RECENTLY the Chappaqua Board of Education (New York) had the exciting experience of hearing elementary school youngsters speak on a topic which might otherwise have elicited only routine interest.

The occasion was the preparation of a Curriculum Report for the Douglas G. Graf-flin School entitled, "The Educational and Psychological Functions and Effects of Assembly Programs in an Elementary Curriculum." The principal raised the question of why assembly programs were traditional in American elementary schools, and how they have contributed to our changing educational values. He also wondered why the assembly program in schools had become an unquestioned ritualistic procedure.

As compared with the usual evaluations given to such curriculum areas as reading, mathematics, science, and social studies, the evaluation of assembly programs has been relatively neglected. Therefore, the principal chose to explore this topic by having teachers and administrators report their experiences with assembly programs to the Board of Education.

In evaluating the basic instructional program, a school staff may use achievement tests and other statistical devices. However, the intangibles involved in evaluating the assembly program as a regularly scheduled and required feature of the school curriculum seemed to necessitate an innovative approach.

After several meetings of the administrators and teachers involved in the Curriculum Report, it became evident that the implications and ramifications of this topic were surprisingly profound and complex. Moreover, the educational values in assembly programs appeared to elude the conventional type of analysis.

Use of Taped Discussions

What changes were effected in children's knowledge, emotions, social insights, and cultural enrichment, as a result of presenting and attending assembly programs? A direct channel to understanding these values was observation and discussion with the children themselves. The school psychologist was consulted as to possible ways of obtaining the children's views.

As an exploratory measure, children were called together in small groups for taped discussions. The school psychologist devel-
oped a frame of reference by observing assembly preparations in the classroom, and rehearsals in the cafetorium, for short periods over several weeks. She also interviewed individual children, including a fourth-grade boy who had written an original play that was presented to the school, and a second-grade girl who particularly enjoyed and excelled at performing on the stage at school.

The tape recordings of the children’s group discussions and individual interviews were technically imperfect, and we thought they could not be heard clearly. Therefore, at the Board of Education presentation, a verbatim transcription of the children’s comments was projected, simultaneously with the tape, on a screen by means of an overhead projector.

The enthusiastic reaction of the Board and the public on hearing these tapes far exceeded the reaction to more conventional methods of presenting Curriculum Reports to the Board of Education.

In analyzing the public reaction, we asked ourselves why it was so extreme and so positive. We realized that the disarming quality of children’s voices in the austere atmosphere of an official Board meeting engendered a sense of proportion and meaning to education, as well as a feeling of delight on the part of the adults present. We further realized that we do not sufficiently use the wisdom of children in deliberations affecting their very lives.

We believe this technique has uses far beyond a single Board of Education meeting. We are not suggesting that children’s opinions on educational issues be solicited as a general practice. However, our experience on this occasion suggests to us that parents, administrators, and Boards of Education might find it refreshing and helpful in keeping adult perspectives and values in focus, to hear the children’s voices from time to time.

The verbatim transcription of the children’s group discussions and individual interviews with the school psychologist on the matter of assembly programs is presented in the following columns in its entirety.

**SOME CHILDREN’S COMMENTS ON ASSEMBLIES**

- **PART I. CLASS DISCUSSION—GRADE 3, MRS. G.**

Mrs. G.: Girls and boys, I don’t know whether any of you were aware of something special that was taking place at the time of our assembly program. . . . Do you know, Michael? What?

Michael: Yes. They were taking pictures.

Mrs. G.: Dr. L. was busy taking quite a lot of pictures and today she brought in a whole selection of pictures of you presenting your assembly program.

Mrs. G.: How have you felt about the play? We never really had a chance to talk about it, since it came almost at the beginning of our vacation.

First Child: My mother said that it had a real lot to it, and I thought so, too.

Second Child: Well, I think the play had good scenery on it, and the mural on there was good.

Third Child: I think the people in the dances did a pretty well—good job.

Mrs. G.: Jo-Ellen.

Jo-Ellen: I felt pretty stupid when my hat fell off in the Irish Jig.

Mrs. G.: But I want to compliment you on the way you went right ahead and performed beautifully, Jo-Ellen.

Mrs. G.: How did you feel when the curtain first opened?
Children: Nervous! (Laughter)

Child: When the curtain first opened, I went “Gulp!” (Laughter)

Mrs. G.: Christopher.

Christopher: Well, when the curtain opened, at the real play, I didn’t feel that scared, but then when I went out to do the first dance, and I saw the people, I was really scared. (Laughter)

Pamela: Well, I was kind of nervous at first, like everybody, and this was my first play, and my grandmother, my mother, my sister, and my brother were all there, and I felt so nervous.

Mrs. G.: Well, what did they say about it, afterwards, Pamela?

Pamela: They said that they liked it a lot.

Mrs. G.: How many of you would like to do another play?

Class: Me! (Whee!, etc., etc.)

Child: Mrs. G., you know what my mother said? That she didn’t think that she could take another play! (Laughter)

PART II. CLASS DISCUSSION—GRADE 4, MRS. A.  
(Following planning session for a specific assembly coming up soon)

Mrs. A.: Well, do you think we could give three assembly programs during the year—one play, and one historical pageant kind of thing—

Class: Yes!!

