Democratic Schooling: What Happens to Young People Who Have Charge of Their Own Education?

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A follow-up study was conducted of the graduates of the Sudbury Valley School (SVS), a democratically administered primary and secondary school that has no learning requirements but rather supports students' self-directed activities. Although these individuals educated themselves in ways that are enormously different from what occurs at traditional schools, they have had no apparent difficulty being admitted to or adjusting to the demands of traditional higher education and have been successful in a wide variety of careers. Graduates reported that for higher education and careers, the school benefited them by allowing them to develop their own interests and by fostering such traits as personal responsibility, initiative, curiosity, ability to communicate well with people regardless of status, and continued appreciation and practice of democratic values.

The practice of compulsory education has always been a source of some uneasiness to people who believe in the tenets of democracy. On the one hand, it is recognized that education is essential to democracy: an ignorant person cannot be fully free, and wise, informed decision making in a democracy requires a wise, informed populace. On the other hand, the contradiction between means (compulsory school attendance, state-determined curricula, and authoritarian control in the classroom) and ends (autonomous individuals and a democratic society) is all too apparent to be easily ignored by the thoughtful democrat.

It is not surprising, therefore, that from time to time in our history, concern about the restrictive nature of schooling has led to experiments that give students more opportunity for self-direction. What does seem surprising is that the concern has not been more frequent or deep-seated and that the experiments have not had greater impact. As shown by Goodlad's recent study, schooling in the United States still

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occurs almost entirely in accordance with the teacher-directed paradigms that we have always known as conventional education (Sirotnik 1983). And yet the cry we hear today, certainly louder than that for more student autonomy, is the one that urges us to go farther in the other direction—toward fewer choices, more requirements, more assigned homework, and more total hours under a teacher's direction, as reflected in the reports of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) and the Education Commission of the States (1983).

Has the concept of a more self-directed (and hence more democratic) education, as urged by such writers as Tolstoy ([1861–62] 1983), Neill (1960), and numerous American writers in the 1960s and 1970s, been tried and found lacking? The national mood implies that this is the case, but where is the evidence? It is true that numerous so-called free schools were started in the 1960s and 1970s and that most of them failed as institutions. But their brief life spans and the often loosely defined nature of their educational practices provide no more than hints concerning their educational effectiveness.

There are, no doubt, a variety of reasons for the short lives of these schools and their resulting inadequacy as test cases for the idea of democratic education. But one of the evident reasons is also very likely a major cause for the sparsity of democratic experiments throughout our educational history. People do not want to take chances with their children. When parents and teachers see that children, genuinely given a choice, do not choose to engage in the kinds of activities that everyone thinks of as "school activities," they understandably become nervous. "What if my child falls behind and can't catch up? Maybe he is being spoiled in this school, developing lazy habits, lack of discipline. Perhaps he will be unable to get into college, get a job, keep a job. His life may be ruined." In many ways, conventional schooling may not be appealing, but at least it is known, and the known is less frightening than the unknown. The fact is that in the United States today we have virtually no models of people who have "made it" without conventional schooling. Consequently, we have a nagging feeling that such schooling, whatever

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its defects, must be one of the essential ingredients of success. The only common examples of people who do not take part in much conventional schooling are the truants, who are both rejected by and rejecting of the school system, who quit as soon as legally possible, who come almost always from the lower class, and who frequently do not make it.

And so when an alternative school begins to look not at all like school, that is, when it becomes a real "alternative," it is seen by the adults (and many children too) as failing and is either closed or modified. More traditional academic demands are brought to bear on the students, and the democratic, self-directive elements of the school, although perhaps still held in rhetoric, are lost in practice.

What would happen to young people who are truly allowed to take charge of their own education, who (unlike our truants) are provided with ample opportunities for learning but are free to use them in whatever way they choose or not to use them at all? Would they acquire the knowledge and develop the skills and work habits necessary to be happy, responsible, contributing members of our society? There is little in the educational literature that would help us answer that question. The well-known "Thirty Schools" study (Chamberlin et al. 1942) that shows better college achievement by graduates of progressive experimental schools than by matched controls graduating from more conventional schools does not help here, as the progressive schools, although offering more choices than the conventional schools, did not offer the choice of not doing any school-like activities. To our knowledge, the only follow-up study of people who attended a school where such a choice was available is Bernstein's (1968) rather informal study of former students of Summerhill. Bernstein visited and interviewed 50 former students of Summerhill who were living in and around London. He found almost all of these people to be working, some in jobs that obviously required a good deal of advanced education after leaving Summerhill (there were two physicians, two lawyers, a zoologist, and a university professor in the group). In his descriptions of his visits, Bernstein paints a picture of the typical former Summerhillian as warm, well adjusted, enjoying life, and successful in job or career.

However, Summerhill differed from most schools in more than just the freedom it offered. It was a boarding school; it was expensive to attend; and it was headed by A. S. Neill, whose great strength of character may (as has been argued by Hechinger [1970]) have been the true guiding force of the school. Bernstein's study is a start toward answering the question that we have raised, but one would want to see a number of investigations, some of them less informal, with grad-

uates of other appropriate schools to know that the results were not unique to Summerhill.

One purpose here is to present the results of a follow-up study of the graduates of a democratically organized school called the Sudbury Valley School. To the best of our knowledge, Sudbury Valley is the only school in the United States that satisfies the following criteria: (1) it is administered entirely through democratic procedures by the students and staff members equally; (2) it places absolutely no academic requirements on students and establishes no academic standards for graduation; and (3) it has survived long enough so that there are graduates (albeit few) who have done all of their elementary and secondary schooling there. We believe that the results of this study are relevant to the current national debate on education. At a time when educators are no longer focusing much on the fundamental question of student autonomy in education but rather are debating such issues as the number of years of math or language that should be required, we feel it would be useful to step back and take a look at what happens when nothing is required, if only to put some perspective on the current debate.

Before describing the method and findings of our study, we must say something about the school itself, as it has not previously been described in any detail in the educational literature (though see Chanoff 1981; Gray and Chanoff 1984; Greenberg 1985). We should note here that one of us (David Chanoff) is one of the founding members of the school and continues to teach there part-time. The other of us (Peter Gray) has a child enrolled at the school and therefore is a member of the school's "Assembly" (described later) but is otherwise unconnected with the school.

Description of the Sudbury Valley School

The Sudbury Valley School (hereafter abbreviated SVS) is a private day school located in Framingham, Massachusetts, home to a substantial commuter population, some older industry, shopping malls, and, increasingly now, spin-offs from Boston's Route 128 version of Silicon Valley. The school admits anyone who wishes to enroll, age 4 to adult, paying no attention to previous school records or other indications of ability. It is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and the Independent School Association of Massachusetts and is certified to award high school diplomas. The tuition charge has always been very low compared with that of other private schools in

the area, varying from $700 per year in 1968–69, the first year of operation, to $1,700 in 1984–85. The per-pupil cost of its operation is considerably less than that of the public schools in the surrounding area. Between 1968 and 1981, the years of attendance for those in our study, the student population fluctuated between 55 and 75. The 1984–85 enrollment was 90.

