

# Undercover Teacher

# Slow Pupils Cheated by Our Schools

Staff writer George N. Allen has just emerged from two months as a teacher in one of the city's "difficult" schools—John Marshall Junior High in Brooklyn. Mr. Allen was assigned to obtain a teacher's job at the school, JHS 210, to learn first-hand the experiences of a teacher there, the attitudes and aptitudes of the students, the day-by-day problems of classroom instruction. He obtained a substitute teacher's license after having met all necessary requirements. In this article, the eighth of the series, he tells short-cut teaching methods used by teachers.

By **GEORGE N. ALLEN,**

World-Telegram Staff Writer.

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I got the surprise of my teaching life one morning early in October.

I walked into the classroom of another teacher at JHS 210 to see how he was teaching hygiene to a group of "adjustment" pupils—



George N. Allen

neither of the groups I taught. By this time, I was aware of the learning limitations of my own "adjustment" (slow learning) students. And I was curious to see how other teachers were handling the other ones.

It is not my intent to embarrass any individual at the school where I taught for two months as a qualified English instructor, so the teacher in this class I visited shall remain nameless. But this is what I saw in his room.

## Blackboard Covered.

The blackboard in the front of the room was almost completely covered with writing—various hygiene topics and questions related to the topics. But I was flabbergasted by what I read.

Even I, a teacher, couldn't understand many of the scientific terms written on the blackboard. The material included the Latin names of the parts of the body.

I walked up to the teacher who at that point was writing still more questions on the board.

"Do these children know the answers to these questions?" I asked in amazement.

"Certainly," he replied with conviction, "they have the answer to every question. Just look in their notebooks. You'll find every answer there."

The teacher, seeing the lack of understanding in my expression, smiled knowingly, then dug me in the ribs.

"Of course, most of them can't understand the answers they have copied," he explained. "But for the record, they have the answers, all neatly written in their books."

I still didn't quite understand.

"You mean," I asked, "that previously you've given these

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# Teaching Methods Cheat the Slow-Learning Child

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youngsters the questions and answers and had them copy the material in their notebooks?"

"Sure," he replied.

"And they didn't know what they were copying?"

"Of course not. Even you probably don't understand some of the terms."

"I didn't and I wondered why the phony hygiene lesson. He explained his reasons.

"It was a lot easier for me if I make my adjustment classes copy the lessons. I am progressively giving to an average or superior class. I know these adjustment kids aren't learning anything this way but under the teaching conditions we have today, I couldn't teach them anything even if I really tried. This way is a lot easier on me.

"Besides, if a supervisor happens to walk in, you have a neat lesson on the board which no one can complain about."

## Outright Fraud.

I was appalled. This seemed to me to be an outright fraud not only on the children, but on the taxpayers.

"Seeing my look of doubt, the teacher hastened to explain: "Don't get me wrong, Mr. Allen," he said. "The adjustment kids like this method too. They feel they are getting the same work as the kids in the average or superior classes, even though they don't have the foggiest idea what they're writing down."

Later that week I tried out the teacher's system with my adjustment students and found that it worked. With that system you don't have to think or plan for the adjustment class at all. Just make them copy the lesson of the last average class.

## One of Best.

This following teacher, I learned, is one of the best and hardest working teachers at John Marshall Junior High School. He simply is the victim of an educational system which hands qualified teachers an impossible job.

I tried his system for a week. It worked like a charm. I had no time and I had time to do the endless administrative paper work.

But, while it paid off for me, it didn't pay off for these kids. They were short-changed.

The reader may ask: "What about tests? Why, if the children aren't learning, should they be tested?"

Tests are popular with teachers of adjustment classes at JHS 210 for one simple reason—they consume time.

Instead of Xeroxing (duplicating) the questions on sheets of paper so the pupils can complete the answers in one period, the teacher takes the questions on the board. That way, it takes them one period to copy the questions and another whole period to write the answers and you use up two periods instead of one."

Typical of the questions which teachers use in their tests are:

The name of our school is \_\_\_\_\_

Our principal's name is \_\_\_\_\_

Our school is at \_\_\_\_\_ Ave. and \_\_\_\_\_ Pl.

One whole period to copy these and similar questions, another whole period the following day to give the answers.

These are examples of how slow learners in our Junior high schools are being hoodwinked.

But average children are hoodwinked, too. I was asked by a science teacher to allow her official reading class to rehearse its school play during some English periods it spent with me. I agreed.

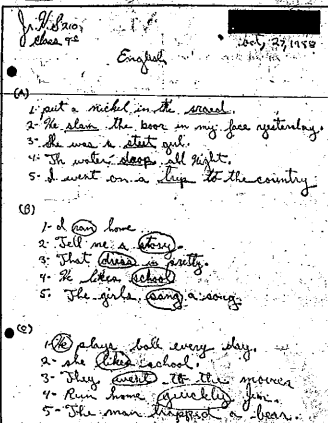
## Play Rehearsals.