Mrs. A.: And a Greek play outdoors in the spring—

Class: Yes!!

Mrs. A.: You think we could do all that and not neglect our school work?

Class: Yes!!

Mrs. A.: You think we can still do our homework and put on plays?

Class: Yes!!

PART III. INTERVIEW—
DR. L. AND BRAD, GRADE 4

Dr. L.: Now, Brad, you are one of the few children at Grafflin School who has actually written original plays that were put on for presentation to the rest of the school. So I would like to know from you whether you found this rather exciting—you know, to see something you had written, to see it acted out by the children. Tell me about that. O.K.?

Brad: Well, yeah, I think it’s sort of fun, because—you know, you feel so big. You’re the director of the whole play, and you have a big feeling in you.

Well, one day I was going outside, and Mrs. Van N. came up to me and said, “Hey, Brad, how would you like to write a play?” So, and I said, “Yes, I’d like it very much.” It took about a couple of weeks to write, but it was worth it once it was finished.

Dr. L.: Tell me about the other play you wrote that was put on for the children. O.K.?

Brad: Well, it took about as long as “The Mod Rocket” to make, but as I said before, it was worth it all. And the play—in June, it says that all the children are happy to get out of school. But they’re not the only ones. And when the children leave, then you can see the teacher dancing around and yelling, “No more pencils, no more books; no more children’s dirty looks.” So that was a funny part.

Dr. L.: O.K. Now what grade were you in when you wrote this little comedy?

Brad: I was in third.

Dr. L.: Third grade, uh, huh. And were you in charge of the production? Were you the director then, too?

Brad: Yes. Director and producer.

Dr. L.: When you wrote “The Mod Rocket,” did you have a script all written out to give the players?

Brad: Well, yeah, first my mother typed out the sort of script, and then Mrs. Van N. ran it through on the copy machine.

Dr. L.: Can you think back to assemblies that you’ve seen, either last year or this year, that were particularly interesting to you?

Brad: Well, I liked one that Mr. R. put on.

Dr. L.: What was it about?

Brad: Well—a lot of kids. He told about musical instruments, and they played it, and I thought that was very good.

Dr. L.: Why did you think it was good?

Brad: Well, it was fun to listen to, because there were nice fun songs to listen to.
Dr. L.: Tell me this, Brad. Do you think, in general, that assembly programs are worth all the time and effort that's put into them? Or do you think that the school should just not have assemblies anymore, in the future?

Brad: Well, I like them very much, and I think they should go on.

Dr. L.: Why?

Brad: Well, they're fun to listen to, and they give you something to do.

Dr. L.: Something to do?

Brad: Yeah.

Dr. L.: I see.

Dr. L.: Suppose there were no more assemblies at Grafflin School. What do you think you'd miss, then?

Brad: Well, I wouldn't like that very much because ---

Dr. L.: Why?

Brad: It wouldn't be too much fun. You wouldn't have any activity to do. It's fun to have a play.

Dr. L.: You sort of look forward to putting on different things?

Brad: Yeah. Also, I look forward to watching different things.

Dr. L.: To watching, I see. Uh-huh, very good. So, in general, you think assemblies are worth having in school.

PART IV. INTERVIEW—
DR. L. AND MARY ANN, GRADE 2

Dr. L.: Now, I'm going to ask you a very important question, Mary Ann. O.K.?

Mary Ann: Uh, huh.

Dr. L.: What would you think of the idea of Grafflin School not having any more assemblies? I mean, why should they have any more assemblies, after all?

Mary Ann: It makes it fun to have assemblies in school because it's more fun.

Dr. L.: What do you mean by "more fun"? Is fun the only thing that matters?

Mary Ann: No.

Dr. L.: Tell me why you think that Grafflin School should have assemblies.

Mary Ann: I'm not sure.

Dr. L.: You're not sure? O.K. Well, then, if you're not sure, why don't we just cut them out? I mean, what good are they? What do they do for children?

Mary Ann: They make them to be more happy.

Dr. L.: They do? In that way?

Mary Ann: They like what they do. If they don't like what they do, they don't make them more happy. And that's the reason they should cut them out.

Dr. L.: Oh, you think they should cut them out ---

Mary Ann: If they don't make you happy.

Dr. L.: What kind of assembly would make a child happy do you think?

Mary Ann: Well—most kinds would make them happy. I think maybe singing—or plays—or movies.

Dr. L.: Singing, plays, or movies. Uh, huh. Is your class planning an assembly for the near future?

Mary Ann: No.

Dr. L.: Uh, huh.

Mary Ann: I've been groaning for one.

Dr. L.: You have?

Mary Ann: Yes. I had one last year.

Dr. L.: Oh. You've been groaning for one?

Mary Ann: Yeah, I like to have plays with me in it.

Dr. L.: Oh. You don't like to just sit and watch plays.

Mary Ann: I like watching them, but I also like me being in them.

Dr. L.: I see. And do you think any other children in the room are just groaning to have an assembly?

Mary Ann: Well, no, I don't think so. They probably don't even think about it.

Dr. L.: No. But you do?

Mary Ann: Yes.

Dr. L.: Uh, huh.

—MELVIN A. FINGERHUT, Principal;
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