The principal philosopher among the group of parents and others who founded SVS was Daniel Greenberg, a wide-ranging scholar who had previously taught physics and the history of science at Columbia University. Greenberg's philosophy of the school is embedded in a philosophy of human nature and history that emphasizes democratic values (Greenberg 1974*a*). The primary consideration of those who established the school was to develop a place where people of all ages can feel comfortable, dignified, and free to pursue their own interests.

In keeping with this philosophy, the school building, a nineteenth-century mansion located in a relatively rural corner of the town, is furnished more like a home than an institution. Overstuffed couches and easy chairs predominate, though blackboards and seminar tables can also be found. Books are not kept in a separate library but rather line the walls of rooms that serve many different functions, where they can be encountered quite casually. Several rooms are outfitted for special purposes: there is a playroom, an art room, a science lab, a photography lab, and a shop. The building is located on a 10-acre campus that includes part of a small pond.

The school employs a relatively large staff, most of whom are part-time and have careers outside of the school. For example, in 1984–85, there were 13 staff members, only three of whom were full-time. Through this arrangement the school brings many adults, with a wide range of interests, skills, and knowledge, into contact with students at a relatively low cost. The present part-time group includes an editor, a historian, several businessmen, a former research biochemist, a musician, a clinical psychologist, and an Episcopal priest.

In terms of its approach to learning, the school's most conspicuous feature is the complete absence of a curriculum. There are no academic requirements of any kind, not reading or other basic skills at the lower end or vocational or college preparatory courses at the upper end. Instead, the initiative for learning is expected to come entirely from the students. Students have no schedules and are assigned to no groups. The school simply leaves them alone to organize their own time and associate with each other and with the staff as they will. From the youngest to the oldest, they use their day as they wish, socializing, playing, studying, attending classes—alone or in groups—following

some carefully devised plan toward a career goal or simply doing what comes with the moment.

With this orientation, learning takes place in many ways. Most learning (as may in fact be true of people in every setting) is incidental, occurring all the time as the students involve themselves in projects, games, conversations, and other activities that interest them. Often these interests are very intense, and a student will become completely immersed in an activity such as fixing a car, programming the school's microcomputer, practicing the piano, or reading all that can be found on a particular issue or by a particular author. Staff members teach in this setting mainly through informal conversations and through responding to questions. Learning of a more formal sort, however, also occurs. When students express a desire to pursue a topic systematically with a staff member, a tutorial or course is organized. Over the years, courses in music, writing, spelling, arithmetic, grammar, art, cooking, drama, foreign languages, and history have been common, and courses in other areas have come and gone. Sometimes staff members initiate seminars and lectures in their fields of interest, but these too depend on attracting a sufficient number of participants. In addition, when students desire learning experiences that cannot occur at the school, staff members help arrange apprenticeships outside the school.

Another feature that contrasts sharply with other schools is free association among people of all ages. Groups gather for games, sports, classes, projects of various sorts, and conversation. Sometimes these are made up of chronological peers, but more often there is a diversity of ages. Surprisingly, age mixing is common even in formal classes. We have commented elsewhere on some of the educational effects of age mixing (Gray and Chanoff 1984; also see Greenberg 1974*b*). Here we simply wish to note that free association together with self-directed learning gives SVS much of its distinctive flavor.

Central to the school's educational philosophy is the idea of personal responsibility. Students must generate or discover their own interests, decide what goals to set for themselves, and decide how to pursue their goals. A corollary is that they must also judge their own progress. The school offers no institutional evaluations—no grades, no substitutes for grades, no written or oral reports of progress. Of course, students will often solicit and receive critiques and judgments from the staff and others, but these are personal, not institutional, and are not imposed on students.

To receive a high school diploma at SVS, there is one requirement. The student must defend a graduation thesis at a meeting open to all members of the school's Assembly, which includes students, staff,

trustees, parents, and elected public members. Essentially, the thesis is that the candidate is ready to take responsibility for himself or herself in the society at large. Each student has a unique way of presenting and supporting this thesis, which is delivered orally and followed by up to two hours of questions and challenges from the audience. At its next biannual meeting, the Assembly considers and votes on diplomas for candidates who have defended the thesis. As of June 1981, the cutoff date for our study, the school had awarded 78 diplomas, and only one student who had presented a thesis had been turned down. The high success rate of thesis defenses is interpreted by most Assembly members as evidence that students have been cautious and have not presented themselves for graduation until they are sure that they are ready. Thesis defenses are taken very seriously by the school community. Most students attend and listen carefully as candidates articulate their convictions that they have prepared themselves to participate in the adult world. By the time a student is ready to graduate, he or she may have heard dozens of such presentations and many hours of exchanges between candidates and Assembly members. These experiences almost certainly play a role in shaping and focusing the student's maturing conception of his or her future as an adult.

As the learning environment at SVS is centered on the idea of personal responsibility, the organization of the school as a community is predicated on a concept of responsible individuals functioning together. The concept implies egalitarianism and open decision making, which writers on democratic education have spoken of at some length (e.g., Chanoff 1981; Higgins, Power, and Kohlberg 1984; Scharf 1977; Simpson 1971). Sudbury Valley's corporate bylaws invest the "School Meeting," a body consisting of all students and staff, with responsibility for administering all of the school's business. In its comprehensiveness, the SVS School Meeting differs greatly from that of the "Just Community" experiments reported by Kohlberg, Wasserman, and Richardson (1975) and by Scharf (1977) and from other well-known meetings such as those at the Putney School, St. Paul's, and even Summerhill. Convening once a week and operating on a one-person/one-vote principle, the School Meeting deals with the entire range of administrative functions, including financial management, staff hiring, building and grounds maintenance, public relations, the legislation of all rules of behavior, and the election of clerks and committees to handle the operating details of the school's business.

In contrast to personal relationships at the school, the School Meeting operates quite formally. A complete agenda is published in advance of the meeting, and the standard rules of parliamentary procedure are meticulously observed. The meeting's primary goal is efficient,

fair, democratic administration of the school. Attendance at the meeting is completely voluntary, and because any given agenda may be rather tedious, the majority of members tend to show up only for matters that concern them. The regulars, who keep watch faithfully, are people interested in administration per se or those with a mature commitment to the school as an institution. They tend to be older students and staff, joined by a sprinkling of younger students who are fascinated by the give-and-take of argument, by parliamentarism, or by some other feature of democratic decision making. The regulars, together with single-issue voters (the 6-year-olds who have trooped in to vote on closing a dirty playroom or the photography students who wish to buy a better enlarger), make up the attendance at a given meeting—perhaps a quarter of the school's population, sometimes less. High-intensity issues, on the other hand, will attract a crowd. In any case, numbers are rarely a concern. The school operates on the assumption that although every member of the community must have the same rights (not only to vote but also to privacy, access to activities, free association, etc.), each person will exercise them differently depending on age, interests, personality, and a host of other factors.

