

THE MERROW REPORT
1: FRANK MCCOURT: Talking to the Teacher
2: Does School Reform Equal Reform School? With John Goodlad

Recorded February 8, 2000

(MUSIC)

JOHN MERROW

I'm John Merrow. You know him as the Pulitzer Prize winning author of "Angela's Ashes." What you may not know about Frank McCourt is that he spent 27 years as a classroom teacher in New York City's public schools.

FRANK McCOURT

The main thing that the kids taught me was to tell the truth. And just to say "We're in this together." Because you're learning about teaching, you're learning about your subject and you're learning about the human heart and you're learning what the chemistry of your class. All of this is going on, and it's very complicated, and nobody's ever written about it.

JOHN MERROW

I'll talk with Frank McCourt about teaching then and teaching now. Also this hour, what's the difference between school reform and reform school? Is there a difference? A veteran educator explains why reforming schools is a bad idea. All that's coming up after this.

(MUSIC)

JOHN MERROW

My guest in the studio is Frank McCourt. You most likely know him as the author of "Angela's Ashes," the 1996 childhood memoir that won him the Pulitzer Prize, and is now a major motion picture. What you may not know about Frank McCourt is that he spent 27 years in the classroom teaching English in New York City public schools, an experience he writes about in his second book "'Tis." And I wonder, Mr. McCourt ... first of all, thanks very much for being here.

FRANK McCOURT

Thank you.

JOHN MERROW

I wonder if I could ask you just to read a little bit from "'Tis" about that ... that first teaching job on Staten Island.

FRANK McCOURT

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In the middle of March, 1958, there was a notice in the paper, "Vacancy for English teacher at McKee Vocational and Technical High School, Staten Island." The assistant principal, Miss Seestead(?) examines my license and takes me to see the principal, Moses Arrola(?), who doesn't move from his chair behind the desk, where he squints at me through a cloud of smoke drifting from his nose and from the cigarette in his hand. He says "This is an emergency situation. The teacher I'd be replacing, Miss Mudd, has made an abrupt decision to retire in the middle of the term." He says "Teachers like that are inconsiderate and make life hard for a principal." He doesn't have a full English program for me. I'd have to teach three classes in social studies everyday, two in English. I don't know anything about social studies. He puffs and squints and says "Don't worry about it" and takes me to the office of the academic chairman, acting, who says I'd be teaching three classes of economic citizenship and here's the textbook. "Your World and You." Mr. Arriola smiles through the smoke and says your world and you, that should cover just about everything.

I tell him I know nothing about economics or citizenship and he says "Just stay a few pages ahead of the kids. Everything you tell them will be news. Tell them this is 1958. Tell them their names. Tell them they live on Staten Island and they'll be surprised and grateful for the information." By the end of the year, even your name will be news to them. He takes me to see Miss Mudd. When he opens the classroom door, boys and girls are leaning out the windows calling to others across the schoolyard. Miss Mudd sits at her desk, reading travel brochures, ignoring the paper airplane that zooms over her head. Miss Mudd has retired. Mr. Arriola leaves the room and she says to me "That's right young man, I can't wait to get out here. What's this? Wednesday? Friday's my last day and you're welcome to this loony bin. Thirty-two years I've been at this and who cares? The kids? Parents? We teach their brats and they pay us like dishwashers. What was the year? Nineteen-twenty-six. Calvin Coolidge came in, I came in. I worked right through him and the Depression then, Hoover and Roosevelt and Truman and Eisenhower. Look out that window, you've got a good view of New York harbor from here and Monday morning, if these kids are not

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driving you crazy, you'll see a big ship sailing by and that'll be me on the deck waving, waving and smiling because there's two things I never want to see again in my life with God's help: Staten Island and kids. Monsters. Monsters. Look at them. You'll be better off working with chimpanzees in the Bronx Zoo. What's this? Nineteen-fifty-eight? How did I ever last? You'd need to be Joe Louis. So, good luck, son. You're going to need it."

JOHN MERROW

That's Frank McCourt reading from "'Tis," his memoir of growing up in New York City and becoming a teacher. Well ... and you go on of course to talk about those first few days and weeks and you must've felt like just turning and running.

FRANK McCOURT

It was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. And I had done hard things before. The first of ... surviving that childhood in Ireland, I think. But then when I came here, uh, all the jobs I had were menial jobs, laboring jobs. Loading and unloading trucks and ships. The ... the piers, the warehouses, down around la-- ... (Inaudible) Street and Laight(?) Street. So, it was very, very hard physical work and I was in great shape but to go before five classes a day, fi-- five days a week of American adolescence is the most daunting thing I've ever done.

JOHN MERROW

And of course, the kids knew it. They, uh ...

FRANK McCOURT

Oh, they knew it. But the thing is, I think what saved me was ... was my accent. Because if I'd walked in there as an ordinary American high school teacher, they would've said "Here we go again." But, uh, the minute I opened my mouth they'd say "Hey, yo, teach, you Scotch or somethin'?" And they were interested in where I came from. And, uh, and then when one of the girls said "Hey teach, you're cute." (Laughs)

JOHN MERROW

And you turned beat red.

FRANK McCOURT

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I ... (Inaudible) yeah. I was very ... I didn't-- I didn't know anything about American teenagers. They're a dangerous species. And I ... I have ... sometimes I have to look back on that and give myself credit for survival. Just in a kind of a dogged, desperate way going in there everyday.

JOHN MERROW

You didn't ... you didn't get much help from supervisors.

FRANK McCOURT

Oh, you got no help at all. No. You were thrown into the classroom and that was it. And they'd come in and observe you. They ... if you were a ... if you were a substitute teacher, as I was, you were observed three times a term. So that's six times a year. And generally, their observation reports were negative. And of course they were negative. How could you ... and they themselves, the supervisors and the administrators were generally people of limited teaching experience.

JOHN MERROW

Let ... let's connect this conversation to teaching today as we go along through your own memoir. I mean, do you suppose it's that much different for a new teacher today? You were thrown in, sink or swim.

FRANK McCOURT

No. It's not much different at all because first of all, human nature doesn't change. Kids are the same. Kids are tough. And kids are constantly seeking out your weaknesses. That's their business anyway. They pit ... pit themselves against you. And the people who were ... who are the supervisors generally, I'd say, 95 percent of them have had that limited teaching experience. And all they do is sit there and they'll ... they'll write up an observation report...

