accident and since her hospitalization, he has not come to school. The boy, who is frail and awkward, looks strikingly vulnerable and Epstein's tone seems to noticeably soften. A call is made to the boy's aunt who is at work. "I'm going to dial the number," says Epstein, "but you say hello to your aunt, so she won't get scared. Tell her it's Mr. Epstein from the attendance office. Then I'll talk to her." The boy repeats Epstein's words verbatim and hands the phone across the desk to him. Epstein is gentle and respectful. "Hello, how are you? We wanted to call to confirm Robert's absences. He has been absent a lot and we've received no notes from home . . . He'll fail his subjects unless we hear from you confirming his absences." There is a long pause in which the aunt must be offering an explanation. Epstein follows with a few questions and then closes by saying, "Okay, we'll try to help him. He seems like a nice boy. Take care now and thanks for your time." Robert has been on the edge of his chair, his body erect and tense, during the telephone conversation. His eyes search Epstein's face. Epstein returns his full gaze and says with a stronger voice, "Let me tell you something important. What happened to your mom is very serious. No doubt about it. It was very scary, extremely frightening . . . but rather than be absent through all of the hard times, you must come to school. Come here and we'll talk about it. . . . Just think, if Mom comes out of the hospital and you've failed your subjects, she's going to be very sad and disappointed. . . . There are lots of people around here who you can get to know, who could care about you. But you have to be in school. If you must stay out, *you* have to call me. Not your Aunt Rose, *you*. It is *your* responsibility. If you want to visit your Mom in the hospital, you can come to school and I will give you a note to leave school a bit early." Robert seems to hang on each word and looks comforted, not chastised. He stands, offers a limp handshake, looks solemnly down at his shoes, and quietly walks away.

In each of these encounters, David Epstein gives his full energy and modulates his tone and style to match what he judges to be the individual's needs and demands. To the distressed mother, he is reassuring but not overly optimistic. To Raphael, he is probing and confrontational. To Robert, he is gentle and firm. To Cindy, he begins by being slightly flirtatious, then more seriously concerned, and finally skeptical and discerning. The traffic in the attendance office seems endless and Epstein confronts a parade of painful and complicated stories to which there are

only imperfect solutions. His energy and stamina are amazing. His powers of persuasion are captivating. Mastruzzi says incredulously, "David literally salvages kids." However, Epstein is the first to admit the limitations of his person, his office, and the process. He worries openly about all the kids who are wasting their young lives out on the street and never make it to the school doors. He recognizes the number of students who come to school and fall between the cracks or get lost in the crowds. His interventions are rarely prophylactic. They usually occur after the crisis—when trouble has been brewing for some time, when he must help repair the damage already done. Watching Epstein's high energy and perpetual motion, I am reminded of the small Dutch child with his finger in the hole of the dike, holding back the dangerous water currents.

But Epstein does not work alone. He is not the only one with his finger in the dike. The attendance office is closely linked with the guidance department and with the Office of the Deans, the primary disciplinary body. The A.P. of guidance says that each office has its primary purpose, but that there is a great deal of overlap in the ways they function. "We do a lot of switching of roles . . . whatever it takes to get the job done." Clearly, the hardest job belongs to the five deans who receive the school's disciplinary problems and are responsible for issuing appropriate punishments. "They have the hardest roles in the school," he admits, "because they have to police the environment." Although Mastruzzi claims that the deans have a "guidance perspective," students speak about them with a combination of fear, respect, and bitterness. Says one who has had several run-ins with the deans' office, "They are brutal, evil people. They want to whip ass, that's all." Another boy claims that their effectiveness lies in their image of toughness. "They're not bad people. Someone's got to look scary so the other guys can look good." A third student is thankful for the deans' consistent and forceful punishments. "This place would go to ruin if it wasn't for the deans. They make it safe because people are afraid of them," she says.

The guidance department, on the other hand, tries to remove itself from disciplinary chores and focus in on academic programming, career and personal counselling of students. Gene DiStasio, its A.P., is a nurturing, generous man whose school-wide image of goodness gives the office its benign reputation. Just as many students refer to the tough ways of the deans, so do they point to Mr. DiStasio's "big heart." Says one sophomore enthusiastically, "He's the best grown-up I've ever met." Colleagues talk about his amazing dedication, his endless days at school, and his extraordinary rapport with students. "He is a rare human being who never turns anyone away—students or teachers," says a faculty member

who has frequently sought his counsel. But even his bountiful kindness cannot possibly respond to the vast needs of Kennedy's huge student body. "I'm telling you that man gives all he has, but it's not nearly enough," observes a senior who feels the guidance area is terribly understaffed. DiStasio has fourteen counselors on his staff and they each carry a caseload of 400 students. "You don't feel like a number when you go in there," claims the same senior. "You feel like a little, tiny, invisible dot. . . . This is the place you should be able to go and get personal attention . . . instead it's the place you don't feel like a person." Most people admit that the ratio of students to counselors would make it impossible for even the most gifted and caring clinicians to be effective. But many observers add that the counselling is uneven, and that there is not enough attention given to the leadership and administration of the area. Several students I spoke to described unsuccessful attempts to meet with their counselor, faulty information or guidance given during the course of conversations, and feelings of distance and distrust that accompany superficial relationships. A former counselor, now on the teaching faculty, spoke about the ways in which many of the counselors "hide behind the numbers." They are consumed by the paper work required to follow 400 students and, "They'd rather face the piles of paper than the real people."