Although the School Meeting is ultimately responsible for handling discipline, it is the "Judicial Committee" that deals with problems as they arise, from the passing argument that has gone too far to occasional cases involving stealing or drugs. Made up of a chronological cross section of the school (staff as well as students) and drawn by lot, this committee changes monthly, so everyone serves from time to time. The committee receives and investigates complaints, rules on guilt or innocence, provides mediation, and issues sentences. If the committee feels that a situation is particularly serious or intractable, it will refer it to the School Meeting. Anyone who feels aggrieved by a sentence may likewise appeal it to the meeting. The Judicial Committee is central to the social education that occurs at the school. Here the ethics made explicit in the School Meeting's rules of conduct are applied to real situations. Because everyone serves, people get to see all sides of issues; yesterday's offenders are today's judges, trying to resolve the same kinds of problems that they themselves were involved in. Very young members of the committee often watch rather than participate actively, digesting the procedures and perspectives of those with more experience.

With its School Meeting and Judicial Committee, SVS has developed a way of governing itself that is consistent with the sociopolitical ideals of the society at large. The school is a working democracy. It has developed ways for children and adults to function together so that the older members can make use of their experience and wisdom

while the younger ones are protected from unwarranted intervention in their work and play.

Purpose and General Methods of the Study

The foregoing description brings many questions to mind. Some have to do with social and moral development. Just how do people of such different ages, interests, and abilities get along with one another? Do children in this kind of setting go through predictable stages of social/moral development? What sorts of values do students develop in this atmosphere? Other questions, which are much more frequently asked than those just mentioned, have to do with the ability of the school's graduates to pursue higher education or careers. Can they get into college and complete college work? Can they get good jobs? Are some career options cut off as a result of going to SVS? In the present study we chose to focus on the latter set of questions. Although the school's philosophy centers more on issues having to do with the first set of questions, the latter set is in some ways more basic. No matter how much one may believe in the democratic values espoused by SVS, no one would want to send a child to a school that would leave the child unprepared to function effectively in the larger community. By far the most common criticism of the SVS philosophy is that children who are not compelled to do schoolwork will fail to acquire the knowledge, skills, and work habits needed for effective functioning in our complex society.

Our approach in the study was to survey the school's graduates to gain information about their pursuits in higher education and careers and to obtain their opinions about the impact that SVS had on those pursuits. The SVS files show that between June 1970 (the first month in which there were any graduates) and June 1981 (our cutoff date for purposes of the study), 78 students received high school diplomas from SVS. Another four left the school at age 16 or older without presenting a thesis or receiving a diploma but with no plans for further secondary schooling. Our goal was to survey all 82 of these former students, whom we shall refer to as "graduates." The addresses of many of these people were known to SVS staff members, and others were obtained by contacting their parents or friends whose addresses were known. In all, we were able to obtain the addresses of 76 of the 82 graduates. To each of these we mailed a questionnaire, with a letter of explanation and a stamped, return envelope.

The questionnaire was quite long and complex, consisting of 29 items. Eight of these items were tables to be filled out and most of the

others involved one or more open-ended questions with space for written answers. In terms of the kinds of information requested, the items can be grouped into three sets. One set asked for background information: schools attended prior to SVS, activities and experiences while enrolled at SVS, and roles that parents and others outside of SVS played in their education. A second set asked for factual information about schooling, jobs, and other activities since leaving SVS. And a third set asked the graduates to evaluate the effects of having attended SVS, particularly regarding how it influenced their ability to pursue higher education and careers. Graduates who did not return the questionnaire were sent a reminder letter, and any who still did not return it were telephoned and asked if they would be willing to participate in a telephone interview. If the graduate agreed, an appointment for the interview was made. The telephone interviews lasted 30–60 minutes and touched on all the issues that were included in the questionnaire, though often in abbreviated form.

To supplement the written questionnaires and telephone interviews, we conducted lengthier personal interviews—held usually in one of our homes or in the graduate's home—with 15 graduates who still resided in eastern Massachusetts. Four of these people had done all of their primary and secondary schooling at SVS, and six others had done all of their secondary schooling (beyond sixth grade) there. Both of us were present at these semistructured interviews, which lasted from one to two hours and were tape-recorded. In cases in which the interviewee had not already completed the questionnaire, our questions covered the questionnaire items in the same way as the telephone interviews did. In addition, in all personal interviews, we asked questions designed to explore, in greater depth, the graduate's experiences with college or work since leaving SVS and the graduate's path of activities from the first years at SVS to the present.

As we noted earlier, one of us had been involved with the school since its inception and was therefore known to the graduates. We were concerned that the graduates' responses might be colored by their knowledge of this investigator's involvement with the school, and we used several means designed to offset this possibility. Our cover letter that accompanied the questionnaire included the statement, "Please be as candid as possible in answering all questions, including those about the ways that the school may have either benefited you or handicapped you for future schooling or employment. It is important that we be able to assess, as accurately as we can, all of the effects that the school has had on the lives of its graduates, and only candid responses will enable us to achieve that goal." We used Boston College stationery and emphasized that the study was being sponsored by

Boston College. The telephone interviews were conducted by the one of us who was unknown to the great majority of the graduates. At personal interviews we acknowledged openly the problem of our involvement with the school and emphasized our interest in knowing the interviewee's true feelings, both positive and negative, regarding his or her experiences at SVS and the effects of these experiences. We cannot be sure that these methods were completely effective, but nothing in the course of the study led us to believe that respondents were less than candid. Those who made negative comments about the school in interviews did not seem uneasy about making them.

We were also sensitive, of course, to the fact that our own biases would influence the formulation of questions and the interpretation of responses. To guard against the possibility that these might prevent us from discovering problems that resulted from an SVS education, we took care to word questions in such a way as to invite graduates to inform us of such problems, and we actively followed up comments that hinted at problems. In addition, to reduce reliance on our interpretations of responses, we phrased our most sensitive questions in categorical, yes-no form before asking for more subjective explanations.

Findings

Response Rate and Classification according to Amount of Previous Schooling

In all, we obtained responses from 69 graduates, a response rate of 91 percent of the 76 who could be located, or 84 percent of the 82 total graduates.[1] Of these, 47 filled out the questionnaire, 15 were interviewed by telephone, and seven were interviewed personally. (Eight who returned the questionnaire were also interviewed personally, making a total of 15 personal interviews.) To compare graduates who started SVS early in their education with those who started later, we categorized them into two groups. Group 1 was those who had completed no more than sixth grade before starting SVS, and group 2 was those who had completed seventh grade or higher. The median and range of years of schooling before coming to SVS, years enrolled at SVS, age at graduation, age at time of survey, and years between graduation and survey are shown separately for the two groups of graduates in table 1.

TABLE 1

Background Variables for Group-1 and Group-2 Graduates

BACKGROUND VARIABLE	MEDIAN (and Range)	
	Group 1	Group 2
Last grade completed before SVS	3 (0–6)	9 (7–11)
No. of years enrolled at SVS	10 (4–13)	2.5 (1–6)
Age at time of graduation	18 (15–21)	18 (16–20)
Age at time of survey	21.5 (19–27)	26 (19–32)
No. of years between graduation and survey	3 (1–8.5)	8.5 (1–13)

NOTE.—Group-1 graduates are defined as those who had completed no more than sixth grade of traditional school before enrolling at SVS, and group 2 are those who had completed seventh grade or higher. There were 14 group-1 and 55 group-2 graduates surveyed.

