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I started out as an elementary school teacher. My first class was the fifth grade, and each year...that year, I felt that I could do more with these kids if I got them sooner, so then I went down to the fourth grade, and had the same feeling again so I went to third grade. Same feeling. Second grade. And when I stopped teaching I was teaching a first-second grade combination, which was most rewarding, because you get them at the beginning and teach them basics, and that's what's necessary. In 1987, I saw an article in the news requesting that people who are interested in counseling apply for such jobs in the elementary schools. I applied for a job as an elementary school counselor, and I was accepted. What had happened was that through the years, the courses I had been taking for my own development were the ones that were needed for counseling, only I didn't know that. I took them because I was interested in them. And, fortunately, they were the ones that...some of them were good for the field of counseling. I became an elementary school counselor in '67, and continued until '72, when elementary school counselors were not funded...that position was not funded, and we moved on into other fields.

I felt that this phasing out was really a terrible thing to happen. I felt that we were doing things that were significant in the elementary schools....we were helping kids and discovering problems, and helping to deal with problems before they became serious. We were able to identify problems that could be helped easily in the early years, that would be more difficult to help in the later years. We....there were about forty-three of us and we were all very sorry that the counseling in the elementary school was phased out. There were a couple of counselors who were named. They were in...funded programs...special programs in certain schools. They left a couple of years later when the contract ran out. From there I went to Junior High School as a counselor. That was very frustrating, because, in a school of 1500 children, there were three counselors.
And there were so many other things to do...scheduling, admitting, withdrawing, transferring, that we didn’t have enough time to really work with the children, who really needed us at that point.

In mini schools, the problem of counselors not having enough time to really counsel the kids still exists, especially at the Junior High School level. In 1974, I became a suspension counselor in the regions. The city school system had become regionalized by that point, and I became a suspension counselor. That means that when children are suspended from school for misbehavior, they will come to the office with their parents, to be interviewed to discuss the problem, to work out solutions that will enable them to return to school or into another program if it’s not feasible for them to return to the schools. At first, we did all suspensions except drugs. But...there was another set of counselors in the central office who took care of drug suspension. In 1980, all suspension services were moved to a central office, and that’s where I work from now.

The reasons why some children are suspended...of course, there are the drug suspensions...for possession, distribution, sale, of drugs. Sometimes it’s alcohol. Often, it’s for possession of weapons...knives, guns, nunchucks...the nunchuk is the...some Asian martial arts tool, that kids bring to school. I don’t know if it’s from Karate, or some other form of self-defense...However, what was interesting...one boy was suspended...his weapon was his bookbag. Yes, at one school, this boy informed me that all the kids bring bookbags to school, because you can’t bring other weapons but you need something to defend yourself with, and the bookbags are used for that. Some had metal trim, and so forth. And they had been used as weapons. So, what is a weapon? I’m saying. You think of weapons as knives and guns and things like that, but a weapon can be anything. It’s important how it’s used. That makes it a weapon. Sometimes, kids are suspended for teacher assault, fighting other students, vandalism, trespassing, being in school illegally, when they have been placed
on disciplinary removal, for instance. If a kid got into some difficulty and he was placed on disciplinary removal, which is a three day removal from school. But, instead, he comes back and creates havoc in the building, and then he might be suspended for that. Those are the main types of things that kids are suspended for. There are others, but those are the main things.

Many of the schools in South East Baltimore seem to have a large number of problems. I can't really say what the reason is, because I don't know. Sometimes the problems are racially motivated, because of one reason or another. Sometimes it's the way the administration is set up, sometimes it's the way the curriculum is set up....where children who belong in special programs are mainstreamed and they are frustrated and acting out and get suspended for that reason.

Some administrators are stronger than others. In one case, there is an administrator who....to whom the children are disrespectful often, so a large number of children in that school are suspended for being disrespectful to the administrator, or insubordination, something like that, and that type of thing can happen.