The problem lies not just with the great numbers of students and the bureaucratic machinery that accompanies each case, but also with the numerous roles the counselors are asked to play. Clearly, the most immediate and time-consuming job involves designing the students' academic programs. At the opening of school each fall, hundreds of students arrive without a program in place, and the first weeks are spent meeting with parents and adolescents as schedules get developed. "There is a huge influx of off-the-street registration," says DiStasio. "That takes our attention away from the in-house kids." Although the academic programming is mostly rudimentary, it offers new students the opportunity for contact with their counselor. "It is a time for mutual sizing up, even if it may not take advantage of the counselor's talents or skills." Yet often the programming displaces the counselling function as the counselors get locked into the clerical chores. For DiStasio, this is the major frustration of his work. "My biggest satisfaction comes from interacting with kids. But we can't be very effective in reaching out to kids when all of this paper work is hanging over our heads. The psychological stuff suffers." Like Epstein, Gene DiStasio worries about the students who get lost in the shuffle. His talent and temperament point towards the clinical counselling, towards saving souls and offering reassurance to weary and discouraged students. But the massive numbers and bureaucratic machinery at Kennedy require

him to focus too much of his energy on clerical routines and brief ritualized encounters with students, therefore neglecting their more personal needs.

Paradoxically, it is in the offices where relationships with students should be most intimate and undefended that the numbers almost demand superficial treatment. Epstein and DiStasio, local folk heroes with enormous talent and tremendous energy, manage to find individual faces in the crowd and make intense and deep connections with troubled, disaffected students. But they must recognize that for those few they are able to help, there are scores that will go unnoticed and unattended. It is in these caring corners of the school that one is most struck with the potential dangers of anonymity.

### FINDING THE CORE: STREAMLINING THE CURRICULUM

Even though many classes are crowded with almost forty students, it is here where one witnesses the greatest intimacy and rapport among adults and students. In almost every classroom I visited, the desks and seats were entirely filled. The teachers' union requires that classes be no larger than thirty-five, but more than a month after the opening of school some courses were still oversubscribed and students were being reshuffled in and out of sections. Many teachers, frustrated by the crowds and chaos, made angry complaints to their A.P.'s, who passed on their concerns to Arnold Herzog, assistant principal for administration. A few threatened to begin formal grievance procedures because of the school's noncompliance with union regulations. But most teachers seemed to be unruffled by the "musical chairs" of the first several weeks and did not let the extra bodies distract them from their work.

Despite the large numbers, the teachers I observed had learned the names of their students and most made great efforts to involve the entire group in classroom discussions. Several times in my observational notes I wrote, "There is no back row in this class," a short way of reminding myself that I did not see the typical subgroup of uninvolved, unnoticed students who usually hide out in the back row. In some courses, particularly those inhabited by lively and ambitious Honors students, the teacher rarely needed to call on students in order to get them to participate.

Rather, he or she could usually choose the respondent from a small collection of waving hands. In other courses, where students felt less confident, teachers tended to initiate contact with a wide range of students and were careful not to always return to the same few people. The teachers' determination to involve as many students as possible in the discourse and their ability to call on students by name seemed to be evidence of their intention to build smaller communities within a large universe. With each faculty member typically teaching five periods and supervising a homeroom, it was not usual for teachers to be in contact with 170 students every day. But in each course, most teachers seemed to focus on the thirty-five students in their midst and offer an unusually intense attention. The classrooms in which I observed seemed to be transformed from impersonal, institutional environments to highly personal places when students and teachers entered. Without material props or aesthetic surroundings, most teachers appeared to structure their own ethos by the power of personality and curricular substance. Said one to me, "When I'm teaching I live in the existential present. We inhabit that space and it becomes ours."

I am certain that I did not observe a typical or random group of Kennedy teachers. After making my interests known, the courses I visited were selected by the A.P.'s. They were all gracious in offering their time and responding to my requests, but I was aware of their wish to show me the best examples of good teaching. One candid and confident A.P. admitted that he was being "highly selective" because he did not want me to see the distortions of either extreme. "I don't think it's fair to show you our duds, but I also don't want you to only see our most special, gifted, and inspired teachers. . . . Let me try and find the good but regular teachers. We have lots of them."

Not only did classrooms become alive and personal when they were inhabited by teachers and students, but I also sensed a curricular clarity and pedagogical confidence that is unusual in most large public high schools. Each of the A.P.'s spoke to me about the structure and goals embedded in the curriculum and the ways in which the course offerings have been distilled down to the "basics." They all referred to the initial curriculum at Kennedy, which was packed with a wide range of courses that seemed to have minimal connection to one another and offered no intellectual coherence. In the first couple of years after Kennedy opened, the numbers and types of courses had mushroomed out of control as teachers tried to be responsive to consumer preference and the progressive rhetoric of the early seventies. Courses were taught as modules and rotated through several "cycles" each year. Everything was considered



an elective and the choices were overwhelming. "There were no meat and potatoes courses, only the frills—no structure, only the embellishments," recalls one A.P. "Most of the electives were Mickey Mouse. Everything was confused and aimless," remembers another.

