"I WANT TO HELP MY PEOPLE"

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

which they described those qualities and characteristics that make the OCS the special place that it is for them and for all those fortunate to be a part of it.

In "I Remember," each of the graduates spoke of the experiences and activities that meant the most to them while they were OCS students. Throughout this segment of the program, while one graduate related the "Remembered" experience, the other graduates questioned the stories.

**YOUTH COMMITTEE**

Barbara talked about the Youth Committee, an organization composed of two representatives from Groups 3 through 8 at the School which helps to set student policies; the Youth Store where the children sell various items in order to make money for the School; the newspaper and the Movie Committee, of which Barbara was chairperson.

While Stefan recalled the trip to the Port of Oakland, the graduates reminisced the day the AC transit bus came to the School to pick them up, Cleveland described the OCS radio station while the other graduates enacted all the different jobs it took to make the station work. Already a budding poet, Valerie talked about the themes of her poetry, explaining that they are "about my life" and "survival."

Theresa gave a touching account of her pet hamsters (and everyone had a good laugh watching Eugene portray one of the hamsters being fed, bathed and, eventually buried.) Eugene shared his love for track and field. A visit to the San Quentin 6 trial in Marin County was an experience that stood out in Alfonso's mind and the children enacted how they were body searched. Jeannine reminisced about a visit she and Valerie made to San Quentin Prison to visit Johnny Spain, a member of the Black Panther Party and one of the defendants in the Six trial.

Graduation ceremonies usually bring to the graduate's mind, "What will I do with my life?" and the OCS graduates were honest and sincere as they attempted to answer this always burning and difficult question. Barbara said that she wants to be a lawyer; Stefan, a "revolutionary" doctor; Cleveland, a veterinarian; Valerie, a writer; Theresa, an actress; Eugene, a football player; Alfonso, a business man and Jeanine, "Whatever I can do to make my people free." Indeed, each of the eight youth expressed his or her desire to use their skills and talents to serve their community.

The entire student body of the OCS — whose

**O.C.S. Director Ericka Huggins Highlights Chicago Alternative Schools Conference**

Certainly one of the highlights of the recent Alternative Schools Conference held in Chicago on May 22 and 23 were the presentations made by Ms. Ericka Huggins, director of the widely acclaimed Oakland Community School. First, at a Saturday workshop on the subject of "Model Schools and the Model Schools Concept," and then in a Sunday address to the entire Conference body, Ericka explained how the essential dynamics of human concern and understanding — combined with creative teaching methods — help make the Oakland Community School the inevitable place for learning that it is.

Following, THE BLACK PANTHER reprints Part 1 of Ericka's thought-provoking address to the Conference.

**PART I**

"Good afternoon. I still haven't recovered from the flight from Oakland, or the streets of Chicago. This city needs people to organize, people to get things done, not only in education, but in housing, in the courts, everywhere. I want to say that before I went on to talk about education. I realize there is a lot of apathy in the country and I certainly don't think Chicago is any different from Oakland, California, or any other city. People need to do some things. I feel that it's important that people not just sit and talk — and have conferences, and seminars, and workshops. The most important thing is that they do whatever they want to do in their lives.

"I talked yesterday about the Oakland Community School, about alternative education, and community schools. I'd like to begin today to give you a history of the Oakland Community School, why we started it, whom it serves, and in what direction we feel we're heading.

"First, we don't call ourselves an 'alternative school.' We know that we are, but the word 'alternative' has taken on such a negative meaning with black and poor people that in analyzing the way we were, whom we were serving and what we were trying to do, we decided to call ourselves a 'model school.'

"We call Oakland Community School a 'model school' — and it is. We serve 125 children. We're located in East Oakland. We serve children who have been labeled 'educationally disadvantaged,' 'economically deprived,' 'undeucable.' We're working with children who would be in public schools; who have not been to private schools or other alternatives; whose parents have no political affiliation and just want their children to have the best. I know we all want the best for our children. Children deserve the best because they are the future.