Later I was discussing the proposal with a third teacher. I wanted to know if it was proper to have play rehearsals during instruction periods. My colleague replied: "Sure, that's great. It will use up quite a few periods for you. Rehearsing is easier than teaching English, isn't it?"

And taxpaying parents, too, are being hoodwinked. One day a teacher was searching for his record book in which he kept the marks and grades for all his students. He couldn't find that if he didn't find it, he would have to read over many test papers again and re-enter hundreds of marks.

"Don't bother," said another teacher. "I never enter marks in my record book. Last year when Open School Week rolled around, I tucked the blank book under my arm and went down to meet the parents.

"When a parent came up to me and asked, how little Johnny was doing, I read her a whole slew of marks off a blank page. I did great. The only trouble I had was with a few nosy ones who kept trying to peek over the top of the book to see the marks for themselves."



These are actual test papers of ninth grade adjustment students at John Marshall Junior High School. Note the obvious errors in first section of paper above. The next two sections of that paper are also to be had. In (B) the student was to circle the subject of the sentence and in (C) he was to circle the verb. The paper at right was the work of a student considered so hopeless he was permitted simply to copy off the questions. Names of the students have been blocked out to protect their identity.

## Here's Why Illiterates Get Into Junior High

How can it be that illiterate boys and girls are promoted into junior high school?

Why are students shoved ahead year after year when they obviously cannot do school work?

Why do school authorities keep up the farce that they are "educating" children who at age 15 can barely scrawl their names?

### The Answers.

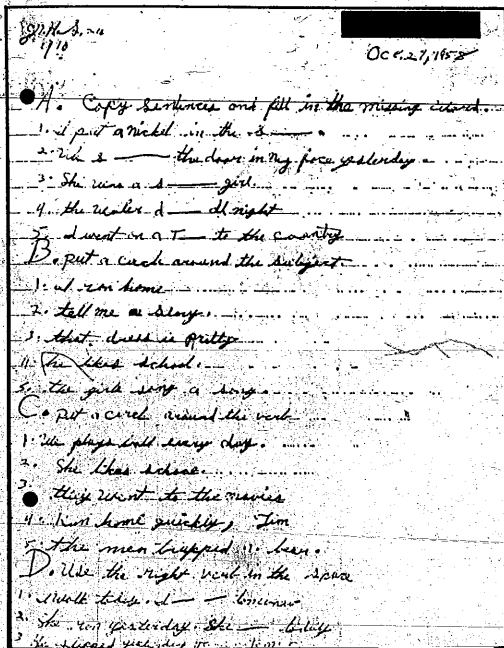
These questions are being asked by scores of World-Telegram and Sun readers. Here are the answers:

In New York State, education laws force educators to keep children in school until they are 17, regardless of their ability, aptitudes or achievement.

A child can be released from school at age 16 to go to work. But he must go to continuation school four hours a week until he is 17.

### 100 Percent Promotion.

From a practical point of view, it is claimed that if educators refused to promote children who cannot read, the lower grades would soon be bursting at the seams. The practice has been that slow learners and poor readers must be shoved ahead each year to make way for the newcomers who are beginning school.



Also, educational theories have resulted in a policy of 100 percent promotion in the last few decades. This policy is a by-product of the progressive education movement. Its adherents held that school children should be graded by age and not by achievement.

A 13-year-old may be hurt emotionally and socially, many modern educators believe, if he is kept back in classes with 7- or 8-year-olds. Also, they maintain, keeping a child back does not help him to learn better but instead gives him a feeling of defeat and frustration.

New York City's school system has never had an officially-enacted policy of 100 percent promotion. But in practice, almost every child was assured of promotion.

In the last two years, the traditional practice in this city has been modified. Officials today is that no child can be promoted if he is more than two years behind in reading.

Opposed by Theobald, Superintendent of Schools John J. Theobald is on record against 100 percent promotions. When World-Telegram staff writer George Allen was teaching at John Marshall Junior High School, a fellow teacher asked him one afternoon how many of his adjustment class students he intended to graduate. "I don't know," he replied. "Hardly any of them can do even sixth grade work and, as far as I can see, none should graduate. But some are good kids who are trying hard. No one has yet told me what standard I should use to determine who should graduate and who shouldn't. I guess I'll leave it up to the school administrators to tell me what they want me to do."

**TOMORROW: Verb Lesson**  
Staff Writer George N. Allen describes how an English lesson was shattered by one of the "paper work" duties of a teacher.

Saturday  
is the last day of