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) So it's a kind of "gotcha" attitude?

FRANK McCOURT

It's "gotcha," yeah. Because and they ... they have ... they have less teaching experience and they get higher salaries. That's the craziness in the education system. That the farther you get from the classroom, the more money you get. The more ... the more you're rewarded.

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JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) You get rewarded for getting out of teaching.

FRANK McCOURT

You get, yeah, you get your reward for leaving the classroom. And there's something wrong with that. It would be like to saying to a brilliant surgeon "Leave the operating room and take this desk and we'll give you much more money."

JOHN MERROW

Crazy system. Now, in terms of getting help, uh, I keep thinking of my own teaching. Uh, I started teaching in 1965. We didn't get much help then. I have a ... a daughter who's teaching in middle school up in East Harlem. Same thing with her. She got no ... no help. It's a sink or swim attitude.

FRANK McCOURT

And how could you get any help? The people who are up ... the ... this ... how can they ... how can they help? They can only help you by providing you with supplies, taking care of disciplinary problems and, uh, and, uh, reducing your class size...

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) Well, those are ...

FRANK McCOURT

... if possible.

JOHN MERROW

... those would be big helps right there. But, uh, in terms of a ... of the supervision and,... the adults who are supposed to be helping you become a better teacher with all kinds of rules, I wonder if, I should ask you to read this pa-- this little section about your chairman, the academic chairman, right there.

FRANK McCOURT

Oh, the chairman.

JOHN MERROW

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Who comes in to make sure you're doing everything right.

FRANK McCOURT

There's a note from the academic chairman requesting I go to his office next period, the third, my prep period when I'm supposed to plan my lessons. He tells me I should have a lesson plan for every class and there's a standard form for lesson plans. I should insist all students keep notebooks that are clean and note. I should make sure their textbooks are covered. Points off if they don't. I should check to see that windows are open six inches from the top. I should send the student around the room at the end of every period to collect litter. I should stand at the door to greet classes entering and again leaving. I should print clearly on the blackboard the title and name of every lesson.

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) Exc-- but was that true? Was all these shoulds, shoulds, shoulds?

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Oh, yeah. Well, these are stand-- and they'll ... they'll ... they'll observe you.

(OVERLAP)

JOHN MERROW

And I have to tell you a story because my daughter, the rules now are you have to have your lesson plan on your desk visible in the upper lefthand corner ...

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Upper lefthand corner, yeah.

JOHN MERROW

... of your desk. And the supervisor came into her ... the teaching room. It's supposed to be on your desk. Now, she doesn't have a desk.

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

JOHN MERROW

But the rule still obtains.

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FRANK McCOURT

Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

And it wasn't in the right place. It was in the middle under some papers...

FRANK McCOURT

(Laughs)

JOHN MERROW

... and so, somebody wrote her up and said...

FRANK McCOURT

All demerits.

JOHN MERROW

... you're in violation of Article 62 of the contract.

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Yeah. Yeah.

(OVERLAP)

JOHN MERROW

So, things don't change.

FRANK McCOURT

No, they don't change there because these people have nothing else to do but go around bothering teachers.

JOHN MERROW

Yeah. You ... you write in there about, "Catcher in the Rye."

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

Remember that for me. How did you end up giving your kids "Catcher in the Rye?"

FRANK McCOURT

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I was desperate. Uh, there were very few books in the book room. There was, uh, one called "Giants in New York," which was practically unreadable. It was an interesting book. It's about Scandinavian immigrants. But the kids, that was comp-- completely outside their experience. Then there was "Silas Marner" which kids called the dirty old man book. And they didn't want to read it. So, out of pure desperation I had them, uh, read the "Catcher in the Rye." And there was ... there was ... the parents were very curious because they ... they're seeing their kids reading this book. They'd never seen their kids read a book. "So, what is it you're reading there, Joey?" And some of the parents pounced on the book and they found out. And they read it. They found there's a scene where Holdenkopf(?) is ... is in a hotel room with a prostitute, although nothing happens. That was enough. And they called up the principal. Seventeen parents called up the principal. And he comes storming into the classroom and plucks the book, "Catcher in the Rye," from the desk and puts it in a bag and takes it away again.

JOHN MERROW

And you never saw him again?

FRANK McCOURT

Never saw ... never saw the books again. But the kid-- the kids went and got their own copies and read the book.

JOHN MERROW

The ... the ... you actually had the kids pay for the books.

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Yeah, I did. Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

They'd contribute to ...

FRANK McCOURT

Oh, a nickel, a dime, a quarter. Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

And then, there's a part in the book where the kid's saying "Mr. McCourt, this says 'crap.'"

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FRANK McCOURT

Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

What kind of a book ... I've never seen a book ... and therefore, they wanted to read it then.

FRANK McCOURT

Well, that was Staten Island. Staten Island was very puritanical in those days. I don't know what it is. They used to have a posse going on to the newsstands, making sure they weren't selling "Playboy" magazine.

JOHN MERROW

Well now, it occurs to me trying Frank, that, uh, sort of teaching as a subversive activity...

FRANK McCOURT

Uh-huh.

JOHN MERROW

... was you and the kids against the administration.

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

That that was one way to get the kids interested is they were doing something they weren't supposed to be doing?

FRANK McCOURT

Well, if ... if ... there was what they call a curriculum. But the curriculum was ... is ... is devised by people who had been out ... out of touch with kids for years. So, teachers, uh ... adventurous and imaginative that teachers will go their own way.

JOHN MERROW

I ... I remember, I used to teach in federal prison and I smuggled books in that the ... the inmates, you know, all men wanted to read. And there was a piece of that as well. Was they were defying authority...

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FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Uh-huh. Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

... even from inside the prison. I guess that works as a motivating tool with kids.

FRANK McCOURT

Well, yeah of course things loosened up after my "Catcher in the Rye" period where everything was banned. Catch-- "Catcher in the Rye" wasn't banned. It was certainly-- it was banned in certain schools. Now, it's required reading with Cliff Notes, study guide and everything. But then, the floodgates opened in the 1960s when ... when ... when, uh, books like D.H. Lawrence's ... "Lady Chatterly's Lover" and Henry Miller started coming in. And now ... now the kids can read anything except certain books are not allowed in the schools.

JOHN MERROW

Do ... do you miss teaching?