After a couple of years of "experimentation," Mastruzzi decided to return to the tradition of two semesters per year and pare down the course offerings to a manageable selection. Remembers one faculty member, "It was a return to sanity." Despite the fact that the number of course offerings had been dramatically reduced, students were still greatly attracted to the variety in the school's curriculum. In comparing Kennedy to other high schools, several students I spoke to referred to the wide selection of courses. Said one enthusiastically, "The best thing about this place is the choice . . . and its a choice between good things."

The high-powered Honors students tend to point to the special, selective programs in the major academic areas when they refer to curricular choice: the law program in social studies, the science honors program that includes a rigorous sequence of courses over a three-year period. Each year the thirty-five science Honors students are screened very carefully before they are admitted to the three-year program, and then they are required to take a toughly designed curriculum that includes advanced biology, advanced chemistry, statistics, research design, and an integrative seminar in science and society. The A.P. of the science department, who developed the curriculum and feels a special proprietary interest in the program, is extremely proud of the intensive experience offered to the chosen. He smiles when he says, "Every one in science Honors missed Bronx High School of Science by three points." But his face grows more serious when he recalls, "My kids went there and I really think our students are getting much more here at Kennedy." As additional evidence of the program's excellence, he points to some of the prestigious colleges and universities that have recently admitted the science Honors graduates: Cornell, Princeton, M.I.T., Cal. Tech., University of Michigan, and the bio-medical programs at C.C.N.Y. and Boston College.

But when most of the students at Kennedy refer to the attractive curricular options, they are not speaking of the academically elite experiences. They are usually pointing to the variety of course offerings in the nonacademic areas, particularly physical education. By far the most robust praise I heard from students was for "gym." They applauded the facilities, the teachers, and the imaginatively varied courses. Exclaimed a plump boy with a studious look, "You don't have to be a jock to like it. . . . It's geared for everyone." Said a more athletic type expansively, "It meets my every need." Principal Mastruzzi compares the full plate of

offerings to the meagre menu of most other urban high schools and points to yoga, cycling, roller disco, jogging, slimnastics and winter sports as a few of the special goodies.

Although many students fasten on the physical education department as "the best part of Kennedy," there are some who point to the programs in music and fine arts. They begin by appreciating the variety of courses, and then move on to talk about the special commitment and creativity of the faculty. In music, for example, students can choose among several choral groups, ensembles, and bands. They can also study percussion, guitar, piano, and woodwinds. But the greatest enthusiasm focuses on the energetic A.P., who often takes his most advanced students on tours to distant places; or the voice teacher who loves to work with hundreds of students and produce momentous sound; or the head of the marching band who was proud to lead his group in Italian ballads for the Columbus Day parade. "They do a lot of extra stuff with us," says an admiring student.

The art department receives similar kinds of praise from students, who for the first time are introduced to pottery, photography, fashion, print making, calligraphy, book design, and cartoon animation. The lively and colorful murals that dominate the school's exterior, line the walls of the escalator, and decorate two of the three student cafeterias were all designed and executed by Kennedy art students. When I am introduced to one of the premiere mural designers, a Puerto Rican boy with lots of flair, he says dramatically, "This is my life!" as he points to one of his creations. Mastruzzi shows me the animal mural in one of the cafeterias and remarks that it has never been defaced by a student, "not a scratch. That speaks to the pride and appreciation kids feel." The A.P. of art, who explodes with creative ideas and tries to track down funding sources to support her many art projects, sees an essential integration between artistic expression and intellectual facility. She is eager to increase cross-disciplinary work at Kennedy and sees the murals as an aesthetic dimension of school culture. From the student perspective, then, the variety at Kennedy is ample; and variety is expressed through curricular choice and through the individual styles and commitments of faculty.

When the A.P. of English arrived in 1974, there were eighty-seven electives in English. By 1977, the department had revised its curriculum based on three central pedagogical themes (language, composition, and literature), and the electives had been reduced to ten (two sophomore year, three junior year, and five senior year). Currently, for each grade, required English is offered at three levels (Remedial, Average, and Honors), and only those students at the top level are allowed to choose elec-

tives. Occasionally, a strong recommendation from a teacher will allow an Average student to enroll in an English elective.

Not only are there few electives now offered to a select group of students, but also the electives must be carefully designed and attractive. "Teachers have to sell the courses . . . get kids hooked on the idea of the course before we will seriously consider adding it to our electives list," says the A.P. of English, who claims his background in advertising alerted him to the idea of "selling courses and gaining consumer response." When a faculty member in English wants to teach an elective he or she must recruit students from Honors English classes. The teacher visits classes, talks about the proposed course, and tries to "create a group of committed students." When pupils express an interest they are asked to submit a writing sample, and their teachers then offer evaluations of their work in the required courses. If the proposed elective survives the process of teacher recruitment and student scrutiny, it becomes part of the curriculum. In these courses, therefore, both teachers and students arrive with an unusual degree of commitment and interest. The electives "Advanced Journalism," "Heroic Literature," "Creative Man," and "College Writing" all were initiated through this marketing process and they enjoy a special kind of visibility and stature in the curriculum. They also tend to be closely linked with the personality and style of the instructor.

"Creative Man," a year-long course for seniors that focuses on "major writings and artistic movements in the history of mankind," has the vivid imprint of its designer. Students choose the course in order to study with Mr. Clifford, its forceful and erudite teacher; and because the academic image of the course imbues them with a special kind of intellectual status in the school. One student describes both benefits, "The way Mr. Clifford talks makes you feel smart. He just assumes you're bright . . . and when you're in the class, you feel like you're part of a special group. It's kind of like an identity." Principal Mastruzzi is fond of saying, "If you go in there and close your eyes, you would think you were in a sophomore English course in the best of colleges . . . sometimes it's so sophisticated that I don't even know what's going on."

