ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1960-1975

by

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ABSTRACT

Significant numbers of Canadians in the 1960s believed their society and their schools required substantial change. A few, believing the public school system was authoritarian, competitive, unimaginative, and unlikely to change, set out to establish their own schools. In British Columbia, like-minded parents, educators, and even high school students founded over twenty alternative schools in the 1960s and early 1970s in the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island, and the West Kootenays. Most of these people nourished idealistic world views comprising elements of pacifism, socialism, or spiritual mysticism. They claimed to be motivated by a sense of social and democratic responsibility, and also put a high value on personal freedom and the possibility of public and private transformation.

Until the 1960s British Columbia independent schools had been organized chiefly on religious, ethnic, or class grounds. However, founders of alternative schools in the early 1960s typically followed a Progressive approach, emphasizing a "child-centred" curriculum based on the ideas of John Dewey. Later in the decade alternative schools took up the Romantic or "free school" ideas of A.S. Neill, and allowed young people almost complete freedom to organize their own educational activities (or none at all), and to be responsible for their own behaviour. They were influenced by the American Progressive and English Romantic educational traditions as well as Canadian social democracy, the American counterculture of the late 1960s, and the Human Potential Movement. By the early 1970s, alternative schools became "therapeutic" with the goal of attracting alienated young people back into the educational sphere and helping them to achieve personal growth.

Two fundamental tensions existed in alternative schools–how democratic their decision-making would be, and how directive or free the adults would be in regulating the academic learning of the students. Although these schools tried to govern themselves in a participatory democratic manner, consensus was difficult to achieve. Furthermore, the participants could not

usually agree on which educational approach they favoured. For students attending alternative schools educational results were mixed. Although most believed they had gained in self-reliance and inter-personal skills, many did not acquire sufficient literary or arithmetic knowledge and found their educational and professional careers limited.

Alternative schools were hindered by financial instability, parental divisiveness, and the absence of a workable educational methodology. Further, the schools accepted too many children with special needs, or hired too many young adult teachers whose enthusiasm was greater than their pedagogical skill. Meanwhile, the social and cultural upheavals of the late 1960s had at last caused the public school system to accept some of the pedagogical and psychological premises of the alternate school movement. The examples of the alternative schools of the 1960s and early 1970s, along with the wider cultural changes of the time, led to a more flexible and inclusive public school system in the 1970s.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract		ii
Acknowledgements		v
Foreword		1
PART ONE	PROGRESSIVE SCHOOLS	
Chapter 1	The New School: Early Years	17
Chapter 2	Argenta Friends School	83
Chapter 3	Craigdarroch School	163
PART TWO	ROMANTIC SCHOOLS	
Chapter 4	Barker Free School	196
Chapter 5	Knowplace	229
Chapter 6	The New School: Middle Years	264
Chapter 7	Saturna Island Free School	305
PART THREE	THERAPEUTIC SCHOOLS	
Chapter 8	Total Education	356
Chapter 9	Windsor House	415
Chapter 10	Ideal School	436
Chapter 11	The New School: Later Years	472
Chapter 12	Alternative Public Schools	501
Afterword		535
Bibliography		544

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FOREWORD

One striking development of the 1960s was the rise of alternative schools. Hundreds appeared across North America including more than twenty in British Columbia between 1960 and 1975. These small independent schools were founded by Progressive educators or by dissatisfied parents who aimed to provide a more humanistic or "child-centred" education than existed in the public schools. Most proponents of alternative schools held some form of idealistic world view. As the 1960s gave rise to so many innovative ideas, they wanted their children's schooling to be expressions of those ideas.[1]

British Columbia provided fertile ground for alternative schools. Educational thinking in the province was influenced by two old traditions, American Progressivism and British Romanticism, as well as by the British private school tradition emphasizing "character building" as discussed by Jean Barman.[2] Other prominent influences were the Canadian socialist and "social gospel" movements, and the American counterculture of the 1960s. All of these factors combined to encourage the rise of numerous and diverse alternative schools in British Columbia. They were created in disparate regions of the province including Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, Vancouver Island, and the West Kootenays. These schools were governed by parent or teacher co-operatives and varied in their curricula from moderate Progressive methods to a laissez-faire style with almost no curriculum at all. The goals of alternative schools varied but in most cases school founders considered academic learning no more important than unrestrained exploration, personal growth, and "community building."[3]