FRANK McCOURT

Oh, yeah. I miss it because well, I wouldn't have the energy for it now. Uh, I miss it because of the immediate ... the immediate results you get for it. You don't know about the long ranges of it. You don't know what you've done for them or to them. But you see, you know, when the-- when a class is going well. You've had that experience yourself. You know what it's clicking. And you see from ... and you see them sit up. And you see kids with the ... with the short attention span. They're paying attention because whatever is going on in the classroom is magic. That was the part that I loved.

JOHN MERROW

Now, you must, however, know what's happened to some of your students, particularly since "Angela's Ashes." They must ... kids have been coming out of the woodwork ...

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Oh yeah. I have ... I get ... I get dozens of letters and e-mail and ... and encounters on the streets and when I ... whenever I do, uh, a reading anywhere in the country, there they are.

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JOHN MERROW

And are many of your former students teachers? I ask that because this morning, just by chance, I met the brother of one of your former students and she's a teacher out in Brooklyn now.

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah. (Overlap) We had a number of them. Not too many. I ... that ... that used to depress me a bit when I'd ask the seniors every ... every spring for the 18 years that I was in Stuyvesant, how many of you intend ... intend to become teachers? And only two raised their hands in ... in the 18 years.

JOHN MERROW

Wow.

FRANK McCOURT

Uh, because there are ... they're all ... they're all primed for college. For...

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) Or Stuyvesant (Overlap) high school. Yeah.

FRANK McCOURT

They're not gonna ... they ... no parent, uh, wants, uh, a son or daughter to come home from college and say "Guess what, dad, I'm going to be a teacher."

JOHN MERROW

Now, you have a daughter. What if she came home and said "Guess what, dad? I'm going to be a teacher."

FRANK McCOURT

Well, she's talking about it already. And I'm very glad. I think she'd be ... she'd be great with small kids.

JOHN MERROW

So, would you recommend to young people that they consider teaching?

FRANK McCOURT

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Well, I know from my own experience that at the end of your career, if not during your career, you can say you've done something substantial. Something satisfying. Something very useful. That's the way I felt in my last day of teaching.

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) Oh, yeah?

FRANK McCOURT

I was able to look back in ... in ... with satisfaction.

JOHN MERROW

So you didn't become Miss Mudd, the teacher you replaced in Staten Island?

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) No. No. I ... I ... I walked out of the ... I walked out ... I felt very, very good about having been a teacher.

JOHN MERROW

Yeah. You have a couple of passages in here where you're thinking about being in the subway. You're in ... you're thinking about how you wish you could have books...

FRANK McCOURT

Mmm.

JOHN MERROW

... the college textbooks and so on ...

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

... and so forth. And I wonder if when you see kids today, if you identify with those kids. Wonder if they're striving the way you were striving.

FRANK McCOURT

Well, I know. You ... you see kids. I ... especially the kids who are going to the, uh, the city, the ... the City University ... schools like ... like Baruch and, uh, City College and Brooklyn College.

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And you know they're striving. You know, mostly they have to have jobs and so on. And I identify with them.

JOHN MERROW

But ... I think what I'd like to do is ... ask you to stick around while we take a short take break and talk about the condition of public schools today and maybe ask you about ... there's a wonderful passage in here where you sort of become a teacher when you throw away the curriculum and so you learn to teach ... so we'll be back in ... after a one-minute break ... back with Frank McCourt, the author of "Angela's Ashes" and "'Tis." So it's one minute. Don't go away.

(MUSIC)

JOHN MERROW

Welcome back to the MERROW Report. I'm John MERROW and my guest is Frank McCourt, author of "Angela's Ashes" and "'Tis," which is a ... the lat-- the latter book is a memoir of growing up ... here in New York and becoming a teacher and of course this being the MERROW Report, we're talking about education. I was intrigued by ... there's a passage where you ... it's ... it's almost like you're really becoming a teacher. You've been teaching for a while. You're at Stuyvesant High School. But would you mind reading that?

FRANK McCOURT

I followed the teacher guides. I launched the pre-fabricated questions at my classes. I hit them with surprise quizzes and tests and destroyed them with the ponderous detail of examinations concocted by college professors who assemble high school textbooks. Everyday, I teach with my guts and ... looking behind my desk at the front of the room, playing the teacher game with the chalk, the erasure, the red pen, the teacher guides, the power of the quiz, the test, the exam. I'll call your father. I'll call your mother. I'll report you to the governor. I'll damage your average so badly, kid, you'll be lucky to get into a community college in Mississippi. Weapons of menace and control.

A senior, Jonathan, banks (Inaudible) on his desk and wails "Why? Why? Why do we have to suffer with this shit? We've been in school since kindergarten 13 years. Why do we have to

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know what color shoes Mrs. Dalloway was wearing at her goddamned party?" What are we supposed to make of Shakespeare troubling deaf heaven with his bootless cries? And what the hell is a bootless cry anyway? And when did heaven turn deaf?" Around the room rumbles a rebellion. I'm paralyzed. They're saying "Yeah, yeah" to Jonathan who hauls his head back to ask "Mr. McCourt, did you have all this stuff in high school?" And there's another chorus, a "Yeah, yeah" and I don't know what to say. Should I tell them the truth that I never set foot in a high school till I began teaching in one? Or should I feed them a lie about a rigorous secondary school education with the Christian Brothers in Limerick? I'm saved, or doomed, by another student who calls out "Mr. McCourt, my cousin went to McKee on Staten Island. She said you told them you never went to high school. And they said you were an okay teacher anyway because you told stories and talked and never bothered them all these tests."

Smiles around the room. Teacher unmasked. Teacher never even went to high school and look what he's doing to us, driving us crazy with tests and quizzes. I'm branded forever with the label: teacher who never went to high school.

"So, Mr. McCourt, I thought you had to get a license to teach in the city." "You do." "Don't you have to get a college degree?" "You do." "Don't you have to graduate high school?" "You mean graduate from high school, from high school, from, from, from." "Yeah, yeah. Okay. Don't you have to graduate from high school to get into college?" "I suppose you do." (Inaudible) grills teacher carries the day and word spreads to my other classes. "Wow, Mr. McCourt, you never went to high school and you're teaching at Stuyvesant? Cool, man." And into the trash basket I dropped my teaching guides, my quizzes, test, examinations. My teacher knows all mask. I'm naked and starting and over. And I hardly know where to begin.

JOHN MERROW

That's so wonderful. I mean, that ... seachange, a life changing moment.