Family Backgrounds, Reasons for Enrolling at SVS, and Use of Time at SVS

To aid in interpreting our findings concerning the post-SVS experiences of the graduates, we gathered information regarding their family backgrounds, previous school backgrounds, reasons for enrolling at SVS, and recollections of how they used their time at SVS. To save space, we shall simply list our main conclusions concerning these issues before moving on to the issues that are more central to the present report.[2]

1. The great majority of the graduates came from middle-class homes and had college-educated parents. In all, 83 percent of the respondents had at least one parent with a college degree, and 74 percent had at least one parent whose occupation seemed best described as either business (managerial or self-employed) or professional.

2. To the best of our ability to judge, about one-third of the group-1 respondents (those who came to SVS prior to seventh grade) and about two-thirds of the group-2 respondents (those who came after seventh grade) had experienced serious school problems prior to coming to SVS. These could be categorized as follows: (1) rebelling, as indicated either by consistent refusal to go to school or consistent refusal to follow the instructions of teachers or other school authorities (28 re-

spondents); (2) learning difficulties, as indicated by consistently low grades or diagnosis of learning disability (11 respondents); (3) emotional problems in school, as indicated by severe anxiety, withdrawal, or depression (15 respondents).

3. The extent of parental belief in the educational philosophy of SVS at the time that their children were enrolled varied widely. At one extreme were parents who enrolled their children at a young age, despite no unusual problems, completely on the conviction that this was how they wished their children to be educated. This situation predominated for the graduates who came to SVS in the primary years. At the other extreme, some parents, especially of older enrollees, enrolled their children out of sheer desperation or because their rebellious son or daughter had threatened to run away from home if not enrolled. But in most cases the decision to enroll a student at SVS seemed to involve a combination of a previous school problem with some degree of parental belief in the SVS educational philosophy.

4. We asked questions designed to assess the roles of staff, parents, and other individuals in the graduate's education while enrolled at SVS. In no case did a graduate report that any such person played a *directive* role. Staff were generally seen as important models, resources, and supporters of the student's self-initiated activities and, in many cases, so were parents. In a few cases, parents were viewed as attempting to exert some authoritarian control over the student's academic learning, but whenever this occurred, it was seen as having little effect.

5. Our questions designed to assess how the graduates spent their time at SVS revealed enormous variability. One generalization that can be made, however, is that none of them spent their time as they would have in a traditional school. In response to our question to "list any courses or tutorials you took at SVS," 29 percent of the group-1 graduates and 56 percent of the group-2 graduates indicated that they took none at all. In response to our request to estimate the percentage of time at school that they spent "studying or doing academic work of the type that might be included in regular school courses," there was great variability, but the average of the percentages given was 8 percent. Other questions indicated that, overall, larger amounts of time were spent socializing, working on various practical and artistic projects, reading for enjoyment, and engaging in sports and games. (In retrospect we can see why our respondents identified little of what they did as "academic work." Is the reading of biographies or historical novels for enjoyment to be regarded as academic work? If a student multiplies fractions in order to cut a recipe down to two-fifths, is the student doing math or cooking? Is a discussion of politics among friends—one of whom may or may not be a staff member—classified

as socializing or as academic work in political science? Some respondents told us that it simply made no sense to try to distinguish academic from nonacademic activities at SVS.)

Going to College

There are many reasons why one might believe that graduates of SVS would be unlikely to go to college. The school attracts many students who previously experienced serious problems in school, places no particular value on going to college, and has a philosophy that is directly opposed to many of the educational procedures that occur in colleges; therefore, one might expect the students to develop an anticollege attitude or even to incubate a fear of traditional educational procedures. The school provides no transcripts and refuses to honor the requests of admissions officers to rank or evaluate students, so one might expect the doors of selective colleges, at least, to be closed to SVS graduates. Students are not required to do any academic work (and, as we have just seen, do very little academic work that they recognize as such) and do not take tests, so one might expect them to be deficient in both the subject-matter knowledge and test-taking skills that are required to get into college and to cope with academic demands once there. Indeed, the basic premise of our graded system of education, which assumes that even a few weeks missed from the orderly progression of classroom work may leave students seriously behind, would predict that SVS graduates should not be able to handle college work. From this perspective, perhaps the most surprising result of our survey is that a large number of SVS graduates have gone on to colleges, including highly selective colleges, and have fared well there.

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the group-1 and group-2 graduates according to the amount of postsecondary schooling that they had obtained at the time of the survey and also lists their major fields of college study. Just over 50 percent of all the graduates (64 percent of group 1 and 47 percent of group 2) had either completed a college degree or were matriculating in a degree program at the time of the survey (categories A, B, and C of table 2), and another 25 percent had done some post-secondary schooling but had not matriculated in a degree program (category D). These figures almost certainly underestimate the total who will eventually get college degrees, as several in categories D and E (of table 2) had definite plans to enroll in degree programs. We could find no obvious relation between the kinds of problems that graduates had experienced in school before SVS and their likelihood of going to college after SVS. For example, of the 11

TABLE 2

Number of Group-1 and Group-2 Graduates in Each Category of Higher Education at Time of Survey

Category	Group 1*	Group 2†
A (completed bachelor's degree or higher)	3	15
B (student in bachelor's program)	4	9
C (completed or student in an associate program)‡	2	2
D (some post-SVS schooling, not matriculating)	2	15
E (no formal schooling after SVS)	3	14
Total	14	55

NOTE.—Groups 1 and 2 are defined in table 1.

* Major fields of study for the nine group-1 graduates in categories A, B, and C are the following: art (2), languages (1), math/music double major (1), music (1), nursing (1), psychology (2), undecided (1).

† Major fields of study for the 26 group-2 graduates in categories A, B, and C are the following: anthropology (2), art (2), art history (1), business management (1), chiropractic (1), communications (2), counseling (1), economics (1), engineering (1), geology (1), health (1), music (1), nursing (1), paralegal (1), physical therapy (1), physics (1), premed (1), psychology (1), sociology (1), theater (3), urban affairs (1).

‡ This category consisted of two-year and three-year degree programs with a liberal arts component (including nursing programs).

who were judged to have had serious learning difficulties in school before SVS, four had already received college degrees and a fifth was enrolled in a degree program at the time of the survey.

Category D (of table 2) includes individuals with a wide range of formal educational experiences. Two had accumulated a total of two or more years of college credits; three had earned certificates from professional schools (seamanship, cooking, and electronics); one was a full-time student of ballet; and the rest had completed anywhere from one to 10 college or professional school courses. Five graduates in category D (all in group 2) had been enrolled in a college degree program and had left. As explanation for leaving, two cited lack of money, one cited disenchantment with college life, one cited family (her children), and one gave no reason. We were able to find no evidence of any SVS graduates leaving college because of academic failure.

The colleges attended by SVS graduates cover the entire range of prestige or selectivity, from four at one end that receive the highest

academic ranking (five stars) in Fiske's (1982) *Selective Guide to Colleges* to nonselective community colleges at the other. Six out of seven (86 percent) of the colleges of matriculation for the group-1 graduates who had enrolled in a four-year degree program and 13 out of 24 (54 percent) of those for the group-2 graduates are among the approximately 220 most selective colleges in the United States, according to Fiske (1982).[3] How did the graduates get into these selective schools without a high school transcript of grades? Our survey revealed that about half of those who matriculated at one of the colleges in Fiske's top 220 went first to a less selective college for at least one semester, apparently using their record there as a basis for transferring. The others went to the selective college directly and were apparently admitted on the basis of SAT tests, letters of recommendation, and, in some cases, special interviews or tests administered by the college.