Alternative schools in British Columbia passed through three distinct periods. During the early 1960s alternative schools were inspired mainly by the Progressive ideas of John Dewey and by the examples of American Progressive schools founded earlier in the century. Progressive schools in British Columbia and elsewhere emphasized "learning by doing," thematic or project work, co-operative learning, the creative arts, and education for citizenship. Progressive ideas

were brought to this province, in part, by liberal American academics recruited by the University of British Columbia during its rapid expansion in the 1950s and early 1960s, some of whom had attended Progressive schools in their youth.

By the late 1960s a definite shift had occurred in the character of alternative schools. They now drew on the Romantic tradition, inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's naturalistic ideas and A.S. Neill's famous Summerhill School in England.[4] Romantically inspired schools were commonly called "free schools." Their proponents believed that children freed from adult interference would eventually acquire the skills and knowledge they needed while growing up without the constraints and inhibitions imposed by mainstream society. Free schools were closely tied to the rapid emergence of the North American counterculture with its emphasis on personal freedom and transformation. Countercultural ideas, values, and lifestyle in British Columbia were fueled partly by another wave of Americans, many from California, who came to British Columbia during the late 1960s because of the Vietnam war.

In the early 1970s alternative schools changed once again. Romantic schools declined with the waning of the counterculture and the radical political movements of the 1960s. Alternative schools became more diverse and many adopted therapeutic or rehabilitative objectives.[5] Therapeutic schools sought to provide a place where the many disaffected young people left over from the volatile 1960s could learn basic academic skills in an accepting and unpressured environment, meanwhile developing personal characteristics that would help them function more effectively in society. These schools were influenced by political, feminist, environmental, and personal transformation movements that grew out of the 1960s. They also acquired a more local and indigenous quality than schools of the earlier Progressive or Romantic "waves." Alternative schools now were primarily staffed by Canadians, at least partly informed by Canadian socialist and humanitarian values. It was during this third period of alternative school development that a combination of parental pressure, new directions in the education profession, and the general ambiance of the times caused public schools themselves to begin

offering a wider choice of styles and programmes. By 1975 several alternative schools had been integrated into the public school system and school districts began to create their own alternative programmes, thus providing facilities for students not succeeding in mainstream schools. With the demand for alternative schooling largely satisfied within B.C.'s public system, independent alternative schools declined. Their enduring impact was their example, which encouraged the liberalization and diversification of the public school system.

Individuals of many varied backgrounds and beliefs came together to establish alternative schools. Most shared a common belief in the "potential" of the individual, in the importance of participation in a community, and in an idealistic world view (socialist, pacifist, communitarian, or spiritually liberal). Some individuals were attracted to alternative education simply through their experience as teachers or parents. For others, increased rights for young people were an important component of a more general quest for self-determination across society. All saw the public schools of the day as representing an outdated political, cultural, and educational outlook. In particular, they believed public schools were authoritarian, competitive, inflexible, and unimaginative in their pedagogy. They were unhappy that, in the post-Sputnik era, public schools were preoccupied with trying to upgrade their science offerings, and that the recommendations of the 1960 Chant report had relegated the creative arts to "frill" status. Above all, alternative school proponents valued individualism. They experienced public schools as unwilling or unable to accommodate the individual differences of children.

The Progressive Movement in Education

Alternative schools of the 1960s combined elements of two longstanding educational movements, Progressivism and Romanticism. The Progressive movement in the early decades of the twentieth century was closely associated with the ideas of John Dewey. Progressivism embraced a humanistic respect for the individual worth of each child, mindful of new theories of

child development made at the turn of the century. Progressives emphasized the uniqueness of each individual learner, the importance of educating the "whole child," active rather than passive learning, subject matter aimed at the child's interests, the value of the creative arts, and education for citizenship. Progressives typically advocated a broad, integrated, and "child-centred" curriculum, a stimulating classroom environment, co-operation rather than competition, and an emphasis on self-expression and critical thinking.[6]

Dewey's methods were developed at the University of Chicago Laboratory School, where he was director from 1896 to 1904, and at Columbia University Teachers' College during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Dewey believed educators should motivate children by appealing to their genuine "interests." Using a flexible curriculum, teachers should recognize and nurture each child's differing capabilities, preferences, and attitudes.[7] Teachers should promote critical inquiry and emphasize socially relevant subject material. Unlike some later Progressives, Dewey also believed in the value of the traditional "handed-down" wisdom and knowledge of Western Civilization.