"So, in 1971, as a result of harassment that certain children were getting in Oakland — by certain children I mean sons and daughters of members of the Black Panther Party — a group of parents and instructors got together and decided to form what was then called the Intercommunal Youth Institute. This was the summer of 1971. We began in a storefront with 15 children. What we did was to give our students supplementary Language Arts and Mathematics after school.

As time went on people became interested...
125 children range in age from two and one-half to 11—next went on stage and enthusiastically sang "Love Is the Answer and Come Along to the New Creation. The children gave their typically fantastic performance and received a standing ovation from the appreciative full house audience of family and friends.

The graduates then sang the inspiring "We Can Do Anything," written by talented songwriter and community activist Ms. Elaine Brown, who is also executive director of the Educational Opportunities Corporation (EOC)—the nonprofit, tax-exempt, community-based organization that administers the Oakland Community School.

As the children sang, the tears began to flow down their cheeks and those of many in the audience. These were tears shed by youth who had finished one stage of their development.

in what they saw us doing and they wanted to include their children in this kind of supplementary education. We gained more children, more community support, and more instructors volunteered to work with us.

"In 1973, we decided to form a nonprofit, tax-exempt, community-based corporation, which we called Educational Opportunities Corporation (EOC). When I say we, I mean the people who were working with the school. I'm not talking about the Black Panther Party alone. In September of that year, we moved into a building which was formerly a Missionary Baptist Church in East Oakland, which is the 'target' Black community in Oakland. Black and Chicano people predominately there.

We moved in with 50 children and within the span of a month we had 90 children. We have an enrollment now of 125 with a waiting list of 200.

The children are primarily Black, but we also have Chicano students, a small group of Native American students and White students. We provide free meals, a day of free medical care, parent-student counseling, full curriculum and a lot of love and individual attention— and the last two things, love and individual attention, are almost the most important.

"Our curriculum includes Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Music, Drama, Dance, Art, Spanish, Physical Education, which includes yoga and martial arts, as well as all of the other sports) and Environmental Studies.

All of the subject matter that we involve the children with is given to them in a unique way. First of all, our classes are very small; there are no more than 10 children to any one instructor. Though there may be 20 children in one group, there are two instructors for that group as well as volunteers, aides both from universities and community colleges, parents, relatives and people who have just come to us through the publicity about the School.

"We are very much concerned that children learn how to think and not what to think. I really don't feel that people understand what I mean when I say that, so I have a little example.

"In giving a Mathematics lesson our instructors may say to a child, 2 + 2 = 4, rather than 2 + 2 = ? or 2 + 2 = 4. We tell the children 2 + 2 = 4, instead of the mystery of 2 + 2 = 4. Then we say, 'How do you come about getting four?' This causes a child to think, instead of looking over at another person's piece of paper, asking the person next to them or getting the answer by just complaining that they just don't know how to do it.

"We want the children to learn how to think because we were never given that chance. We were always told what to think, how seriously we should think about it, how long we should think about it, and where it was in terms of priorities in our thinking. All of that. We were duped, all of us — except perhaps the young children who are sitting in the front row because I'm sure their parents won't allow that to happen to them. We were all fooled. We are fooled, so we want our children to learn how to think.

"We're very, very particular at the Oakland Community School about knowing each child and finding out the problems in the home (if there are some and there usually are because our children are from poor families). Our typical parent is a single working mother. Our next typical parent would be a welfare recipient.

"It's impossible for a child to think about Language Arts if he or she has no food at home. It's impossible for a child to think about Mathematics if she doesn't know whether she'll be able to get to school in the morning, because she doesn't have a pair of shoes. If a child is seeing constant argument or struggle at home, it's impossible to think about what makes flowers grow and why there are stars and the sun and the moon.

"So we try to wipe all the obstacles out of the way and then we involve the children in learning. TO BE CONTINUED