FRANK MCCOURT

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(Overlap) Yeah, yeah. You have to find your own way.

JOHN MERROW

And what was your way?

FRANK McCOURT

My own way, you have to discover your own style and that ... that takes a long time (Inaudible) nearly 30-- really 30 years in the classroom consid-- with ... with ... community colleges and so on. And it took me 15 years to ... to become a teacher. To fi-- to become comfortable in the classroom. To ... to find my own style. To go my own way and to do ... and they did leave me alone at Stuyvesant. I had to say that for the ... the principal and the ... academ-- the chairman of my department.

JOHN MERROW

But you say, to find your own way. But you'd been to college ...

FRANK McCOURT

Mmm.

JOHN MERROW

... and you'd been told about teaching. (Overlap) There's a teacher training...

FRANK McCOURT

Well teachers ... to teacher train ... they ... these are professors who ... who wouldn't know what to do in a college ... in ... in a ... in an English high school class. They wouldn't not ... they have all kinds of theories of ... there was a ... a course down at NYU called "Principles and Practices of Secondary Education" taught by a high school principal who is now an assistant professor or something like that. He didn't know anything about teaching. You couldn't ... you ... you have to get into the classroom. It's like, uh, Michael Jordan in college was not given great credit. He was not ... an A player. But then, he went to the Bulls and becomes the ... the greatest basketball player ever. He had ... but he ... and there are kids in ... who imitate him. You can't imitate Michael Jordan. You can imitate Hemingway but you'll never be Hemingway.

JOHN MERROW

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But does this mean that you ... you just don't believe in teacher training?

FRANK McCOURT

It has to be done by teachers. It has to be done by in the classroom. It has to be an internship. That you can't sit in the ... in the college classroom and talk about teaching unless you have teachers come in, veteran teachers, who will come in and talk ... well, what's it like. What the chemistry of a class is like. And how to open up the kids and how ... and then a lot depends on yourself. How you open up yourself. I know it's a ... it's a bit of a cliché, this opening yourself up. But you have ... you have to do something like that. You have to do something that's individual.

JOHN MERROW

So you ... can a good teacher be trained? A good teacher is born, not made?

FRANK McCOURT

Well, it ... a good teacher ... can you teach somebody how to write a poem? You can't. You can help them. You can suggest and hint and suggest but, uh, I think ... I think there are ... a good teacher is ... you can't make a teacher. I think ... there is an innate quality, there's a personality ... but then, I think the only way of ... of finding out is to be in the classroom three or four years in front of the kids and you'll find out. We got ... there was something in the paper recently about ... about ... I think it's four out of five teachers drop out within the first five years.

JOHN MERROW

Well, no. It's more like 30 percent drop out ...

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Is it?

JOHN MERROW

... in the first five years. But in cities, it's 50 percent.

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Yeah, yeah.

JOHN MERROW

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It's still a very high dropout rate.

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Yeah, yeah.

JOHN MERROW

It's a lot higher than for medicine or ...

FRANK McCOURT

Oh, sure. Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

... preaching or any of those ...

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Never drop out of med-- medicine.

JOHN MERROW

But, so if you ... what would you say are the two or three most important qualities ... a good teacher has to have or has?

FRANK McCOURT

Well, I discovered, not because of ... of any moral or ethic imperative, I discovered the main thing that the kids taught me was to tell the truth and to say ... and just to say "We're in this together."

JOHN MERROW

So, a good teacher has to listen...

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Be honest.

JOHN MERROW

... and be able to learn.

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah. Oh yeah, oh, that's the main thing. That's the main thing about teaching that I discovered: what I learned as a teacher. Because if you're not learning while you're teaching, you're not teaching. Because you're learning about teaching, you're ... you're learning about your subject and

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you're learning about the human heart, you're learning about the chemistry of your class. All of this is going on. And it's very complicated. And nobody's ever written about it.

JOHN MERROW

Well, how important is ... is subject matter now? You love to read.

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah. (Overlap) Well, it depend-- any ... any subject ... any subject can be made fascinating. Math-- mathematics, English. Anything. Because ... it ... it's up to the teacher to bring it to life.

JOHN MERROW

How important is it that I ... if I'm going to be a teacher ... that I study, say, child psychology or adolescent development that I know ... that I've been in a ... in a ... a situation where I've actually been taught about what kids are like.

FRANK McCOURT

That would be supplementary to your experience. You can ... you can read books on child development and adolescent psychology and so on but it isn't until you went to the classroom ... if you want to keep some of the so-called principles in mind. But you only learn in the classroom.

JOHN MERROW

Now you said you'd be happy if your daughter wanted to become a teacher. Would you say "Okay, go to teacher's college. A teacher's college?" Somewhere? Would you say "Go through an alternative certification program?"

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) I'd ... I'd say alternative certification. To go with teachers, talk to teachers because I learned more in the teachers cafeteria at McKee High School than I ever did at NYU in the classes at NYU.

JOHN MERROW

You learned more about teaching?

FRANK McCOURT

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About ... yeah, about teaching. About the practical details of how to deal with kids. About crises in the classroom. About ... about un-- unruly kids. And ... and ... then I ... then of course the main thing is I had to steer a middle course between the rigorous ones, the old-- the old-fashioned ones and the ... and the more liberal John Dewey types.

JOHN MERROW

Well you ... you write about that.

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

But the old-fashioned ones said "Be tough."

FRANK McCOURT

You're tough, you're in charge, you're in control. And you can do that maybe if you're in a Catholic school. Sit down or I'll break your head. (Laughs) But you can't do ... do that in a high-- in a ... in a public school.

JOHN MERROW

So, what's your advice to the beginning teacher? What do you do on that first day in class?

FRANK McCOURT

Talk to the teach-- listen to the teachers. And ... the first ... the first day in class is ... I don't know, it depends on the personality of the teacher. It depends on the subject you're teaching. But the main thing is ... it's to ask the kids for help. And they love that when you ask them for help. Uh ... how do I do this? What ... what ... what's the procedure here? And they'll come up and they'll help you. And some of them will ... will assert themselves and ... and ... and they'll tussle with other kids to help. But you're putting yourself almost in a supplicant position but what you're really doing is learning.

JOHN MERROW

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You know, you write in the book ... about what we think of teachers (Inaudible) of somebody ... if you want to read it, actually, it's on page 232 about where ... someone ... one of your ... one of your fellow teachers, I think it's Jake, says ...