Of the respondents who had already completed a bachelor's degree, six were enrolled in graduate degree programs or had already received a graduate degree. Two of these were Ph.D. candidates at highly prestigious universities (one in theoretical physics and one in anthropology), another was in a master's degree program (in clinical psychology), another had earned three master's degrees (in communications, international relations, and law and diplomacy), and the remaining two had each earned a master's degree (one in music and one in social work).

Our question asking graduates to explain why they did or did not go to college revealed that those who went did so to pursue a particular career and/or for less specific reasons generally having to do with a desire to broaden themselves. Interestingly, none gave cynical reasons such as, "It is the expected thing to do," or "To please my parents." Most of those who did not go to college indicated that they felt college was unnecessary to pursue their career interests or to further their own learning. Among these were many with obviously high intellectual ability, some of whom were pursuing careers in the arts or had developed their own businesses.

Graduates' Evaluation of Effects of SVS on Their Pursuit of Further Education

To obtain the graduates' assessments of the effects that their SVS education had on their ability to pursue education after SVS, we asked each graduate the following question: "Do you feel that your attendance at SVS rather than a more traditional school has *handicapped* you in any way having to do with your ability to pursue post-high-school

education (for example, in getting into a school of your choice or in coping with the demands of a school to which you were admitted)? Yes _____ ; No _____ . If 'yes,' please note how it has handicapped you." This question was followed immediately by another question, identical to it except that the word "handicapped" was replaced by the word "*benefited.*" Since it is reasonable to expect differences on these questions between graduates who pursued a college degree and those who did not, we separated the data for the college and noncollege subgroups of groups 1 and 2. The college subgroup is defined as the combined categories A, B, and C of table 2, and the noncollege subgroup as the combined categories D and E. Table 3 summarizes the yes-no data for each of the four subgroups. In the following paragraphs, we discuss the findings for first the college and then the noncollege subgroups.

The college subgroups.—As can be seen in table 3, 13 of the 35 graduates in the college subgroups responded yes to the question about SVS being a handicap for further education. As reasons for this response,

TABLE 3

Number of Graduates in Each Subgroup Who Showed Each Combination of Yes-No Responses to Questions about SVS as a Handicap and as a Benefit for Further Education

Response Combination	Group		Group		Total
	College	Noncollege	College	Noncollege	
No handicap, yes benefit	5	3	14*	15	37
Yes handicap, yes benefit	4	0	9†	3	16
No handicap, no benefit	0	0	3	6*	9
Yes handicap, no benefit	0	0	0	3‡	3
Omitted both questions	0	2	0	2	4
Total	9	5	26	29	69

NOTE.—The exact wording of the two questions is given in the text. Groups 1 and 2 are as defined in table 1. The college subgroup is defined as categories A, B, and C of table 2, and the noncollege subgroup as categories D and E.

* Includes one who omitted the handicap question.

† Includes one who responded maybe to the handicap question.

‡ Includes one who omitted the benefit question.

eight stated that they were weak in one or more academic areas or skills (math being mentioned most often) when they entered college. Three others reported feeling handicapped in applying to college because they lacked a high school transcript. The remaining two stated that they initially felt intimidated by college because they perceived it as so different from SVS (one said she postponed going to college for several years for this reason). All 13 of these respondents also said yes to the questions about SVS being a benefit for further education, and most of them made it clear that the benefit outweighed the handicap.

Turning now to the question about SVS being a benefit for further education, 32 out of 35 graduates in the college subgroups, including all nine in college group 1, answered yes to this question. The specific reasons given as benefits are too numerous to list, and therefore we placed them as best we could into a number of categories. The two most common categories (each spontaneously mentioned by about half of the graduates in the college subgroups) were the perceptions that (*a*) the graduate's motivation to continue learning was greater as a result of attending SVS (included were statements about being "curious" or having "a good attitude toward learning"); and (*b*) the graduate was more responsible for or more in charge of his or her own education as a result of attending SVS (included were statements about being "self-directed," "responsible," or "able to find things out on my own"). Other categories of benefits mentioned by five or more graduates in the college subgroups were as follows: (*c*) lack of fear of authority figures (such as college professors), which improved interactions with such people and hence improved learning; (*d*) development of skills and knowledge in specific fields of interest to a greater extent than would have been possible at another school (arts, writing, and math were mentioned by different people in this category); and (*e*) developing personal strengths or overcoming personal problems, which facilitated learning. There were no obvious differences between the group-1 and group-2 college subgroups in the kinds of benefits mentioned.

In personal interviews, several in the college group elaborated on the differences that they perceived between themselves and their college classmates. Some saw themselves as behind their classmates in certain substantive areas when they started college and others did not, but all of them felt advantaged in terms of their attitude. Some of this advantage seems to stem from their feeling that it was their own choice to go to college. One interviewee, an honor student in college who had been a student at SVS from age 9, put it this way: "A lot of the people there (in college) have had more experience in some of the substantive areas. But the attitudinal difference seems to allow me to catch up very quickly. The substantive things are trivial to acquire. . . . My attitude

is that I'm going to college for fun and I fully intend to enjoy myself by taking full advantage of whatever it has to offer. The attitude of many people there is that they're going because they were kind of corralled. It never occurred to them that there was something else they could do."

Another theme that was elaborated on in considerable detail by several of the interviewees was the ease of communication that they felt between themselves and their professors in college. For example, one graduate who had come to SVS at age 13 and had gone on to earn a bachelor's degree in economics told us, "I would hang out in the economics department, just as I would hang out in the office at SVS, just hang out and talk with professors. I always felt I had as much right to be there as anyone else. Most of the students felt a tremendous gap between themselves and the professors—they weren't used to relating to the 'enemy' in that way. I didn't have that kind of feeling." This person went on to talk about a club that she had organized to bring students and faculty together.

We were initially surprised that none of the graduates who had gone to college claimed to have a problem adjusting to the formal structure of college—the required courses, assignments, tests, and so on. We pursued this issue in each of the interviews with graduates who had gone to college, and the responses we obtained led us to understand why they did not see themselves as handicapped in this way. First, those who went to college felt that it had been their own decision to go, that they knew full well what they were getting into, and that doing required work and tests was part of the bargain. The same people who had rebelled against required schoolwork before coming to SVS, when they had no choice in the matter, were not rebelling against required work in college because it had been their own desire to go to college. Second, the kind of discipline needed to do well in college, where teachers do not take roll, collect daily homework, or generally keep an eye on each student from day to day, is in some ways more like the discipline needed at SVS, where students are completely on their own, than at a traditional high school, where students are constantly supervised. It is this that led so many of our respondents to perceive themselves as advantaged in college because they were "responsible" or "self-directed." Finally, some students, by the time they graduated from SVS, were eager for a more structured kind of learning than they had found at SVS. The organized course was, for them, a new and refreshing way to learn. For example, one of our interviewees, who had started SVS at age 9 and had gone on to graduate summa cum laude from a state college, began explaining her adjustment to the structure of college by saying, "I left SVS yearning to discover

what I had missed." And another, who had started SVS at age 8 and had virtually never used a textbook before starting college, had this to say, "Textbooks are so systematized, so easy. You know exactly what they want."

