

# The Parkway Program

by Steve Rosenzweig

Secondary Ed and all other students in education-----Beware! Beware of the institutional hassle and surroundings of a traditional school. Get smart, get with it, be bold, be creative and go to Philadelphia's Parkway Program and learn what teaching is all about.

The discipline and school is going to be taboo in the future. So, when it's time to student teach, get into the system of the future. The system that's happening at Philadelphia's Parkway Program.

Parkway is a free school at the secondary education level. Unfortunately, you El Ed majors may not have a way out. But, the lucky few in secondary education can student teach at the Parkway and see some of the changes taking place in our new educational system.

It's very informalities of the traditional school. No silly channels to go through when you want something to be done. It gives the teacher the freedom to be bold, innovative, creative and honest with his students. The Parkway Program and all it's fantasy out of Dr. Eisenstein's Ed. 314 classes, but it's here and

copies of it are opening throughout the country.

The "School Without Walls" is in and you students at Capitol can have the opportunity of a lifetime to teach there. Of course, many of you may want to teach fulltime in such an environment, but when the economic squeeze pinches you, you'll get your hair cut, buy some new suits, and begin your babysitting job at a Woodrow Wilson, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, or "who you have" traditional school. So, if you have the opportunity to intern at the Parkway, do it. Maybe when you go out to teach in the traditional school you'll retain some of Parkway's ideals. Remember, the best way to change a system is from inside it. The learning you develop at Parkway might just be applied inside the traditional school to help chance it.

Now, let's talk about some fantasies of the Program. Don't get too excited and start visioning students roaming around the streets because they don't feel like going to class that day. Don't envision it as a school of selected "A" students. And don't imagine teachers and students sitting around in class getting high. This is all folklore which is connected to the Parkway Program.

Let's rid thee of thy fantasy. First, the student must attend class. It's not the Summerhill environment where the students go to class when they're ready. They must attend classes and do all that is required of them as in a traditional school. But, they can choose the courses they want which is more than I can say for most traditional schools. Of course there are boundaries placed on these they want to take. Because, as a Woodrow Wilson High, they must meet certain state requirements in history and english. But, Parkway students don't have to take U.S. History, World History, Grammar, English Poetry, or the likes just to mention a few, unless they desire to do so. They can choose history options from courses concerning the depression, the South's view on the civil war, the Roaring 20's, or even one entitled Future Shock which is based on the current best seller. In English they can meet state requirements with courses such as Fantasy in Literature, Great Love Stories, or even my class, Sportwriting. The courses are quite varied and sometimes are stretched a bit to meet state requirements. But, the state does not say how a student should be graded, so at Parkway, written evaluation forms are used as opposed to Abraham Lincoln's letter grading or Thomas Jefferson's numerical grading.

Secondly, students are not picked from a select group of applicants. They are drawn by lottery from any applicant in the city school system as well as a few from suburban and parochial schools. The school is quite homogeneous both in ability levels and ethnic backgrounds. There are more blacks at Parkway, but this is to be expected because the Philadelphia school system has a black enrollment of over 65 percent.

And finally, the students at Parkway don't sit around in class and get high. They do good constructive work and learn as well as any Room 222 student. The dress may be extremely informal for both the teacher and the student, but the education has nothing to do with the dress code.

Questions about Parkway have been raised as to where the "school without walls" holds its classes. Also, how can the students learn basic skills of english and math when their courses seem to be so specialized? These two questions are very valid and commonly asked.

To answer, let me first say that limited classrooms in size and number are in use at the four separate branches of Parkway. Though Parkway is one system it is divided into four smaller units so to make it more personal to the student. The units based around the city are Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta. Each community, as they're called, has it's own limited space for classroom use. Usually the instructor will find his own meeting place. It may consist of a room in a church, a bank's conference room, or a museum in the Philadelphia Art Museum. Fortunately, some businesses in Philadelphia are receptive to the idea of Parkway and open their doors to them for meeting places. Of course, the four communities, which consist of about 180 students each, can always use more space.