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Jake Palmer, yeah.

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) Yeah, yeah ... or no one ... no one ... no other profession. Do ... do you see that?

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah. Jake ask ... he ... he was the teacher I work ... I worked with in the cafeteria. Jake asked if I'd ever been in the army. When I tell him yes he says "Bet you didn't know you'd be pulling this kind of shit detail when you decided to become a teacher. Bet you didn't know you'd be a cafeteria guard. A garbage supervisor, a psychologist, a babysitter, huh? Tells you what to think of teachers in this country that you have to spend hours of your life looking at these kids eating like pigs and tell them to clean up afterwards. Doctors and lawyers don't run around telling people 'clean up.' You won't find teachers in Europe stuck with this kind of crap. Over there, a high school teacher is treated like a professor."

JOHN MERROW

Well now that was 1958. Do we still feel that way?

FRANK McCOURT

Oh, yeah. You know the ... you know the ... the ... the reputation of teachers in this country. The reputation ... we ... we can't all of us reduce it to the dollar but the ... the amount they're paid is an indication of ... of what we think of them. And if ... if teachers raised their heads for a moment and ... and ask for more money "Oh well, look. Look at the ... you're finished at 3:00 then you go home and you're free. And you have nothing to do till ... till tomorrow. We'll come in tomorrow. And then you have all these summers off. And you have these holidays off."

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Now, any teacher that I know has to ... most teachers, until ... until later in life, any teacher has to work during the summer to supplement. If you have a family, you have to supplement your income. There are teachers who teach nights to supplement their income.

And then, the average English teacher, for instance, takes home a bag. If you're any good at all, you're hav-- having the kids write. So, let's say you have 160 kids. You ask each of them ... you ask them to write a ... a 250-page essay. How many hours does that take? You'll ... they'll go ... I think the most dreaded part of English teaching was to take that bag home on a Friday afternoon and see Saturday pass and Sunday and then the most awful night of all, Sunday night comes, and you look at that bag and your heart drops and ... and you know you're not going to do it that night. And you take the bag back and all these papers are piling up. So, the time the teachers spend at home working and ... reading and preparing is double what they spend on the classrooms.

JOHN MERROW

So ... so why don't we value teachers?

FRANK McCOURT

Because a ... for ... I think it's ... familiarity breeds contempt. We ... we've ... we've gone to school, we've seen them. We know that a lot of them maybe ... I don't know, a large percent of teachers are inept and incompetent. And we see them and a lot of them didn't-- don't want to be in teaching for the things I said above. And, uh, we don't pay any respect for them.

JOHN MERROW

So ... they may have gone in for the right reasons but they've been treated so badly that ...

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

... they've changed.

FRANK McCOURT

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You can't-- you don't expect these circumstances. I didn't know ... it's a ... my ... my ... my view of teaching was what I saw in American movies where all these kids were bright-eyed and ... and rosy cheeked and the teacher was up there talking about John Dunn or something like that or ... or Chaucer. And these kids are scribbling away. That was my idea. I didn't know. But I did ... the first ... the first ... negative image I got of that was when that movie came out around the time I started teaching.

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) "Blackboard Jungle."

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) "Blackboard Jungle." And then the next ... the only other movie that treated ... teaching authentically was ... "Up the Down Staircase." Otherwise, all the stuff that's written and filmed about teaching is garbage. (Overlap) But I didn't ... I didn't know it was going to be five classes a day with all these kids five days a week. And the paperwork was mountainous.

JOHN MERROW

Now, you said that ... some teachers are inept. They don't work that hard. And then, the good teachers do work hard. Yet, they're paid the same.

FRANK McCOURT

Uh-huh.

JOHN MERROW

Would you endorse a merit pay system where the ones who are really worth are ... ?

FRANK McCOURT

I don't know. It would... if a surgeon fails in an operation, do you ... do you drop his salary? I don't ... maybe that's a strange parallel but if a lawyer loses a case, he still gets paid. But the teachers ... I don't know how ... I ... an inept lawyer sooner or later is going to be found out and he's not going to get ... he's not going to get the clients. But ... I know it's history that ... that it's the blame here. Teachers have always been bad-- badly treated.

JOHN MERROW

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But ... but I ... I want to push you on this, though...

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

... because if you can say "Well, that guy McCourt, look at him, he's carrying the bag of papers home..."

FRANK McCOURT

Uh-huh.

JOHN MERROW

"... his kids are writing all the time." He ... and that is like a narrow-- and he's not ... his kids never write and so on and so forth. Yet, they're both making the same amount of money, let's change that. Would you change that?

FRANK McCOURT

I think so. Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) How would you?

FRANK McCOURT

I think ... I think ... I think ... the good teacher should be ... should be rewarded. How ... the details, I don't know. But I think teachers themselves should be the ones who are ... who ... who ... who sit in judgment. Not the supervisors. Not union officials. No bureaucrats on the Board of Education. It should be largely ... of course teachers are going to support teachers. But I ... at the same time, teachers will say to themselves "Would I want to have my child in that person's class?"

JOHN MERROW

Oh, one ... one of the ... proposals from time to time floated around is let's ... let's pay ... the people in the school depending on how all of the kids in the school do. So it's not just ...

FRANK McCOURT

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In tests.

JOHN MERROW

In test-- in performance in some way. But now just how McCourt's kids do. But ... so that the whole school has a sense of purpose. We all want to make ... get ... make sure these kids learn. Would that make sense to you?

FRANK McCOURT

Well, did you see the ... where the states were listed last year by ... in that fourth grade reading test? The top state in the country was Connecticut where there's money. The second from the bottom was California. So, in ... in the California ... picture, they'd include the kids who ... who didn't know English at all. They were Mexican kids and ... and Asian kids. So ... I ... it ... I suppose federal funds go ... go to these states but how ... I don't know how you can ... I don't know how you can judge ... a school like that.

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) So you'd be scared of ... of using ...

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Well, you know ...

JOHN MERROW

... standardized tests?

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah. Yeah. I don't know how you'd ... these standardized tests don't ... don't tell the truth. You'd have to have one standardized test for Stuyvesant High School. You'd have to have another one for Brandice High School up here in the Upper West Side so because you have a different population. How ... how do you measure a kid's street knowledge?

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) Well, what you could ...

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Or survival skills?

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JOHN MERROW

I suppose what you could do is, well okay, here's McCourt school, let's measure where these ... the way he'd ... these kids are at the beginning of the year ...