Another key Deweyan concept was "learning through experience." This was more than simply "learning by doing," for as he wrote, "mere activity does not constitute experience." Rather, meaningful experience must involve intentional development, meaningful purpose, and change. Another central principle in Dewey's Progressive thought was the education of citizens for a democracy. It did not make sense to teach young people in an authoritarian, bureaucratic, and unstimulating atmosphere if they were to become the creative, critical, informed, and socially conscious adults required for an effective democracy. Dewey believed that in a "community-centred" education children would be active participants in the day-to-day life of the school. His ideal classrooms would be "democratic communities of inquiry."[8]

Progressivism reached its peak in the 1920s and 1930s with the establishment of many private Progressive schools in the United States particularly around large northeastern cities. The best known was City and Country School in New York, founded by Caroline Pratt, where young

children learned primarily through art and play.[9] Hundreds of Progressive teachers were trained at the University of Chicago and Columbia Teachers' College by such as William Kilpatrick, developer of the well-known "project method." Some Progressive ideas also made their way into the public school system during this period, but by the 1930s the humanistic "child-centred" Progressivism of Dewey had become overshadowed by "scientific" and "administrative" Progressives who emphasized efficiency, expertise, and psychological testing and measurement.[10] Exemplified by Edward Thorndike, they were in their impact essentially conservative. This was in contrast to the humanistic Progressives," and the more radical "social reconstructionists" who envisioned the school as a co-operative community helping to bring about the transformation of society.[11] Psychological testing and the "cult of efficiency" were the most noticeable Progressive legacies in the public schools up to 1960.[12]

Progressive education had Canadian proponents as early as the 1890s.[13] Canadian Progressives were interested in an expanded curriculum known as the "New Education" movement, a coalition of child-centred educators and practical reformers.[14] Their innovations included kindergartens, manual training, school gardens, domestic science, and physical education. They were humanitarians who paid increased attention to child and family welfare, and educators seeking to eliminate traditional nineteenth century teaching methods which relied on rote learning, memorization, and a narrow curriculum.

Between 1920 and 1940 Progressive thought dominated Canadian educational debate, particularly in western Canada. The 1925 Putman-Weir Report in British Columbia endorsed Progressive principles confirming that such ideas already had many adherents in British Columbia.[15] In Saskatchewan a modest curriculum revision along Progressive lines was begun in 1931, and the Alberta Department of Education, under the leadership of Hubert Newland in 1936, implemented a locally developed Progressive curriculum called the "enterprise system" organized on thematic principles.[16] Unlike in the United States, very few private Progressive schools were established in Canada between 1920 and 1940. One exception was St. George's

Progressive school in Montreal, founded in 1930.[17] During the 1940s and 1950s radical educators such as Watson Thomson in Saskatchewan combined Progressive educational theory with socialist communal values in an effort to encourage social change based on democratic, participatory, and egalitarian principles.[18] With the exception of Alberta, the development of democratic socialist politics in western Canada was often a parallel development to the acceptance of Progressive educational theory and proponents of alternative schools in British Columbia were undoubtedly influenced by this context.

Progressive education had fallen out of general public favour by 1945. Although there may have been a broad Progressivist "consensus" among Canadian educational leaders in the 1930s, in practice the "child-centred" and innovative methods they advocated were rarely implemented in the average Canadian classroom. Neil Sutherland vividly describes the traditional pedagogy that endured in British Columbia schools well into the 1960s:

> It was a system that put its rigour into rote learning of the times tables, the spelling words, the capes and bays, a system that discouraged independent thought, a system that provided no opportunity to be creative, a system that blamed rather than praised, a system that made no direct or purposeful effort to build a sense of self-worth.[19]

Alternative school proponents of the 1960s strongly opposed these aspects of the school system.