Clifford, a large man whose ruddy face is covered by wire-rimmed glasses and a full moustache, holds a notebook in his left hand as he slowly paces the front of the room. Occasionally he pauses to lean against his desk. His voice is strong and his sentences are intricate. Until I grow used to the rhythm of his language I get lost in the tangle of complicated images that fill each paragraph. I look for direction from the single sentence written on the board—"Aim: How does Aristotle's *Poetics* guide the development of Greek tragedy?" The classroom

is crowded with close to forty students who are absolutely noiseless as they sit in rapt attention listening to the lecture. Some take occasional notes, others merely listen, a few ask questions. Clifford gives a straight, verbose lecture interspersed with a few questions that usually ask students to link the complicated historical symbols to their own experience. Towards the beginning of his lecture, Clifford quickly reads Aristotle's definition of tragedy as students follow the words on their own mimeographed copies. "Tragedy is an imitation of an action which is serious, completed in itself, and of a certain magnitude, in language embellished with every kind of artistic ornament which is to be found separately in different parts of the play, in a dramatic, not a narrative form; through pity and fear bringing about the purgation (catharsis) of these emotions." The students express relief when Clifford quips: "Isn't that interesting. It means nothing, right? . . . We can't make sense out of it until we break it into pieces and look at it more closely and carefully. . . . Aristotle laid down Robert's Rules of Greek Tragedy. He recognized that we can only approximate reality. We can try our damndest to raise it to a level of perfection. . . . Tragedy comes closest to what imitation can be. Aristotle believed it represented the heights of what man can create." After some exchange with students about the objects of imitation, Clifford compares tragedy to comedy and prose. "Man can be represented in three ways. When you idealize man, you are talking about tragedy. When man is portrayed as he really is, that is prose. When man is seen as less than he is, that is comedy, buffoonery." Probably recognizing the abstraction of his language, Clifford refers to modern likenesses of Greek tragedy. "The closest we come to Greek tragedy is a Wagnerian opera. It affects all of our senses. We see, hear, experience everything . . . remember there were no KLH amplifiers to exaggerate the sensations. It was done through gesture, body language."

Clifford's discussion touches briefly on the importance of the plot in Greek tragedy and then moves on to consider character. He uses Oedipus as a vivid example of a tragic character, "Look at how Oedipus was portrayed. Oedipus has done a crime of such moral violence . . . one does not kill one's king. . . . He's killed his father, married his mother, broken every ritual taboo in the book. . . . Think of the repetitive theme of violence." A Hispanic boy raises his hand, "Why did the Greeks go for imperfection? Why were their characters so imperfect?" Clifford launches into a long and wordy response. He seems to savor the words he speaks. "They tried to portray man as a real human being . . . always reaching for perfection, but never realizing it. Oedipus may be better than the normal man, but he has the same appetites, the same fears . . . the tendency to anger first and repent in leisure later. . . . We see ourselves in Oedipus." The question of imperfection is followed by a series of student inquiries that focus on the quality and intensity of relationships in *Oedipus Rex*. The students' queries sound simple, almost pedestrian, against the elaborate language of Clifford. Yet they do not seem disturbed by the dissonance. Perhaps they do not hear it. Mostly they appear to appreciate the way he vigorously seizes their questions and launches into a poetic, embellished response. Despite the fact that Clifford's voice dominates and students are in the listening mode most of the time, the class seems to see him as responsive. A willowy girl with sandy straight hair and a studious gaze offers a paradoxical view. "He talks a lot . . . but he's the best listener."

Clifford's course is not typical in any sense. It gathers together the most capable students, appeals to those who want to be identified as intellectuals, and is an expression of the teacher's passionate interests. In addition, the pedagogical style contrasts sharply with most of the courses I visited where teachers actively enlisted student participation and discussion. At Kennedy, there seems to be a high premium put on "inductive teaching"; on drawing out student ideas, perspectives, and understandings. Teachers tend to direct and guide, but rarely take center stage in the way Clifford did. For less advanced students, inductive techniques are seen as essential strategies for gaining and maintaining the class's attention.

Except for two White boys, all of the thirty-five students in "Unified Biology" are Black and Brown. The course, designed for Remedial students, is full of "repeaters"; students who have taken the class at least once before. Although this is usually a sophomore-level course, the students' physical maturity is much beyond grade level. The boys appear tall, bulky, and bearded. Their long legs stretch out under the laboratory tables. Most of the girls look even older. It is not only their well-developed figures that give them an almost adult appearance; it is their weariness, their seeming loss of innocence, that is striking. The students settle into their chairs quickly with two seated at each lab table. Mr. Romeo, the teacher, is dressed formally and impeccably in a blue suit, light-blue shirt, and conservative tie. He is a slender man with an erect posture. His shiny black hair, perfectly shaped goatee, and his stylized gestures make him appear almost imperious. When he calls on students, he often uses their last names and beckons to them with a long, extended arm and pointed finger. Romeo's tone seems to be an interesting mixture of arrogance and respectful regard for students.