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

... and then let's measure them in June. And if they'd gone up, then McCourt gets more money and so do the other teachers.

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah. But who's ... who's creating the tests? Teachers? No. The tests don't come from inside, they come from outside. They come from New Jersey or someplace like that where they have that educational testing service.

JOHN MERROW

So ... so you want the system to trust teachers more?

FRANK McCOURT

Absolutely. We trust doctors, don't we?

JOHN MERROW

I take it that's a rhetorical question.

FRANK McCOURT

Yeah. (Laughs)

JOHN MERROW

(Laughs) But ... but ...

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) And you're not going to run with that ball. (Laughs)

JOHN MERROW

Increasingly these days the curriculum is becoming more prescriptive. Teachers are being told what to do and when to do it. I'm not sure they're heading in the direction of creating a teacher-

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proof curriculum but there does seem to be this concern for results that say "Well, let's tell the teachers exactly what to do." Does that worry you?

FRANK McCOURT

The results are for ... these are test results. We want ... we want to know well how bright this kid is. And why ... why do we want to know this? We want to make sure this kid fits into the system. We want to know that he ... that ... that he ... that he can go through what the call a good college and then take his place in society. We have expectations. We put him on a ... a kind of an assemblyline. We don't say-- one parent in my 18 years at Stuyvesant, one parent said to me "Is my son enjoying school?" And I was up to say "I think he is." Only one. Because the rest "Oh God, is he doing his work? I'm worrying about his PSATs and his SATs and his application to Yale and Cornell ..." and the rest of it. And I ... I ... that forced me to think about what the hell was I doing in the (Inaudible)? The fact ... and then I was ... I had to say to myself "You're here." Well, it sounds (Inaudible) for freedom. To go from fear to freedom because we all suffer from some kind of fear. To have the kids think for themselves and not to be afraid to think for themselves. But they're dis-- they're discouraged when thinking ... from the ... for themselves because they're told all the time the test, the test, the test. We don't ... in a ... in ... in any Socratic way, pursue wisdom. And I think that's what ... what it's all about. The pursuit of wisdom. But that ... I ... I used to say that in ... at ... at meetings of the English department at Stuyvesant. Or even the faculty meeting. They saw what ... there he goes again. McCourt and his whimsy.

But that ... that's ... that's, I think, I had to ... I had to boil it down to this ... to this equation that we go from fear to freedom. That was my purpose in teaching.

JOHN MERROW

Only one parent asked that question?

FRANK McCOURT

One.

JOHN MERROW

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That's astounding.

FRANK McCOURT

They don't care. They have ... they have expectations of their kids. And ... along with those expectations, as I ... as I said earlier, you ... most parents would be terribly disappointed if their Jonathan or Susan came home and said "Dad, mom, I want to be a teacher." "We're sending you to Cornell, Yale and you want to be a teacher? Get off it."

JOHN MERROW

Yeah. But ... do ... do you worry about, you know, fear for the public schools?

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

Today ... the paper the other day had a headline about the number of states now ... I'm thinking about vouchers.

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

It's actually half of the states have some sort of plan for other legislation.

FRANK McCOURT

That's the end of the public schools.

JOHN MERROW

If they ... people had a voucher which would (Overlap) basically a ticket would say "Okay, here's some money. You can go to a private school."

FRANK McCOURT

That's what ... take the average parent who gets a voucher. What is this average par-- average parent going to do? What ... what school ... will he or she look for? What ... do ... will this parent say "I want my son or daughter to enjoy the experience." Do ... the expectations are what

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will ... will fall into place. And I ... with these vouchers, they'd be running all over the place. The ... the public schools have been abandoned by the middle class.

JOHN MERROW

Now, you're working on a new book. Is it about teaching?

FRANK McCOURT

It is, yeah.

JOHN MERROW

I'll look forward to it.

FRANK McCOURT

(Overlap) Well, I'm stumbling towards it.

JOHN MERROW

I'll ... I'll look forward to it. This has been delightful spending some time with you, Frank McCourt. The author of "Angela's Ashes" and "'Tis." Two marvelous books that ... if you haven't read, rush out and get them. Don't go away. We'll be right back.

(MUSIC)

JOHN MERROW

Welcome back to the MERROW Report. I'm John MERROW. My guest is someone that ... I've admired for many years. Um, if you haven't met him, you're in for a treat. Uh, his name is John Goodlad. He began teaching in a one-room schoolhouse in 1939. Uh, he's moved around and up and always moving up. Always asking questions. He's now ... head of the Center for Educational Renewal at the University of Washington. And the head of the Institute for Educational Inquiry ... in Seattle. And of course, he has been inquiring all these years. In 1984, he published a book called "A Place Called School" which won the award for the Outstanding Book of 1984. It arguably is the most significant book in education of, say, the last 20 years anyway. I'm delighted to have you on the program, John. How are you?

JOHN GOODLAD

Thank you. I'm just fine.

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JOHN MERROW

Earlier on ... on this program, Frank McCourt ... the author of "Angela's Ashes" and "'Tis" worried ... now he's a former teacher, taught for many years in New York City, said that we're dumbing down the curriculum. We're telling teachers to teach from the book. We're becoming more rigid. What's your reaction to that critique of what's going on in public education?

JOHN GOODLAD

Well, I ... I would agree completely. As you know ... in my book "A Place Called School," we documented in great detail what was going on hour after hour, day after day, in the classroom. And the people said to me "What a boring chapter." I said "Yes, I wrote it show what a boring, uh, enterprise, uh, I was describing." Uh, there have been some lesser studies, quantitatively since that suggest that we have increased ... this ... this what ... what he's calling "dumbing down." And, uh, now with testing becoming so important, we get youngsters ... geared to those tests and consequently ... not the excitement of some ... big ideas, some big learning, some ... unit activities that go on for several weeks where youngsters get involved. Yeah, I think ... I think ... that ... that, uh, McCourt is absolutely correct.

JOHN MERROW

So that's ... that's a scary trend. And you reported it on it back when that book came out in 1984. And there seemed to be some kind of rhythm and cycle to the ... to American education. We're back ... back there again.

JOHN GOODLAD

Yes. But interestingly enough, this one has gone on much longer than usual. I ... I ... years ago, I projected a 22-year cycle of going from what I call the hard and tough, which was standards, uh, flunk the kids, etcetera, into open classrooms, so-called progressive education and so on. That really hasn't happened this time. That is, that ... that the ... the ... what was stimulated by "A Nation at Risk" 1983 is pretty much still continuing along those same lines.

