



The New York Times/Robert Walker  
**Students at the experimental John Dewey High School in Brooklyn rest on a sculpture outside the school. The school's free-wheeling program has stirred controversy, even within the teachers' union last week.**

## John Dewey H.S.:

### What Price Reform?

When educational reformers complain about resistance to change, they usually point the finger at the central bureaucracy—the Establishment. But an exchange of letters in last week's issue of *The United Teacher*, the weekly publication of the United Federation of Teachers, showed that the problem reaches down through all echelons of the professional power structure.

The issue was John Dewey High School in Coney Island, the city's only truly far-out secondary school. The two-year-old school, which has

attracted national attention, allows students to learn at their own rate and to plan their own curriculum. Instead of the traditional seven-period day, it has a schedule of short "modules" of 20 minutes. Instead of two terms a year, it has six short ones. About 25 per cent of the students' time is reserved for independent study.

The argument erupted between two U.F.T. chapter chairmen, one at Dewey and the other at Abraham Lincoln High School, considered a good but traditional school in Brooklyn. J. J. Yoshor, Lincoln's union chairman, made the following charges:

- It costs \$38,000 annually to pay for the computer used to program Dewey's 2,000 students for their free-wheeling modules and cycles, while neighboring Lincoln has no such expense. Such complex programming is "an absurdity."

- Critical questions ought to be asked about the Dewey experiment: Do its pass-fail grading and mini-terms encourage class-cutting and mediocre standards? Are Dewey's Independent Study Kits "glorified correspondence courses that demean the role of the classroom teacher?"

"I for one," concluded Mr. Yoshor, "have formed the invincible conviction that Dewey has not yet been a proven success."

#### The Reply

Replying to "brother Yoshor," Michael Sussman, Dewey's U.F.T. chairman, said that while offering no proof of success, he could point to an extremely low dropout rate and notable demonstrations of "literally thousands of masteries of subjects in independent study." Further, he said:

- It is because of the use of the computer that students are not locked into a prescribed curriculum.

- The absence of standard grading and the loose programming has not encouraged cutting, and while a visitor may see a lot of students moving about, they do so with a purpose.

- Academic standards are high, as indicated by students' performance on standard city- and state-wide tests.

- The independent study kits, rather than "demeaning" the teachers' role, supplement their efforts.

In the view of many students of the dynamics of change and reform, such debates between the partisans of progress and the status quo are virtually the only real promise that change will eventually triumph over the established routine.

—F. M. H.