Until desegregation was enforced, black children went to school with all black teachers, and the white kids went to school with all white teachers, and after 1954, they made efforts to integrate the schools. This put teachers of each race into the position of teaching children with whom they were not familiar. Sometimes, the white teachers with whom I work said that they could not teach black kids. Quite often, poor kids, and black kids, come to school with no previous stimulation toward reading, writing, arithmetic, and things like that. So when they come to school the teacher has to start from the very beginning to teach them. As a result, when they come in without having learned their ABC's, 1-2-3's, how to write their names, the colors, and so forth, special skills have to be used in teaching them. And because time is spent in doing these things in the early years, they might be behind the average kids you expect to see at the first grade level, and at the second grade level.
They catch up if they’re taught appropriately. On the other hand, many of the middle and upper class kids who come to school will have had certain experiences and certain learnings when they come to school. And it’s just a matter of the teacher continuing what has been started and enriching the program, because their parents will help them at home. Quite often, with poor kids and black kids, the mother is working and does not have the time or take the time to spend with the kids teaching them at home. And they expect the school to give it all. Do all the teaching. Sometimes the kids are strong enough motivated that they will continue what they’re doing once they get home. Even without encouragement from the parents. But most often, they come home to television, and school ends when they leave. Homework is not done, of if it’s done it’s not checked, or sometimes there’s no place even to do the homework. Sometimes there are no books or references to refer to for doing homework, and they’re not allowed or encouraged to go to the library. Sometimes the libraries are not easily accessible to them. Anyway, as a result, many poor kids have a different need in being taught than kids who come from a better environment.

At the time when, I guess in about 1973.....I guess that was the worst year. ...that’s when they made the biggest push, I guess, to get the integration at the Junior High School level. Or else, there was reorganization in the city. Anyway, I know that at that time, a large number of children from some areas...South Baltimore, for instance, South East Baltimore, were zoned to go into some schools that had been predominantly black at that time. And many students objected to it. Many teachers also objected to this integration bit. At the same time, large numbers of people were moving into the surrounding counties, and their school roles were burgeoning, so there was a need for more people in the County schools,...more teachers, in the county schools...and, at that time, many of the county schools, nearby county schools, were paying more than the Baltimore
city schools, so it was a double opportunity for people who were dissatisfied with what was going on with integration in Baltimore city, to move to a different location where the problems had not hit yet... put it that way. They were coming but they hadn't gotten there yet, at a greater salary. And they did that. Meanwhile, the counties had a chance to be selective about the teachers they took. They could take those who were better qualified and had better recommendations. They could pick and choose the ones that they wanted. And so, city schools, I think, suffered as a result of that. In many cases, then, city schools had to take what teachers they could get. Sometimes, teachers had to teach in areas in which they had not been certified, or was not their first level of certification. You know, like the person who was a Math major, but the opening in the school was for a science person, so there fore he would have to teach science. Or, a History major teaching English... that type of thing. And that reduced the program for the children in the city schools.

I'm sure that the situation affected the teacher's enthusiasm for teaching a course that wasn't their specialty. But if a teacher... if a person had gone to teacher's college, and wanted to become a teacher, and the only opening was in a field that was not his major, he would take it. Because it was a job. You take it. And you hope that maybe next year, you'll be placed in the area of your ( ).

Of course there are a hundred reasons for why the kids are doing what they're doing in schools... vandalism, fighting, drugs... but we don't know what they are. I know that... one problem that we face often is children who may be misplaced academically. Students who are in, say, seventh grade, with a fourth grade reading level, and they need some additional help in those areas, and they may or may not be receiving it. The point is, they might be frustrated in certain classes... and they cannot do the work, because, I guess they don't feel good about themselves
in the class, and the teachers certainly don't feel good about them being in the class. Not able to do the work of the class. Sometimes, it's because they can't do what they're supposed to do that they get into things that they shouldn't be into. Sometimes, it's because, often, they're not following their schedules. Quite often, children get into a difficulty because they're cutting classes. And that means that no one is supervising them. If a child is due in a certain class and he is hiding out in the halls, running up and down the halls, sometimes, however, he is cutting class because he is unhappy in that class. Because he can't do the work or because he has difficulty with the teacher or for various reasons like that. Sometimes, he's cutting class because he got to school late, and could not go to the class, or got to school late, and no one even notices he's in the school, when he gets into difficulty. Often, when kids bring weapons to school, they say "I didn't know it was in my pocket," or "I didn't know it was in my bookbag" or "I didn't know I had it" others say they have a pocket knife that someone gave them. And they didn't know it was wrong to bring it to school. Others say they thought someone was going to attack them, so they brought a weapon to school to protect themselves. Those are the things we hear often.