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) Now, now what's ...

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JOHN GOODLAD

(Overlap) There's a linear ... a linear model of change.

JOHN MERROW

Now, what's interesting is, most people talk about "A Nation at Risk," and that was the report that came out in 1983 and ... and warned that we ... our schools were drowning in a rising tide of mediocrity and called for ... more core courses and so on and so forth. Most people say "Well, that was a good thing that that happened." But you look at that and you say "No, that's ... almost a militaristic ..." it's ... it's a pejorative to you. Is that fair?

JOHN GOODLAD

Yeah. Yes. Well, ... Ted Sizer ... agrees. He has ... he has compared, for example, the book that Ernie Boyer ... Boyer wrote, "The High School," textbook on "Horace's Compromise," my own book "A Place Called School" on both elementary and secondary education, and our recommendations, and in ... in effect, concludes that "A Nation at Risk" went precisely in the opposite direction to what our research said, what we deduced from our research.

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) You know ...

JOHN GOODLAD

So, instead of opening up and becoming more creative and more imaginative, we ... we closed in.

JOHN MERROW

What ... what's in ... what ... what has always interested me ... in ... in your way of thinking, John, is that people say school reform and ... and that's a good thing. But when you hear the word school reform, I think you think of reform school. Reform is not the right direction is what John Goodlad is arguing. Is that correct?

JOHN GOODLAD

(Overlap) It's a ... it's a most unfortunate word. Uh, I guess I feel it strongly because I was director of education at one time in the Provincial Industrial School for Boys in British Columbia, aka, reform school. And ... I became accustomed on ... on Saturday night in visiting with my

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friends to say, "How are the bad boys doing?" You automatically assume with the word reform, there's badness in people, it has to be ... it has to be flushed out, and there always is some standard, some view of somebody else that's being imposed. So, the whole reform movement suggests first bad administrators, bad teachers. And then, when finally the blame comes down on the ... on the youngsters, that's when I think we start turning, and the trend beginning in another direction, and say supposing we had schools for ... for youngsters instead of schools for adults. And what would those schools look like? So, I keep hoping that the change for renewal will occur.

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) So you want the word...

JOHN GOODLAD

Renewal being ...

JOHN MERROW

... renewal. Okay.

JOHN GOODLAD

Renewal, because when you think about it, that's what we human beings attempt to do. We attempt to renew our bodies, renew our minds and keep going. It isn't a matter that ... that ... that we're ... we're reforming ourselves. We're ... we're renewing, becoming better if we can ... uh, finding new outlets for our creativity and enthusiasm and so on. So we use the word renewal completely and I, uh, chastise educators for falling into the business of using the word reform along with the way ... way it's used by the political reformers.

JOHN MERROW

Can you in a ... in a thumbnail sketch tell me what a ... a school that is renewing itself looks like? Feels like? Sounds like?

JOHN GOODLAD

Yeah. Yeah. Well, you can ... you can pretty well tell right away, for example, in ... in the ... conducting the study of schooling, I walked around every school we studied with the principal. And I could pretty well tell, in my conversation with the principal, whether it was renewing or not.

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For example, I would ask the principal "Do you have any discretionary time?" Uh, many principals look at me in horror, they didn't even know what I meant by discretionary time. But when I find...

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) What ... what do you mean by that?

JOHN GOODLAD

... somebody said ...

JOHN MERROW

What do you mean by discretionary time?

JOHN GOODLAD

The time in which the ... the principal can ... can act according to what he thinks is necessary ... he or she thinks is necessary in the situation. Going around and saying "Gee, we ought to be doing more about this" or "Perhaps we ought to be looking into that." Instead of simply, uh, taking care of order in the hallways, messages in his office ... in his or her office and so on.

JOHN MERROW

(Overlap) Okay. So that's one side.

JOHN GOODLAD

And then ...

JOHN MERROW

Discretionary time.

JOHN GOODLAD

Yeah. And then ... then ... the next thing is, uh, after you've been around in that school for a while, do you begin to get the impression that the teachers are sharing regularly in conversations about what ... what they're trying to do.

JOHN MERROW

So in a school that's ...

JOHN GOODLAD

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"Why are we here?"

JOHN MERROW

So in a school that's renewing itself, teachers talk to each other about their pedagogy, about what they're trying to accomplish or how they're doing?

JOHN GOODLAD

Uh, absolutely. And even ... don't ... don't hesitate a moment to arrange to be in one another's classrooms. Furthermore, you will find, uh, clusters of teachers organized around the major components of schooling, and coming up with ... with analyses of what we're doing well, what we're doing poorly, what we're doing poorly that we could change in a month or two, what we need to be doing that might take us three years. That kind of conversation simply marks not only the school internally, but also the way the school connects with the parents and the community.

JOHN MERROW

I was a teacher, and we had faculty meetings, uh, department meetings, and we would talk about the tests having to be given and which kind of blue books to used. That's not what you're talking about.

JOHN GOODLAD

That's not what I'm talking about. That's simply taking ... taking care of the ongoing business rather than, uh, you know, uh, "How do we make this farm better?"

JOHN MERROW

What are some other signs of a school that's renewing? I suspect people listening will be saying, "Wait a minute, maybe I should go take a look at my kid's school." (Laughs) What else do you look for?

JOHN GOODLAD

Uh, the ...

JOHN MERROW

What about the kids themselves, is there a different ...

JOHN GOODLAD

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Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

... kind of behavior?

JOHN GOODLAD

Yeah. Yeah. The, uh ... the, uh ... interestingly enough, uh, what one finds in a ... in such a school almost invar ... invariably is a great deal of conversation going on among the youngsters themselves. They tend to be involved in ... uh, in long ... long term pursuits, where they're sharing, where they're reading, where they're bringing in ideas, where they're bringing things from home. Where they are in effect into the learning, rather than merely, uh, you know, gathering it together so they can put it back on a test.

JOHN MERROW

Just ...

JOHN GOODLAD

So you ... you don't see youngsters just bending over their desks all ... all day long, uh, doing work books and the like. You ... you see them engaged in serious conversation about what they're trying to do.

JOHN MERROW

John, what about the size of the school? Is there some point when a school becomes too big to be involved in a process of renewal?