The noncollege subgroups.—One might expect that many of the graduates who had not pursued a college degree would attribute this to a deficit produced by their SVS experience or their lack of traditional schooling. But such was not the case. Of the 34 graduates in the noncollege subgroups, only six (all in group 2) said yes to the question about SVS being a handicap in the pursuit of higher education (see table 3). Two of these stated that they felt that they would be handicapped by lack of a high school transcript if they applied to college, two others stated that they felt that college work would be difficult or impossible because of their weak academic backgrounds, and the remaining two gave no reasons for feeling handicapped. Of these six, three also answered yes to the benefit question, two answered no, and one omitted it.

In contrast, 21 of the graduates in the noncollege subgroups answered yes to the question about SVS being a benefit for further education, and most of the remaining indicated that the question was irrelevant (either responding no to both the handicap and benefit questions or omitting both questions—see table 3). These latter generally indicated that they had no basis for responding, since they had not pursued any formal schooling since leaving SVS. Those who answered yes to the benefit question applied the question to whatever schooling that they had experienced since SVS or to their perceived potential for further schooling or to their ability to learn on their own or in their work. The main recurring themes for these people were those of being self-directed, responsible, and comfortable about asking others for help and advice when they needed it—very similar to those of the graduates in the college subgroups.

Career Choices

We asked each graduate to describe all significant jobs since graduation and to tell us about current career goals. Based on this information coupled with that about the graduates' post-SVS schooling, we placed each graduate into one of eight broad categories according to the type of job or career he or she was in or was making definite progress toward achieving. The numerical results of this categorization are shown in table 4, separately for the college and noncollege subgroups of group 1 and 2. Although this table shows the general fields that

TABLE 4

Number of Graduates in Each Subgroup Either Employed in or Actively Training for Each Career Category

Career Category	Group 1		Group 2		Total
	College	Noncollege	College	Noncollege	
Arts	3	4	6	2	15
Health and helping	2	0	8	3	13
Business management	1	0	2	5	8
Clerical and sales	0	0	0	6	6
Academic	1	0	4	0	5
Applied science and technology	0	0	3	2	5
"Special skills"	0	1	0	8	9
Miscellaneous	2	0	3	3	8
Total	9	5	26	29	69

NOTE.—Groups 1 and 2 are as defined in table 1. The college and noncollege subgroups are as defined in table 3. The specific occupations included in each career category are listed in the text.

the graduates have chosen, it does not say anything about the actual jobs that they have obtained. In the following paragraphs, we list the principal job held by each graduate or other evidence of progress toward the graduate's chosen career at the time of the survey. Since the group-1 graduates are of special interest and since there are relatively few of them, we do this in somewhat more detail for them than for the group-2 graduates.

Perhaps the most striking observation in table 4 is that half of the group-1 graduates (7 out of 14) were pursuing careers in the broad category of the arts. Of the four of these in the noncollege subgroup, one was dancing as a student member of a world-famous ballet company; another was developing a portfolio as a landscape photographer while supporting himself by doing studio work in portrait photography; another was studying as an apprentice to a potter; and the fourth, whose goal was a career as a rock musician, was performing as lead singer and bassist for a local rock group in the evenings while working

at a music store during the day. Of the three in the college subgroup, one had a degree from a prestigious school of music and was earning most of his living as a pianist and music arranger; another was completing a bachelor's degree in fine arts, with drawing and painting as specialties, and was aiming at becoming a professional artist and perhaps a teacher of art; and the third had recently earned a bachelor's degree with a major in studio art and was planning further training and a career in either commercial art or interior decorating. Since the median age of these seven graduates was 21 years (range 19–25), it is too early to tell how far they will develop in their chosen careers or how long they will continue in them. However, considering the competitive nature of the arts, the success that they have achieved so far seems quite remarkable.

We turn now to the seven group-1 graduates who are not pursuing careers in the arts. Of the six of these in the college subgroup, one was completing a bachelor's degree with a double major in music (piano) and mathematics, had been awarded Phi Beta Kappa in his junior year, and had plans to work for a doctoral degree in mathematics; another, who had completed a bachelor's degree in psychology, was working as a quality control manager in a large business; another was working as program director of a residence for the mentally ill while completing graduate work in clinical psychology; another, a male, was a nurse working in a hospital; and the remaining two, who were both in their first year of college, had indefinite career plans (and were placed under "miscellaneous" in table 4), though one was leaning toward the study of languages and the other toward a career in social work. The only group-1, noncollege graduate who was not pursuing a career in the arts was a self-employed mechanic and machinist.

The group-2 graduates, being generally older than the group-1 graduates (see table 1), were more likely to be further along in their careers. We now list their occupations, with reference to the categories shown in table 4. The largest category for group 2 is that labeled "health and helping," which includes four social workers (broadly defined); a nurse; a physical therapist; a chiropractor; a funeral director; a social work student; and two premedical students. The category labeled "the arts" includes an oboe player for a professional symphony orchestra; a recording artist, lead singer, and lyricist for a nationally known rock music group; a silversmith (jewelry maker); a director of children's theater; a stage manager for a professional theater; and three full-time students in the arts (one in theater, one in photography, and one in graphic design). The category labeled "business management" includes a founder and president of a small computer consulting and software development corporation; a personnel director and executive

vice president of a moderately large manufacturing company; a budgeting planner and building manager for a furniture design and manufacturing company; a sales manager and buyer for a small metal-finishing company; a manager of a natural food store; a manager of accounting for a large urban taxi company; and an assistant manager of inventory for a department store. That labeled "clerical or sales" includes a sales representative; an inventory receptionist; a records clerk for a company; a hostess at an inn; a waiter; and a bartender. The category labeled "applied science and technology" includes two products engineers; a computer technician; a geology student; and a student of radio production. Of the four graduates pursuing careers labeled "academic," three were students aiming for doctoral degrees and university careers (two in anthropology and one in theoretical physics) and the fourth was employed as a historian for the U.S. Air Force. The category labeled "special skills" (defined as practical skills that did not fit well into any of the other categories) includes a pattern maker who headed a department in a high-fashion dressmaking firm; a self-employed baker; a chef and part owner of a restaurant; a captain of a cruise boat; a self-employed automobile mechanic; a carpenter; and two surveyors. Finally, the "miscellaneous" category includes a foreign service officer for the U.S. government; a director of the conventions and tourism bureau in a large city; a paralegal student; two homemakers with children; and one person who was unemployed and had not taken definite steps toward a career.

The conclusion that anyone would have to draw from this list of careers and occupations is that SVS graduates are showing no signs of dropping out of the mainstream of U.S. society. They are clearly in the thick of things, occupying the whole gamut of jobs and careers that one might expect of a group of young adults coming from middle-class backgrounds.