In the case of the Drug suspensions, the thing we hear most often is that "I didn't belong to me. I'm holding it for"....this person, that person, the other person...they also say....those who admit it belongs to them..."Well I don't smoke it in school" and quite often, the parents say they did not know their children were smoking marijuana.

Right after Spetember, 1980, I only worked....I did not work with the drug cases. When I became involved in drug cases as well as the regular suspensions, I was surprised at the different type student who was coming in for the drug suspension as opposed to the regular suspensions. Most of the regular suspension cases were children of low ability and low achievement, and most of the drug cases
were children of high ability and high achievement. And this was a striking thing, that they felt....the other thing is that most of the kids who were in that category for the drug suspensions did not really see anything wrong with smoking marijuana. Because all the kids did it. Many parents, too, are defensive of their kids who are smoking drugs. They understand, and many of them....they, too feel "Well, all the kids are into it and I didn't know he was into it but I'm not surprised. But he's a good boy. He does everything I tell him to do. He comes in the time of night that I tell him to. He keeps up his marks in school. He's a good boy, and I guess he'll be all right." Also, many of the kids who are involved in drugs have parents who are involved in alcohol. There seems to be some correlation between alcohol abuse and adults, and drug abuse and the children.

They have an anti-vandalism program working. It's been in for about a year and a half now, and it's successful in reducing the cost of the vandalism. They are working on that in about six pilot schools at this time, and they're going to increase the number of schools in which the program has been taken. One of the things that's really needed is more programs for children in the Junior High schools. Many children find it difficult bridging the gap between elementary school and Junior high school. Many children who were slow learners at the elementary level and have not achieved seventh grade achievement by the time they get to seventh grade begin to slip further behind at that point, because often, the work of the grade is too difficult for them. And they go from one frustrating class to another. Sometimes getting into trouble. But, invariably, when we see them, their parents tell us how good these children are with mechanical things and with their hands and things like that, and they ask if there's not a vocational program they can get into. And, to my knowledge, there is no vocational program that we can offer them at the seventh grade level.
Or the eight grade level. There are vocational programs at the ninth grade level, at school 298 and 453, which are general vocational schools. If they have at least a fourth grade reading level. Then we also see a number of children in suspensions who are repeating the seventh grade for the second, third, or fourth time. And with them, often, absenteeism is a big problem. And of course, the more they're absent the further behind they get, and when I say absenteeism, I mean absent sixty-seventy-eighty—a hundred days of the year, and they, many of them have lost interest in school by the time we see them. We have been fortunate enough to refer some children to the new school, 178 ( ) and Calhoun St., which accepts students at fifteen years old, who are several years below grade level in reading, and who could benefit from that type program. But only a small number of students can be helped by that program, and we do need more programs for children who fall into that category. The junior high school student, between thirteen and sixteen years of age. Otherwise, what has happened too often is as soon as they become sixteen years old they drop out of school. And they can't get a job. The sooner they realize that what they need is more learning... and some of them will go to the adult education center and try to earn a high school diploma. Some will go into other programs in the city, many of which are not being funded anymore. I know that one of the good programs was the prep program that sixteen year olds could enter and in that program they would get their basic skills for half a day, and they would work at a job for half a day, so they would be paid while going to school, which, by the way, is why kids drop out of school... because they think they need some money to get some decent clothes, for instance, like the other kids have, and their parents can't afford it. They drop out of school to earn money, and there's not much money a sixteen-year-old could earn without a high-school diploma.

We don't get many kids who are pregnant. One thing... when they become pregnant they have an alternative. They can either stay in their own school until the child
is born, or they can go to the school for pregnant girls. I don't really know
at the time...okay, I know that more children...many children...many girls are deciding
to stay in their own schools. There's a strange reason for that, too. Most black
girls who become pregnant are willing to go through this......