After quietly telling a boy in the front row to remove his hat, Romeo walks around the silent room spot-checking homework assignments. His announcement of an examination the following Tuesday brings no clear response from the students' impassive faces. The lesson begins with a review of the material covered the day before. "Yesterday we discussed some artificial ways man has been able to propagate plants . . . who can describe the method we call grafting?" When six hands are raised, Romeo complains, "I remember teaching it to a *whole* class yesterday." In order to spark their memories, he offers several clues; asking specifically about "layering" and "cuttings." Without much success, he decides to draw on their experience, "Can you describe what a lawn looks like when it is first seeded?" The student's answer seems to be a partially memorized response, rather than an observation. "It doesn't have a green color to it because it hasn't reached the adult stage." Romeo provides a different, simpler answer. "It is patchy, isn't it?"

The confusion and obfuscation that accompanies the review of yesterday's lesson cause a frustrated and disheartened expression on Romeo's face and he finally decides to turn to the day's agenda. In precise script, he writes on the board, "Aim: How does natural vegetation and propagation occur?" and then

carefully draws a sketch. "Will you look at the drawing, please. Describe what is occurring." A Black boy offers a tentative answer, "The roots go under further and pops up another stem." Romeo praises his efforts. "Very nice, an underground stem occurs. We call that underground stem a rhizome. . . . Why can we describe this as asexual reproduction?" A few hands are raised and the teacher waits for more. His gaze is stern as he calls on a Hispanic girl who was the last to raise her hand. "'Cause only one parent is needed," she says softly. "Very good," responds Romeo crisply. Several times during the lesson, the teacher asks them to reflect on their experience. "Can someone describe what happens to onions when you've kept them around the house for a long time?" When only a pair of hands shoot up, Romeo's voice reveals a slight disgust. "I can't believe you *all* haven't seen that." A few other students are prodded into responding and they answer when he points at them. "Stems start to grow," offers the first respondent. "That's correct," admires the teacher. "That's very good." "Roots start to grow," adds the second voice. "Very good, can someone tell us what is happening?" "The onion is becoming a plant," says a third contributor with certainty. "Very good," responds the teacher again.

Most of the class proceeds in this way with the teacher asking short, factual questions, offering a series of clues when necessary, and giving reinforcing praise when the students' answers are mostly correct. The teacher insists upon raised hands, mildly admonishes the few students who call their answers out, and often waits for more people to show a willingness to contribute. The pace is painstakingly slow and the frustration palpable. There are moments of naiveté and misunderstanding. "Is that where onion paper comes from?" asks a boy after Romeo's explanation of the onion's "fleshy" leaves. "What does fleshy mean?" inquires another girl. There are also moments when the teacher's frustration turns into momentary cynicism. "Well what can I expect from city kids," he says when no one reacts to his question which asks students to refer to their gardening experience. But it is in the final minutes of class that students exhibit their first signs of anxiety. It is an anxiety that seems to derive from a fear that they will be singled out and called on and a growing recognition of how much they do not understand. "Who can quickly summarize for us the six methods of vegetative propagation?" inquires Mr. Romeo optimistically. The class is absolutely still and noiseless. "You mean no one can answer . . . now I see two hands . . . oh come on you were all here." Finally, a Black girl breaks the ice, "When you say summarize, what do you mean?" The teacher looks dejected and soon decides to break his big question into pieces. Teacher: "Vincent, would you tell us about rhizomes?" In a halting voice, Vincent reads the definition from his notebook. Teacher: "Miss Washington, describe a runner." Her answer is confused and partial but the teacher decides it is adequate. Teacher: "A bulb, Miss Soto." In answering the pointed questions, most students shuffle through their notes and use words that do not seem to belong to them. The teacher is determined to conclude on a more positive note. "Last question," he says with some drama. "Where did the first one [asexual plant] come from? It seems to be a problem." A Black boy answers clearly and immediately. "Sexual reproduction." "That's what I wanted to hear. This is only a secondary method. Aha!" exclaims Romeo as the first smile spreads over his face.

Described by many as being "the lowest of the low," the Remedial/Repeater classes are by far the least attractive courses assigned to teachers. When we talk after class, there are tiny beads of sweat on Mr. Romeo's forehead that contrast with his otherwise smooth veneer. He has worked very hard. "It is like pulling teeth . . . very, very difficult," he says with a mixture of discouragement and pride. There seems to be some small pleasure in the meager accomplishments and a relief that he is able to survive the persistent setbacks. Although as I observe them I feel pained by the students' frustration and limitations and the hopelessness that lines some of their faces, I am heartened by the perseverance of both the teacher and his class. No one seems to have totally given up. There are many examples of persistence from the students, even moments of dogged determination—and the teacher cares enough to prod, badger, and pursue them until something is understood. Never does the class disintegrate into the chaos that characterizes many high school classrooms filled with their least talented students. Instead, civility and order are emphasized. Even the teacher's slightly haughty style seems to be a demand for dignity and poise in his students.