Relation between Career Choices and Activities at SVS

We noted earlier that there were great individual differences in the ways that graduates spent their time at SVS. Very often those who devoted unusual amounts of time to particular activities continued to pursue those activities as careers when they graduated. For example, the four graduates pursuing musical careers were all deeply involved with music at SVS. The professional oboist indicated in his questionnaire that he used most of his time at SVS to practice his instruments and study music theory. The professional pianist told us in an interview that he spent many hours at school experimenting with the piano,

just trying things with it without taking formal lessons. When he first began studying music formally, at a leading school of contemporary music after graduating from SVS, he found that he already knew, based on his own discoveries, a great deal of what he was being taught about modern music theory. The rock star wrote in his questionnaire, "The school was loaded with talented people to talk, jam, and create with." The graduates pursuing careers in the visual arts had also all devoted great amounts of time to their arts while at SVS. For example, the landscape photographer began doing photography seriously at SVS beginning at age 13. At that age he helped build the school's darkroom, and during the years after that he would commonly spend all day, two or three days a week, in the darkroom developing his own photographs.

The musicians and artists were not the only ones who began developing their professional interests and skills at SVS. The two mechanics, for example, both spent much of their time at SVS working on cars. The professional pattern maker spent much of her time sewing and developing new patterns—she was making all of her own clothes by age 16. The baker did a large amount of cooking at SVS, and this led to a cooking apprenticeship at a restaurant. The cruise boat captain spent as much of her time as possible working at a seacoast area where she could study navigation and sailing. A particularly interesting example is the graduate who (at age 22 and without a college education) was president of a highly successful computer consulting and software development corporation with several employees. He came to SVS after seventh grade, with a poor school record, and developed an interest in computers. He managed to get a company to lend the school a computer and taught himself to use it, there being no others at the school at that time who were knowledgeable about computers. He also discovered his interest in business at SVS as head of the school's supply corporation.

Several graduates who followed more academic pursuits also devoted much of their time to their fields while at SVS. One student, who had been at SVS from age 8, told us how an early interest in science fiction led to an interest in physics that led to mathematics. He spent much of his time during his last years at SVS studying physics and mathematics on his own, occasionally going to a staff member for help. The doctoral candidate in theoretical physics similarly developed his interests and abilities in physics and math at SVS largely on his own. The clinical psychologist wrote that her interest in psychology was already present when she first came to SVS, at age 13, and that she pursued the interest by reading college textbooks and other works on psychology found in the SVS library.

Some of the graduates in social service professions also noted a direct relation between their activities at SVS and their present careers. A social worker involved in community organization, for example, wrote that his greatest interest as a student at SVS was school meetings and the various committees involved in running the school and noted that these served as "a testing ground for later career training and practice in community organization." Other graduates, some in the helping professions and some not, noted a relation between values that were central to their experience at SVS, such as respect for individuals, and their approach to their current work.

Graduates' Evaluation of Effects of SVS on Their Pursuit of Careers and Employment

To obtain the graduates' overall assessments of the effects of their SVS education on their ability to pursue careers or employment, we asked a pair of questions that were identical in wording to the handicap and benefit questions that we had previously asked concerning further schooling, except that the words "to pursue post-high-school education" were replaced by the words "to obtain employment, maintain employment, or pursue your career objectives." In all, only five graduates said yes to the handicap question (59 said no, and five omitted this question), whereas 45 graduates said yes to the benefit question (17 said no, and seven omitted this question). Of the five who said yes to the handicap question, two explained that they felt low esteem when they left SVS because they had attended a school that was so different from the ordinary but that they eventually got over this feeling; the other three indicated that SVS had fostered some laxity in their punctuality or self-discipline, which they had to overcome when they entered the world of work.

The explanations given by those who responded yes to the benefit question were similar to those given regarding the pursuit of higher education. By far the most common category of benefit mentioned had to do with being responsible and self-directed in their work. In elaborating on this, some explained that they had learned how to take initiative and get things done at SVS and that these abilities were very valuable in their current work. As one respondent put it, "The school gives one the realization that whatever you want you have to work for, and my life since leaving SVS has been a good example of that." Another benefit often mentioned was that because of their SVS background, graduates had the ability to deal directly and openly with authority figures at the workplace, lacking a sense of fear or awe of

such people. In line with the point made in the previous subsection, many graduates indicated that they had a head start in their careers, compared with people coming from traditional schools, because of the amount of time that they had been able to devote to it at SVS. Stated directly by several graduates, and implicit in the statements of many others, were the additional points that because of their SVS experience, these graduates had chosen to pursue careers that truly interested them rather than possibly more secure but less interesting careers and that they felt great enthusiasm for their work. One respondent seemed to sum up many of the benefits expressed by the whole group, stating, "I am attentive, communicate well, look people in the eye, ask lots of questions, work independently, and give lots of effort to whatever I do."

Graduates' Overall Evaluation of Their SVS Education

The final question asked on the questionnaire (and in interviews) was the following: "All in all, are you glad that you attended SVS during the years that you did, rather than a more traditional school? Check one: Yes, very glad _____ ; Yes, moderately glad _____ ; No, it would have been better for me not to have attended SVS _____ . Please note the main reasons why you are glad or not glad you attended SVS." A total of 56 graduates (12 in group 1, 44 in group 2) responded yes, very; 11 (one in group 1, 10 in group 2) responded yes, moderately; two (one in each group) omitted the question; and none responded no.

Of those who responded yes, moderately, eight gave explanations that indicated that they were happy at the school, generally adding that the school was important for their personal or social development, but that it did not sufficiently foster their academic or vocational development. The other three indicated that they learned a great deal at the school but that socially the school had a poor effect on them, causing them to feel different from other people their age and to miss out on the kinds of social activities that revolve around a normal high school life. These three, and several others, indicated that the school would have been a better place for them if it had been larger.

At this point it would be redundant to present all of the kinds of reasons given by the graduates for being glad that they had attended SVS, as many of them are similar to those presented previously concerning the effects of the school on their pursuits in higher education and employment. In addition to these reasons, many stated that they were glad they attended SVS because it allowed them to enjoy their

childhood, to be free, and to feel respected in a way that they had not before. Some wrote specifically about the importance to them of the democratic procedures at the school. Many wrote of the personal and social values that they acquired at SVS as most important. The latter are illustrated by the following quotations, from the questionnaires of three different respondents, which seem to us to capture sentiments held by many of the graduates. "I am grateful to SVS for the education it gave me about people, life, and sharing. I feel I am far more tolerant of other individuals who are very different from me. At SVS *everybody* is an individual. At public school to be different in any way is to be avoided at all costs." "The articulation of democratic philosophy, particularly the debates on responsibility of individuals, impressed me deeply. I continue to try very hard to know what my responsibilities are and to carry them out. And that, of course, has been helpful in every area of my life." "I'm glad I went there and experienced the people I did because it turned me from a rebellious child into a person in control of my life. . . . I acquired the confidence in myself to do anything I want. I can fit into any social situation comfortably. I have a successful, positive outlook on things, and other people see that quality and look upon me with a benevolence and a desire to help me along and to be involved with me."

Concluding Comments and Discussion

According to the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), we are "A Nation at Risk" because we do not require children to do enough schoolwork. We are falling behind Japan in industrial and technological production, according to the Education Commission of the States (1983), because Japanese children are required to do more schoolwork than are our children. At a different level, in home after home—rich and poor alike—parents are anxious about whether their children are working hard enough at their schoolwork so as not to fall behind the other children and be left out of the competitive world of education, jobs, and life.