JOHN GOODLAD

John, it's fascinating that we've spent so much time on class size, and it's a little ..

JOHN MERROW

I'm not talking about class size. It's ... oh, I'm sorry ...

JOHN GOODLAD

I know. But we've spent so much time on class size, and we haven't paid any attention to school size. Uh, we looked into this in our study of schooling that produced "A Place Called School," and, uh, we had a satisfaction criterion that we used, one of the criteria we used to ... to determine

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the quality of the school. But the satisfaction criterion was parents, teachers and students, not just an external body. We discovered that there was not one large school in the top quartile on satisfaction. That in fact all of the large schools were in the bottom quartile, and the small schools were in the top quartile.

JOHN MERROW

That's interesting because ...

JOHN GOODLAD

And ... and ...

JOHN MERROW

Go ahead.

JOHN GOODLAD

And we concluded that, uh, you top out in an ... in an elementary school for size at about 400, in a middle school at about 600, in a, uh, senior high school at about 800.

JOHN MERROW

Wow, those are much smaller, particularly when you're getting at the upper grades, uh, because the tendency is ...

JOHN GOODLAD

Much smaller.

JOHN MERROW

Yeah.

JOHN GOODLAD

And ... and in order to ... and, you know, I wondered about, uh, about this, because, uh, you know, when you're studying whole schools, you don't have that large a sample. And so I happened to connect with several Australians who were here studying school size for the Australian government. They had just finished their work. And so I said, "Where did you end up?" And they ended up at exactly the same place using different data.

JOHN MERROW

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And there's a study that's just coming out now, John, which backs up what you said. Now, this is the year 2000, but this study suggests that smaller schools ... not ... not ... they're not talking about classes again ... smaller schools can ...

JOHN GOODLAD

Right.

JOHN MERROW

... in fact overcome the disadvantages that ... that poverty brings to ... into this. So ... so there's some ...

JOHN GOODLAD

Well, and ... and ...

(CUT)

JOHN MERROW

Right.

JOHN GOODLAD

And interesting enough, John, when we talk about standards and tests and so on, there was a study done, uh, five or six years ago in which the conclusion was that, uh, school size a major factor in, uh, student achievement.

JOHN MERROW

And ... and of course ...

JOHN GOODLAD

And, uh, she ... she found in her study that the small schools, the youngsters were doing better on ... at achievement (Overlap) ...

JOHN MERROW

So ... so rule of thumb, you said 400 for an elementary school, 600 for a middle school.

JOHN GOODLAD

Top.

JOHN MERROW

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1: FRANK MCCOURT: Talking to the Teacher
2: Does School Reform Equal Reform School? With John Goodlad

Recorded February 8, 2000

And 800 ... yes, top. So really it's almost like the schools should not be so big that the people there, the adults, can't know all the kids.

JOHN GOODLAD

Absolutely.

JOHN MERROW

So the kids know ...

JOHN GOODLAD

And ... and ...

JOHN MERROW

... that somebody knows them.

JOHN GOODLAD

That's right. You ... you notice this glaringly in a big middle school where there ... nobody knows the youngsters and ... and ... and the youngsters, a great deal of frustration on the part of the youngsters. I ... I think the middle ... a big middle school is an abomination.

JOHN MERROW

And so when ... when people say, "But wait a minute, we already have this great big building," uh, the common sense response I guess would be, "Okay, so you have a big building. So have three schools in that big building." You don't ...

JOHN GOODLAD

You (Overlap)

JOHN MERROW

A building does not equal a school.

JOHN GOODLAD

You can break it up, uh. And, you know, Harold Howe ... Doc Howe, he recommended that schools within schools to get them smaller years ago when he was a superintendent of schools. And that's a long way back, because, uh, Doc is over 80 now. And when he was superintendent he said, "Break it up, have schools inside of schools if you have a big building."

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Now, uh, John, I'm going to read ... uh, change the subject slightly, uh, read something that you wrote recently about school reform and ... and school renewal. And you said, uh, "We begin to understand why some reformers do not want well educated, thoughtful, creative teachers in our schools. Simply put, they get in the way." Well, that's a kind of conspiratorial view of what's going on in schools.

JOHN GOODLAD

(Laughs)

JOHN MERROW

What ... what do you mean by this?

JOHN GOODLAD

Well, if you look at the history of, uh, of public schooling, particularly at the elementary level, you find that teachers have never had much of a voice in what went on in the curriculum, in what was expected of them or anything else. You also find that teaching emerged as a female profession at the time that women, uh, weren't supposed to be bright and intelligent and ... and threaten men. And consequently then you get a picture of, you know, people outside of the schools run the schools for these, uh, not very well prepared, but caring people who are going to run the schools. And so if we start talking about getting well educated, bright, able people in the schools, uh, let's put it this way, they become good crap detectors.

JOHN MERROW

(Laughs)

JOHN GOODLAD

And, uh ... and consequently then they're alert to ... to the stupidity of much that is proposed that they know full well isn't going to work. Now, either we have to subvert it or ... or we ... we make some move to suggest we're doing something about it, but basically it gets in the way. So the people who want to change the schools according to their recent mandates, that they just don't

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want bright people. That's not only ... that's not true just in schooling, it's true in everything. If you have bright people, they're going to resist you when you im ... impose things on them.

JOHN MERROW

That's fascinating. So the ... the ... Now, I want to ask you one other thing. Frank McCourt on the earlier part of this program talked about teacher training. He said "The problem with teacher training is that teachers are not involved enough. Teacher training, a lot of it ought to be done at the school itself, and teachers need to be more involved." Do you agree?

JOHN GOODLAD

Oh, this is high in our ... uh, in our recommendations. Uh, as ... as I think you know, we did a study of teacher education that's about as comprehensive of our study of schooling. Published three books on our findings in 1990.

JOHN MERROW

So you say (Overlap) teaching ...

JOHN GOODLAD

And, uh ...

JOHN MERROW

We're going to run out of time, John, so tell me that ... yeah ...

JOHN GOODLAD

Yeah, and ... and absolutely the teachers need to be involved, uh, during their preparation and what they're going to be involved in later. So we agree with other folks who now recommend the partner or professional development school as part of teacher education.

JOHN MERROW

John Goodlad, thanks so much, uh, for continuing my education. Uh, we've run out of time.

Thanks to John Goodlad, thanks to all of you for listening.

(MUSIC)

(OFF-MIKE)

(END OF TAPE)