Now, the next question deals with where the students get their needed basic skills. The basis of the Parkway program is the

tutorial session which meets four times a week. The tutorial is a combination advisory period and basic skills class. Students lacking in math skills will be placed in a math tutorial just as students lacking in english skills will be placed in an english tutorial. Some of the more advanced students may be able to choose from a sewing or problem-solving tutorial. The tutorial has it's emphasis on individualized instruction as implied by it's name. As I said, tutorial meets four times a week. The other day is left in each community for town meeting. This is where all tutorials of a unit get together and discuss any problems that they may have. It's like an assembly, but the students usually preside over it.

Discussing some of the disadvantages of Parkway let's first mention overabuse. It's not so prevalent now, but when the Program first began students took their new freedoms and carried them to extremes until they were made to realize that the school wasn't in a totally free environment. Students would miss class, be lax on work, and on occasion use quite vulgar language. Today most students know they must attend classes and do their work. Four-Letter words may still be used, but in a serious and non-vulgar tone. There are some students who still overabuse their freedoms, but these are the ones who are asked to leave the Program.

Another disadvantage of the program is the breaking of meaningful relationships with students because of a large turnover of students teachers. The Program encourages meaningful relationships between student and instructor. But, in many cases a relationship is short lived because of a large number of interns coming and going. In all units the student teachers are equal to or outnumber permanent staff. The student is constantly forced to change good relationships with his teachers.

Also, students will try to take advantage of interns. They will tell him, "we don't do it this way him, "Parkway," but the intern is usually advised beforehand of such games and is prepared for such a situation.

Some advantages of the Program include the students wanting to do the work. The student realizes he's in a unique learning environment and doesn't want to ruin it for himself. He will be motivated by

the ideals of the Program itself, and maybe try somewhat harder.

Also, because of the large homogeneity which echoes throughout the system, the student has the chance to talk or argue with someone of a different ethnic group in a relaxed and open atmosphere.

The biggest advantage is to the black male student. He's the student who is afraid to go to school in his own neighborhood because of gang violence. Parkway gives him the chance to go to school without this internal fear. This is because the Program is located in the center of the city which seems to be "neutral turf" for Philadelphia's gangs. Whether the Parkway student is a gang member or not, while in Center City, everything is cool.

The system is working. You can see that for yourself after being there for a short time. It's working as well as any traditional school in Philadelphia, but it has that something extra that makes it better. It's hard to describe the system and what that little extra is that makes it seem so great. It might be something charismatic that attracts both the students and myself to the Parkway Program. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so if you have a chance, get involved with the Parkway.

In conclusion, let me say, whatever it is about this system that attracts it to the students, there should be and will be many more Parkways like this in our society in years to come.

## Letters To The Editor

Dear Editor:

This week I attended a meeting where we discussed the progress made in confronting a very serious problem in today's society—drugs. We cited new educational programs, new inroads to scientific studies, progress of acceptance, and other important methods. All these programs are beginning, going, and on-going; but who is listening to us?

The adults of tomorrow are listening. They are listening with a wary ear while intently watching for us to prove that our society and its individual members do not need stimulants, irritants and depressants to function on a day-to-day basis. They are thinking! They are thinking about what they say should be done to eradicate our problems, but they are also confused by the example of what we are doing.

Why are they confused? At the meeting we discussed our "progress" in a room filled with the smoke of cigarettes, cigars and pipes. The burning sensation in our lungs and our nervousness was anesthetized by the drinking of our favorite brewer's art. As I sat there I visualized an average (below average or above average)

student at our program raising his/her hand to ask some questions of our dedicated programmers. This young adult seemed disoriented, shaken and worried. The same condition seems to exist for all persons when they see (or know of) someone close to them (a parent, sister or uncle?) participating in the very common usage of sleeping pills, tranquilizers, stimulants, alcohol and tobacco.

The student's real questions are: What is the real difference for the youngster who wrecks his/her life via the thrilling sting of the needle or by the tang of a alcoholic-rendering, family-wrecking beverage? What is the difference to the individual's life and happiness when he/she chooses the smoke of a "joint" to the cool refreshing taste of the best selling menthol filter-tipped, cancerous cigarette?

Is there a difference? Is there a better way? Why haven't most people found the answer to this better life without "crutches"?

We ask, "Why Drugs?!!" Their answer has been, "Why not?"

Don't you think it's time for you and me, and everyone else, to begin practicing what we are preaching?

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