In the present report we have outlined the experiences of a group of young adults who graduated from a school where no schoolwork was required and little (at least of the traditional sort) was done and where curricula, academic requirements, tests, and grades did not exist. Our principal conclusion is that these people, including both those who started the school early in their primary years and those who started in their secondary years, have not suffered as a result of attending such a school. They have gone on to good colleges and good

jobs. They have become, or are clearly en route to becoming, productive members of our society, contributing to the economy in nearly the entire range of ways that people can contribute. They are taking responsible positions in business, music and art, science and technology, social services, skilled crafts, and academia. How are we to explain this finding—that people who were not required to do any academic or vocational work in school are doing well by even the most conventional standards of doing well—that runs so counter to the conventional wisdom?

One possible line of explanation is that what we are looking at is a selection effect—that the graduates of SVS were a special group of people to begin with who were destined to do well no matter what sort of education they had. Although SVS does not have any entrance requirements, only a self-selected few choose to enter. According to this view, SVS graduates may do well for the same reason that Exeter graduates do well, though the mechanism of selection is different in the two cases. To pursue such a line of explanation, let us consider the ways in which SVS graduates were special before entering the school.

Clearly, as our survey showed, the SVS graduates do not represent the entire spectrum of socioeconomic classes with regard to their family backgrounds. Nearly all of them came from middle-class homes. We have not provided empirical evidence that an SVS-like education would work for children coming from economically and culturally impoverished homes. Perhaps it can work only for children of the relatively well-to-do. This certainly would limit somewhat the potential significance of SVS as an educational model, although a demonstration that middle-class children do not need coercive schooling or an imposed curriculum to learn what they need to know to do well in our society would still have quite enormous implications.

The problem of how to rectify the inequalities in achievement that result from social stratification is certainly an important one and one that, according to many observers (e.g., Jencks 1972), is not being solved by the traditional school system. On theoretical grounds it seems to us that a school like SVS might have a better chance of accomplishing this task than the traditional school. As we spelled out in the section that describes the school, SVS is not defined simply by lack of curriculum. It is a community of people that centers around democratic values that involve notions of individual integrity and respect. The membership of this community includes a group of adults (particularly part-time staff members) from various walks of life, all of whom serve as potential role models, guides, and bridges between the developing child and the larger world. Most of those who have analyzed the effects of poverty

would agree that it is the lack of such models and bridges and perhaps also of feelings of dignity, not the lack of authoritarian commands for learning, that creates the achievement gap between the children of the poor and those of the well-to-do.

More critical perhaps than the social class limitation is the possibility that the individuals who we studied were dispositionally different from the majority of young people, even of the same social class, before they came to SVS. Our questions designed to understand the factors leading to enrollment at SVS led to the identification of two such factors—difficulty adjusting to public school and parental openness to, if not outright agreement with, the SVS philosophy. Perhaps many of these young people had difficulty with public school precisely because they were dispositionally oriented toward self-control and resistant to control by others. This disposition may have been innate or may have resulted from rather nonauthoritarian home environments. This line of reasoning might lead one to think of SVS not as a model appropriate for everyone but as a model of alternative education for children with a certain kind of "special need" (the need to be in charge of their own education). Still, even from this most limiting interpretation, our findings indicate that no harm is done by allowing children who rebel against school to have their way, that is, by allowing them to go to a school where they are permitted an equal voice in decisions and where they are not required to do schoolwork. This is by no means a trivial conclusion.

Our own view is that explanations in terms of who enrolls at SVS are not as compelling as other kinds of explanations, specifically, (*a*) the lack of fit between what is normally taught in school and the kinds of skills and knowledge that are actually needed to function well in careers and higher education, and (*b*) the positive attitudinal and learning benefits that accrue from being part of the SVS community. This view is clearly most consistent with the graduates' own evaluations of their experiences.

An analysis of the characteristics that lead to high employability would probably include such traits as a strong sense of responsibility, an ability to take initiative and solve problems, a desire and ability to learn on the job, an ability to communicate effectively, and, perhaps most of all, a high interest in and commitment to the field in which employment is sought. These are precisely the kinds of characteristics that the graduates see as having been most fostered by their experiences at SVS. Rarely would an employer be concerned about a prospective employee's knowledge of ninth-grade algebra, tenth-grade biology, or eleventh-grade history. However, if the person had developed special skills and knowledge by direct involvement in the field in which em-

ployment is sought, as was the case for many of the SVS graduates, that would be of great interest to an employer. Thus, it does not seem surprising to us that SVS graduates have done well in jobs and careers. It does not seem to be the kind of observation that requires explanation in terms of unique qualities that may have resided in them prior to enrolling at SVS.

More surprising than the observation that SVS graduates have done well in jobs and careers is the observation that they have also done well in college. Not having taken the usual high school courses, many if not most of these individuals must have been behind most of their college classmates in knowledge of the materials taught in such courses, yet they seem to have had little trouble catching up. As we have seen, the graduates themselves explain this in terms of their positive attitude about learning, their feeling of responsibility for their own learning, their ability to find things out on their own, and their lack of inhibitions about communicating with professors and asking for help when needed—characteristics that they regard as having been fostered by their SVS experience. This view is consistent with that of directors of at least some college learning centers, who have found that the distinction between those who do well in college and those who do not has more to do with "learning to learn" skills than with knowledge of content areas (Heiman, in press).

Some supporters of "free schooling" or "deschooling," in focusing on the negative effects of traditional schools and the merits of freedom, have seemed to imply (or occasionally have stated explicitly, e.g., Neill 1960) that children are innately wise and good—a view that is properly (and not pejoratively) labeled as "romantic" (Kohlberg and Mayer 1972). Our own much less romantic view, which we have elaborated on elsewhere (Gray and Chanoff 1984), is that what is innate in the child is not goodness and wisdom but rather a strong drive to acquire the skills, knowledge, and values of the culture in which he or she develops. From this view, the primary objectives of a school need not be to instill motivation or to prescribe courses of study. Instead, our observations of Sudbury Valley graduates suggest the value of two very different goals: (1) to make educational resources available in a supportive but nonintervening way, and (2) to create a milieu in which young people are expected to make their own educational decisions.

Given a school's successful embodiment of these two complementary goals, it appears that students will prepare themselves for success in terms of the generally accepted societal definitions of that word. We are well aware that such an inference is based on a small sample. Unfortunately, we do not at this point know of other sources that lend themselves to study. We hope that such sources will come to light and

will be investigated. The implications regarding our ability to structure effective educational institutions that accord with our society's sociopolitical ideals are too significant to dismiss for want of data.

Notes

1. Of the seven graduates who could be located but did not respond, four informed us that they preferred not to participate, and the remaining three, although expressing willingness to participate, had not done so by the completion date of the study. We know enough about the post-SVS education and careers of these individuals and about their feelings concerning their SVS education to be confident that including them would not have changed the overall results of the study in any important way.
2. Some of this information was obtained from a questionnaire that we sent to the parents of the graduates. Further information regarding this questionnaire and a more detailed report of the findings may be obtained by writing to the authors at Boston College.
3. Fiske lists a total of 265 colleges but notes that some are included because of special features other than academic selectivity. We eliminated schools that did not receive at least a three-star academic rating, which reduced the list to about 220.

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