"Unified Biology" and "Creative Man" represent the extremes in pedagogical style and curricular substance at Kennedy. They are also inhabited by students with strikingly different abilities and futures. Most of Kennedy's students fall somewhere within the broad range stretching between these extremes, and receive instruction that blends the slow, determined pace of Romeo and the elaborate, dramatic display of Clifford. Even though the differences between the Honors electives and Remedial courses seem great, they do not appear to be as vast as one might expect. In many big city schools, Remedial Repeaters are treated as discardable waste. They mark time in meaningless and empty courses or they are permitted to engage in subtle violence against themselves and others. In contrast, bright college-bound students exist in a different world, far away from the contaminating influences of the slow, disaffected students. At Kennedy, the differences are marked, but there are universal expectations of civility and humaneness that seem to shape teacher/student exchanges at all levels. Certainly, most faculty are quick to admit their preferences for the more rewarding experience of working with bright and gifted students and their discouragements, even despair, in teaching slow learners. But the despair is rarely expressed in disdain or defeat. Teaching may proceed at a snail's pace, but some teachers and students learn to recognize and appreciate the almost invisible progress.

## BALANCING FORCES: INSIDE AND OUT

Although the coherence and simplicity of Kennedy's current curriculum was a response to explicit internal decisions by administrators and faculty, the academic structure is also partially defined by requirements imposed by the city and state of New York. Throughout my visit I was often struck by the tension between the particularistic goals, style, and decision making of Kennedy inhabitants; and the universal edicts of the state and city educational bureaucracies. These external bodies impose constraints on procedures and products that shape the everyday life of teachers and students at Kennedy. Some seem to regard the regulations imposed from outside as a source of security, a way to maintain decent educational standards across the city. But most people I spoke to viewed the bureaucratic layers encompassing Kennedy as potentially deadening to the creativity and productivity of their school. One A.P., who actively tries to diminish the intrusions of the city and state educational structures, refers to them ominously as "the central authority." He spends a fair amount of energy figuring out ways to circumvent policies and directives that, he believes, distort the educational experiences of teachers and students. Even though he finds the external intrusions "pernicious," he recognizes why they are necessary in a large, diverse city school system. He believes they were established to monitor the poor schools, the ineffective administrators, and the lazy teachers. But in trying to protect against inferior schooling, the "central authorities" have limited the freedom of the better schools and distorted the essential human encounters that shape education. "The independence of good schools is stifled because they are paying the price for poor schools that did not meet minimal standards . . . there is an increasing burden of clerical chores, an elaborate set of regulations . . . lots of bureaucratic machinery . . . the lock-step routine of the central authority inhibits our creativity. I must fight against it."

Others, who are critical of the external interventions but less vehement in their attacks, claim that some of the requirements are neutral and legitimate, while others distract energy away from the essential processes of teaching and learning. For example, they do not argue with the numbers or types of courses stipulated by the state and point to the fact that Kennedy's requirements are often more stringent. But they do chafe at some of the pedagogical directives, the prescriptions regarding how teachers should present material. "It is outrageous to require 'reasoning and critical thinking' and say nothing about the kind of institutional and

interpersonal climate that would support that," complains one faculty member who tries to distinguish between "the spirit" and "the letter" of the law and only adheres to her "interpretation" of the former. Sitting around the table in one department workroom, several teachers told me increasingly funny stories about their noncompliance with regulations that strike them as "absurd." They told tales of "bending" the rules to adapt to their personalities, student abilities and needs, and the school environment and local context. One admitted to refusing to follow certain guidelines because they were morally repugnant and antithetical to her "view of professionalism." But a single voice offered a very different perspective. She saw the bureaucratic layers and huge system as a "wonderfully impersonal" structure that provided "the freedom that comes with anonymity . . . somehow I believe that the rules and restraints will never reach down to me. I am free to be myself because no one will ever notice."

The toughest critics of the state and city mandates spoke about Mastuzzi's critical stance in "softening" the external constraints. "A school can only develop into a viable culture if we all can negotiate our terrain without any interference . . . and Bob protects us as much as he can from that interference," said one teacher philosophically. Another pointed to Mastuzzi's political acumen and said, "He knows how to read and interpret the decisions . . . which ones to pay attention to and which ones to discard and that gives us a great deal of latitude here." A third observer spoke of Mastuzzi's self-confidence as a critical variable. "He is not afraid to say 'no' to them because he knows how good we are here. We have more freedom here than any other school I know of in the city."

Every assistant principal I spoke to began his or her description of the curriculum by reciting the city and state regulations and then told of the ways those are embellished by school requirements. For example, of the seven semesters of social studies required of Kennedy students, six are responses to state and city requirements. The state mandates one year of American studies; while the city requires three semesters of global history and one semester of economics. The school adds an additional semester of American history and permits students to choose electives beyond the seven term requirements (including courses in crime and justice, Black history, sociology, the American family, and American women). Likewise, the state guidelines for English require seven terms of English and one semester of speech. But Kennedy students must take a ninth term in order to meet school requirements.

However, it is not the numbers of state or city required courses that cause rancor among teachers and administrators. They seem to be per-

ceived as relatively neutral guidelines shaped by a convincing intellectual rationale. In addition, the academic departments at Kennedy tend to be more demanding than the state or city in terms of the students' required fare. Rather, the complaints surrounding external regulation tend to be focused on the requirements of staff responsibilities, not the curricular structure. For instance, both teachers and supervisors speak negatively of the city system's regulations on faculty meetings and teacher supervision. On the first Monday of each month, every department is required to have a faculty meeting. The second Monday is reserved for full faculty meetings. Most teachers describe these occasions as "non-events," imposed rituals that rarely lead to substantive exchange. Some feel the perfunctory nature of the meetings is related to their rigid and dogmatic structure which does not permit a responsiveness to emerging issues or a spontaneity of exchange. Others believe that the boredom is a direct response to the compulsory requirement. "Somehow the edict from on high makes us all respond like resistant children who would rather go out and play," says a young woman half-jokingly. Still others fault their colleagues for "non-professionalism" and lack of commitment. Says one harsh critic, "most of them don't want to do any of the extras. They are unwilling to do anything that goes slightly beyond the literal duties listed in the teachers' union contract. Faculty meetings force them to tack forty extra minutes on to their day and they actively resent it. They're chomping at the bit to race to their car pool and head for the suburbs."