The Romantic Movement

Alternative schools were also influenced by the Romantic Movement in education, a long-standing tradition that can be traced back to the publication of J.-J. Rousseau's *Emile* in 1762.[20] Rousseau proposed a naturalistic education that would leave children free to follow their desires, curiosity, and instincts with little adult direction. His ideas found an eager audience among English Romantics and political radicals, Rousseau becoming a cult figure in England during the late eighteenth century. Many notable intellectuals, poets, and educators of the period were

ardent Rousseau followers. His influence also extended to continental Europe where his ideas were developed and applied by Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, Leo Tolstoy, and others.

Romantic ideas had gone largely underground by the early nineteenth century, but resurfaced in twentieth century Britain just as Dewey's ideas were gaining prominence in the United States. Homer Lane, an American educator in England, pioneered the idea of self-government for children while headmaster at the Little Commonwealth in Dorset, a residential school for delinquent teenagers from 1913 to 1918. School rules were made at meetings of the entire school community where everyone, whether small child or headmaster, had one vote.[21] The philosopher Bertrand Russell and his wife Dora Russell founded Beacon Hill School in 1927 where experimental inquiry was encouraged, academic study was voluntary, and day-to-day decisions were made at school council meetings. Beacon Hill, in Sussex, was criticized for the underlying socialist, pacifist, and agnostic views of its founders, as well as Russell's policy of permitting public nudity among the children and sexual freedom among the adults.[22] Dartington, another rural English school and part of an experimental self-sustaining intentional community in Devon, emphasized the creative arts and employed a partial system of self-government. Its headmaster, J.B. Curry, had been influenced by Dewey's methods during five years at a Progressive school in Philadelphia.[23] Beacon Hill and Dartington had elements of both Progressivism and Romanticism, stopping just short of complete freedom for students.[24]

The most famous Romantic school was Summerhill, founded in 1924 in a small town northeast of London, by A.S. Neill, a follower of Homer Lane and Sigmund Freud. Throughout his long career Neill developed several basic principles: that children would be allowed to pursue any activities that interested them, that they would not be compelled to attend classes, and that school rules would be set by all members of the school community with one vote for each person whatever his or her age. Neill's approach was based on psychoanalytic techniques as well as his own experience and intuition, and he had a particular genius for working with young people. However, without a theoretical framework, his methods were difficult to duplicate or transfer

particularly from Summerhill's residential setting to North American day schools.

With the publication of A.S. Neill's *Summerhill* in 1960, Romantic ideas burst into the popular culture. This was a timely event for those unhappy with the public school system in Britain and particularly in North America.[25] The widely-read book was an inspiration to many dissatisfied parents and educators who helped initiate a new wave of Romanticism resulting in the "free school movement" of the late 1960s in North America.

Summerhill ushered in a new era of thinking and writing about education. During the next twelve years dozens of books advocating alternative schooling appeared. Some of the earliest identified problems in the public school system and suggested directions for change. The best known were John Holt's *How Children Fail* and Paul Goodman's *Compulsory Mis-education*, both published in 1964.[26] Others were written by educators seeking to change the system from within or establish alternative schools with less restrictive environments. The most important were Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *Teacher* (1964), Jonathan Kozol's *Death At An Early Age* (1967) and *Free Schools* (1972), Herbert Kohl's *36 Children* (1967) and *The Open Classroom* (1969), James Herndon's *The Way It Spozed To Be* (1968), George Dennison's *The Lives of Children* (1969), Herb Snitzer's *Today Is For Children* (1972), and Allen Graubard's *Free The Children* (1972).[27] Other works advocating radical changes in school curriculum and organization were Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner's *Teaching As A Subversive Activity* (1969), Charles Silberman's *Crisis In The Classroom* (1970), Joseph Featherstone's *Schools Where Children Learn* (1971), and finally Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (1971), which argued for the abolition of schools entirely.[28] These writings were accompanied by an explosion in the numbers of alternative schools, particularly of the Romantic variety, by the end of the decade. Across North America such schools, by 1969, numbered in the hundreds.[29]

