

HIGH SCHOOL RENOVATION

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[Assignment: Respond to the essays in *The Little, Brown Reader* on teaching and learning by thinking about an describing past experiences which suggest a thesis for an essay on problems in public education.]

(1) "Save old schools. Build fewer new ones" (*L,B Reader* 177). This idea is proposed by Nathan Glazer in his essay "Some Very Modest Proposals," and I would agree with him. He contends that old schools have a lot of character, and I would agree with this as well. In fact, I will take Mr. Glazer's argument one step further--don't even renovate older schools, at least not when school is in session. Many people feel that their high school was a dungeon of sorts, with no trace of beauty or cheerfulness. I used to feel the same way until my high school entered its "renovation era," as I call it, the summer following my sophomore year. The project was scheduled to be completed shortly after my graduation, so I really had nothing to gain from it in the first place. Unfortunately, I soon found out that I had plenty to lose. Because of this experience, I now believe that the learning environment is a very important aspect of the educational process. To prove my point, I will describe the conditions in the school on any given day during the renovation.

(2) I enter the building still half-asleep shortly after seven o'clock in the morning. As I head towards my locker, I notice that it feels as though the floor is covered with gum, because my shoes keep sticking to it. I look down at the floor and realize that there is no tile covering it. It is just a dirty black floor with some sort of sticky residue on it all the way down the hall. The walls are covered with dirt and grime, and the ceiling has been partially removed to leave the water pipes exposed. There are also bare light bulbs hanging from above, supposedly posing as adequate lighting. The hallway has a peculiar odor, like a mixture of sawdust and paint, which adds to the pleasantness. There used to be rows of lockers lining the walls, but now a number of them are missing, and there are in some places big gaping holes in the walls, presumably where a new doorway will be added.

(3) Finally reaching my homeroom, I walk in to find equally attractive changes. The first thing noticed is that there is no flooring in this room either. This holds true for every room in the school. On a good day, all the windows are in place. Unfortunately, the workers sometimes remove windows and cover the area with plastic, which just doesn't provide the same insulation when it is five degrees outside. Consequently, it is not uncommon for us to freeze through the homeroom period. The ceiling, of course, is virtually non-existent, and there appears to be some type of dark liquid oozing down from what little ceiling there is. During homeroom period, we have to read a printed bulletin of announcements because the PA system has been temporarily disconnected. As we stand to say the Pledge of Allegiance, there comes from above the shout of a construction worker, something about needing to move some equipment before a roof caves in. This is followed by quickly moving footsteps, which is always a good sign.

(4) My first period class goes fairly well, which doesn't really matter anyway since it is a study hall. Second period, however, I have English. About halfway through my teacher's lecture on semantics, we are jolted awake by a jackhammer running nearby. This lasts for a good ten minutes, thereby ruining the impact of the lecture and insuring the fact that we will not learn much today.

(5) The day drags on similarly, and finally lunchtime arrives. The cafeteria had actually been almost completed over the summer, so we are able to eat in a fairly clean environment. Even here, however, we cannot escape the sounds of construction as there are workers busy doing things to the hallway just outside the cafeteria.

(6) After lunch comes college algebra. For some reason the heating system works exceptionally well in this room as it is about a hundred degrees. This is in sharp contrast to the rest of the building, which tends to be cold. About midway through this class, the PA system suddenly comes to life with an ear-piercing squeal, followed by an announcement that the fire alarm will be tested momentarily. Sure enough, the alarm works quite well, but it unfortunately distracts us from our linear equations. So much for algebra.

(7) The day ends as I head toward my bus, walking once more through the dirty, drab hallways. There is even more dust flying around now than there was in the morning and the smell is even worse. In fact, the smell is so powerful that you can practically taste sawdust. Finally, I make my way outside where there is a chaotic scene of construction workers pushing wheelbarrows around students who are rushing to catch their buses. It is very nice to realize that tomorrow we will have to go through it all over again.

(8) I never realized how much of an impact the surrounding environment could make on the learning process, but after this experience I am convinced that it is an important aspect of the whole educational process. The renovation process was a distraction to both students and teachers, and I feel it created many unnecessary inconveniences. The old building was not in very bad shape, although it is true that the school needed to expand to accommodate the increasing student population. This problem could have been solved by adding another wing onto the school; it was not necessary to remodel the entire building. Remodeling seriously undermined the learning process for students and the teaching process for teachers.