The Board of Education also has explicit regulations regarding the supervision of teachers. Based on years of experience and training, faculty are divided into three categories. Maximum salary teachers (M's) have had more than twelve years of experience and at least thirty credits toward their master's degree; tenured teachers (T's) have from three to twelve years experience; and probationary teachers (P's) have been teaching for less than three years and have not yet come up for tenure review. Most departments at Kennedy are dominated by more experienced teachers (M's and T's). The English department, for example, has only one probationary teacher out of thirty faculty members. Twenty-two are maximum salary teachers and seven are tenured. In social studies all of the thirty-one faculty are tenured, with twenty-nine on maximum salary. Although there are fairly elaborate regulations for the supervision and evaluation of new and inexperienced teachers, most of these do not apply to the A.P.'s duties at Kennedy. Instead, they are faced with experienced faculty who are safely protected by tenure. In many respects their job is tougher than it would be if the faculty were younger and less experienced. They do not have optimistic, energized teachers with unformed,

malleable styles and approaches. Neither do they have the option of getting rid of incompetent or lazy faculty. There is a challenge of revitalization, retraining, and re-energizing the commitment of experienced faculty.

Some A.P.'s take this challenge to heart by rigidly following the external guidelines. The Board of Education requires that they visit each maximum salary teacher once a year and observe tenured teachers twice annually. One A.P. I spoke to feels the guidelines trivialize an important supervisory function, so he doubles the number of teacher observations and adds several "mini-visits" during the year—short, spontaneous classroom visits that allow him to "keep in touch" with his faculty and diminish their apprehension regarding the more formal observations. This A.P., who laughingly refers to himself as a "grandfather type," has a benign, paternal approach to his supervisory work. "I try not to be too judgmental . . . I find it more effective to soothe problems among faculty." Other A.P.'s do not adhere as stringently to the letter of the law, and a few speak of the formal supervisory requirements as impediments to good faculty relations. One claims that informal encounters, over a cup of coffee or a bottle of beer after school, are always less threatening and more productive. "Teachers resent written reports. I get them done but I am often wasting my time. . . . With these very experienced teachers, there is a conservatism that comes with habit. My purpose should be to get teachers to think about throwing out, discarding materials, taking on a new form. I want to provide a climate for creativity . . . but the lock-step routines imposed by the central authorities exaggerate the conservative tendencies in teachers . . . the lesson plan becomes more important than the teacher."

A third A.P. neither regards the supervisory regulations as counter-productive, nor does he see them as benign. His cool approach matches his smooth temperament and his view of bureaucracy as a relatively neutral form. All regulations, he feels, must be "adapted" to the context and received with perspective and a measure of humor. He refuses to get bogged down in organizational details or spend his energy fighting external interventions. In his department of twenty-five, there is only one probationary teacher. The others express the broad range of talent and commitment, with most falling mid-range. "It is as you would expect," he says matter of factly, "most teachers are pedestrian, a few are losers, and only a handful are superstars. They are the ones who make the department go, do the extra work, and offer creative, energetic input. If you have three or four of those, you can build a decent, even good, department." To those teachers on the low end of the continuum, this

assistant principal constantly prods and admonishes—"I am on their backs constantly. I drop in often, very often, and look to see if they are really teaching." To the broad middle range of teachers, he tries to offer supportive judgment. "Teachers are strange animals. They are very threatened by written evaluations. I usually tell teachers when I will observe them. I give them the opportunity to be at their best." To his superstars, he is "lavish in his praise." "I treasure the gems. In whatever way I can, I make their lives more pleasurable . . . I stroke their egos."

Even though the A.P.'s have different ways of coping with the requirements set by the Board of Education, they all claim to believe that teacher supervision is critically important to staff morale and pedagogical standards. They all refer in various ways to the irony that plagues their work: "The most secure and able teachers are the least threatened by supervision and of course they need the criticism the least." In addition, all of them point to the tension between standards set by the Board of Education and the regulations that are part of the teachers' union contract. The dual requirements often seem to be in opposition to one another. "We are squeezed from all sides," claims a beleaguered A.P. "The central authorities want to make sure that teachers work hard, and the union wants to guard them against hard work." These contrary forces are often expressed in the daily encounters with teachers. For example, one A.P., who believes that good supervision should include a careful review of written lesson plans, is not able to apply this standard to all his faculty because the union contract gives teachers the option not to comply with such a request. "I'm not going to play games with professionalism," he says with resignation in his voice. "But it is always the worst four of five teachers who deny me permission." Another mentions the opposite problem of not being able to adequately reward excellence in teaching due to union regulations of uniform treatment.