But what I am concerned about is the large number of girls who become pregnant
while still students, and the results that we're seeing...mainly, many of the
students we see are the children of teenage mothers. The kid is fourteen years old
and the mother is twenty-nine, and yet this kid may be one of four or five, you know,
and we feel that that's quite often a cause for problems that children face in the
schools. That their parents are not sufficiently mature to rear the children, because
they were children themselves.

Maybe sex education is stressed enough, and they have survival skills now which
certainly include sex education, however, no matter how much the school might stress
it, what's happening in society has a great deal of influence on what happens with
the kids in this area, and the movies...goodness.....many of them get their sex
education from the movies. That's a heck of a school. Also, television.

Things that are good about the school system....well I think that many things
are good. They have interesting new programs in the school....certain schools have
outstanding programs...you know, they can take electronics in some schools, data
processing in some schools, communication, art, some schools feature music...once
the kid finishes Junior High School, if he's able to survive elementary school and
Junior High school, then, for the senior high school, he can enter into a variety
of programs according to his interests and learn to enjoy school. Also, there are
many study programs in the schools, much more than in past days....for those
children who want to work so that they can stay in school....they need to work,
but they don't have to drop out to get a job, because there are work-study programs
in the school...they can help them. They also have some military programs for those kids who are so inclined. The ROTC in some schools, the naval training and the marine training in some schools, business education, and then for those who want to go to college....so many fine academic programs, not only Western and Poly and City but in many of the other high schools. And most of them have classes for those kids who want a liberal arts program, or...college preparatory program or things like that. I think we have a fine school system, honestly. And I think the schools are trying to be responsive to the needs of the students, but things happen in the budgets every year, so that even if a good program is conceived, quite often before it can come to fruition, funds are cut, staff is lost, and that type thing. So that...we don't really get to see what it could have become.

I think we have a good system. We're all excited about the fact that test achievement scores, standardized citywide testing...they are going up...at one time, the score were so low that we were embarrassed about what was happening to Baltimore city scores, but now, year by year, the scores are approaching the norm, and we're pleased for that. I think the school is good..

On the budget cuts....for one thing, a large number of people don't feel job security. I know of one man who has been cut twice in the job ( ), you know....in other words, the first time they had to let people go, because they had to cut back, he was let go. This year, he got a letter again. He's gone again. Well I doubt that he'll come back to Baltimore City for a job. This is a traumatic experience to happen to you twice. What's happening this year....I've spoken with a few people who had......what they considered were promotions. But now, some of them are being returned to the classroom, which does not please them,greatly. What's happening, too, is that even though they....in some places class size are still too large, as a result of the budget cuts. I think too, that we need more services more counselors in the schools. I think the nursing staff has been cut the last few years,
Like one time, there was a nurse available in each school at some point during the year. Some were there, three days a week, four days a week, but now, some schools don't even have a nurse there.... the administrative staffs have been cut. Schools that used to qualify for both a principal and a vice-principal.... assistant principal, now only qualify for a principal. One administrator in a school, which of course, changes his role... increases the pressure of his job. I think that it's unfortunate that so many cuts have taken place in the area of education, because you read it all the time, but in order really for Baltimore really to be the greatest or a great city, they have to have great schools, and great schools need great staffs for great services. As a result, too, a few weeks ago I read in the paper that doctor Lloyd, doctor Robert Lloyd, the head of pupil services, and development, was commenting on the fact that, this year, more children dropped out of school than graduated. And if that's going to be the trend, it's unfortunate.

It's depressing news. I don't have anything more to say on that subject.

Yes, we can educate our young people. If, somehow, we can make a school an interesting, attractive, exciting place for the children to be. And if we provide them with teachers who know how to teach. If we can encourage the parents to make sure that their children come to school every day. I mean, there are only 180 days in the school year and absenteeism certainly interferes with the process. We certainly can educate our children. Yes. We have to. It's important that we put more emphasis on what is happening in the schools, because, that's the future of the city. The children are our future..... these children that we're educating now are going to be our leaders in a few years. And we can't shortchange them, or else they'll shortchange us someday. That's the way I look at it.