From both sides, therefore, the people most directly responsible for curricular and pedagogical standards experience constraints on their initiative and autonomy. In the same breath, they recognize the need for standards imposed by the central administration and the need for protection and security of teachers. Their job is to walk the tight rope between these often competing spheres and to find ways of interpreting both sets of requirements so that they can be made to appear compatible. Each of the A.P.'s I spoke to used some portion of their ingenuity and wit in balancing the external demands and standards; and a few complained that the "balancing act" consumed far too much energy—energy that should have been focused on educational processes within Kennedy.

As I observed the vitality and certainty of John F. Kennedy High

School, I was struck by circus metaphors that would either appear in my mind or in people's language. During my visit, I heard about the "tight-rope walk" of administrators who must engage in a "balancing act"; "the three-ring circus" that students must observe as they negotiate the huge and complex school environment; and Mastruzzi, the "master of ceremonies," whose dramatic flare shapes and defines life at "the Big Top." I was reminded of the energetic clowns who pranced amid the wheelchairs in the Special Olympics parade held at Kennedy last year, their painted faces showing the extremes of emotion; and the animal murals painted on the school's walls that show lions, tigers, elephants, and giraffes living peacefully together. I recalled the combination of spectacle and humor that seems to fuel the energy of the school. The circus metaphors did not convey to me a trivial, fantasy-like, staged event. Rather, they seemed to express attention to drama and performance as part of schooling, to the role of humor in maintaining perspective, to the dexterity and poise required in balancing forces inside and out. Mastruzzi is an elegant example of a ringmaster in his carefully chosen costume, his deft orchestration of events, his comfort with all of the beasts that inhabit the Big Top, and in his dramatic announcements of the attractions. He is smooth, articulate, and compelling. His stature and mastery depend upon the cooperation and participation of all the actors, and he watches their performance with pride, always cheering from the sidelines.

Certainly the symbolism of life at the Big Top can be taken too far, particularly if it begins to exaggerate the drama and performance and neglect the hard, grueling, rough-edged practice that goes on all the time—before, during, and after the staged events. It seems to me that people at Kennedy pay attention to both the performance and the practice and see each as essential to the survival of a big-city school. Mastruzzi's critics, for example, often point to his attention to public relations and claim that he focuses too much time on projecting the school's image. But Mastruzzi, in referring to his role as a "community leader," believes that he must balance school image and educational essence, and that each is dependent on the other. Unless he convinces the skeptical public of the school's goodness, they will subtly undermine the hard work of his teachers and students. Unless the students and faculty combine to produce high standards, all of his pronouncements will sound like empty gestures and not be believed by the wider public. His "fetish" with attendance figures reflects the same dual concern for image and essence. High attendance rates are critically important, says Mastruzzi, "Because unless kids come to school they won't learn." However, he is equally concerned about the *appearance* of high attendance scores. He believes

they are a quick indicator of a school's goodness, a visible and measurable sign.

Likewise, many teachers seem to express a similar concern for smooth performance and rigorous practice. In every classroom I visited, there was a great deal of attention paid to form as well as substance. Teachers insisted on discipline, civility, and poise even when the atmosphere seemed relatively informal. Boys wearing hats were asked to remove them; students chewing gum were told to deposit it in the trash basket; and mannerly turn-taking was required. These disciplined forms were seen as an integral part of learning, not a reification of procedure. Said one teacher who claimed to be a recent convert to "traditional education": "I used to think that manners and discipline got in the way of real learning. I thought they somehow obscured the essential process. Since coming to Kennedy, I realize that structure is just as important as the substance. One is dependent on the other." Another teacher offered more pragmatic reasons for the emphasis on order and discipline when she referred to the need for consonance between family values and school norms. "Most of our kids come from working-class or immigrant families where parents want the educational basics. To them school is a place to be taken very seriously. They like the idea that we emphasize order. Then they know we're not cheating their kids."

The emphasis on form, therefore, is partly a reflection of the serious regard teachers have for their students; partly seen as an integral part of the educational substance; and partly viewed as an important visible indicator of the school's goodness. But form is also linked, I think, to an explicit ideological stance often voiced by Mastruzzi and his faculty, and occasionally echoed by students. The emphasis on discipline and manners is connected to a view of education for citizenship. Time and time again, I heard Mastruzzi refer to his belief that "all our students are winners" and that "winning" has more to do with being a good, caring, and generous person than with visible and lofty achievement. It is an inclusive, rather than an exclusive, educational vision—one that does not focus superior or prideful attention on the narrow band of top achievers, or create a school image based on their great successes. Rather, it is a vision that asks for "extra human effort" on the part of *all* students and asserts that they are all equally capable of becoming good citizens. Says Mastruzzi proudly, "There is an unbelievable emphasis on doing something for someone else." As an example, Mastruzzi points to a now-traditional holiday ritual. At Christmas time, Kennedy students collect hundreds of gifts for needy children. The students wrap each gift and deliver the presents themselves. Last year the presents were given to a

home for mentally retarded children and this year they will probably arrive at an institution for the severely handicapped. The personal attention of gift wrapping and the presenting of gifts is central to the act of giving. It is not a distant, paternalistic gesture. It is an intimate act of charity. Each year the principal offers the same message of charity to the graduating seniors. He rehearses the words to me with great feeling, "I tell them, you need to leave this school with a sense of appreciation for other human beings. That is the primary lesson we teach at this school. I don't care if you are going to Columbia University pre-med, or if you have been tops in our Honors program. If you don't give a bit of yourself to someone else, you are a failure!"

# PART TWO

## SUBURBAN PORTRAIT