The therapeutic or "rehabilitation" schools of the 1970s were primarily staffed by Canadians and had a more indigenous quality than either Progressive or Romantic Schools. The

founders of therapeutic schools were influenced by the humanitarian and compassionate values of the "social gospel" movement and Canadian social democracy.[30] Some had played a significant role in Christian social welfare organizations whereas others had been active in the New Democratic Party. However, therapeutic schools were even more affected by the emphasis on personal transformation growing out of the 1960s. Often called the Human Potential Movement, this pursuit was particularly important in the early 1970s as thousands of people sought personal growth through a combination of psychological and spiritual techniques.[31] Encounter groups, Jungian analysis, meditation, and Eastern religious practices were taken up by professionals and amateurs alike. One of the most influential figures in this movement was Fritz Perls, founder of Gestalt Therapy, who spent his last years on Vancouver Island. Another was George Leonard whose *Education and Ecstacy* (1968) was read widely by alternative school teachers.[32] The combination of personal growth and social reform goals gave the 1970s alternative schools their particular character and tension.

Canadian Alternative Schools

Alternative schools began to appear in Canada by the early 1960s, a time of economic expansion and public optimism.[33] The best known alternative school in Canada was Everdale Place, an alternative high school located on a farm fifty miles northwest of Toronto. Everdale was founded by Bob Davis and four colleagues in 1966. Mr. Davis had been active in nuclear disarmament organizations, the Student Christian Movement, and the "new left" Student Union for Peace Action (S.U.P.A.) during the early years of the decade. Opposed to the authoritarian nature of public schools, Everdale founders believed in "total student input," and the school evolved into a "democratic and open commune." Although courses were offered, attendance was voluntary as at Summerhill. There were only two compulsory activities: everyone had to be at the weekly meetings, and everyone had to do chores.[34] Everdale teachers took up a political

mission to spread the word about alternative education by publishing *This Magazine Is About Schools* (1966-1973), a radical journal about alternative schools that circulated across North America.[35] The magazine was edited by Bob Davis, George Martell, and Satu Repo. In 1969 George Martell, another key figure in Canadian alternative education, founded Point Blank School in Toronto, meant for teenage dropouts and "street kids" many of whom could neither read nor write.[36] Mr. Martell wrote widely about alternative education and its political implications in a class society.[37] By the late 1960s public interest in alternative schools was growing as evidenced by the Ontario government's reformist Hall-Dennis Report, *Living and Learning*, and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation report, *Involvement: The Key to Better Schools*, both published in 1968.[38] In 1970 the Toronto Board of Education created S.E.E.D., an alternative high school programme similar to several that arose in Vancouver at the same time.[39]

Numerous other alternative schools were established in Canada during the early 1970s, many the result of increased parent activism. One notable example was the Saturday School in Calgary, an elementary school founded in 1972 by a group of parents dissatisfied with their children's education in mainstream schools. The school emphasized aesthetic education, integration of the curriculum, and a co-operative and democratic school community. The project generated much excitement and debate among the parent community. The school eventually joined the Calgary public school system in 1975.[40] In 1975, one of the parents, educational historian Robert Stamp, wrote *About Schools*, a summary of different types of Canadian alternative schools in existence at that time, and a guide for parents about how to be more involved in setting public school policy, or how to start their own school.[41] Greenhouse School in Regina and St. Norbert's Community School in Winnipeg were other examples of the many parent initiated schools established during this period.[42]

But no province gave rise to the number or diversity of alternative schools that British Columbia did. From the New School in Vancouver to the Argenta Friends School in the West

Kootenays and Craigdarroch in Victoria; from the Barker Free School to Knowplace; from the Saturna Island Free School to Total Education, Ideal School, Windsor House, and the Whole School, the growth of alternative schools in B.C. was unusual and significant. This growth was partly due to a tradition of individualism and popular opposition to central authority which led to the establishment of many intentional communities in the province since the early part of this century.[43] As well, the social gospel, socialist, and co-operative movements mentioned above had a particularly strong presence in British Columbia where many individuals participating in alternative schools had been active in the N.D.P. or in religious groups oriented to social action. Progressive educational theories were well established in the province, and Romantic ideas found a willing following. Furthermore, the tradition of private schooling was so well entrenched in British Columbia that, until 1977, no legislation whatsoever regulated independent schools.

Another factor unique to British Columbia was a disproportionately large influx of immigrants from the United States. These were academics from 1950 to 1965, followed more visibly, from the mid-1960s, by thousands of young Americans who left that country for political reasons. Many of the latter were Californians who brought elements of the counterculture with them. Ideas and values popularized by the 1960s counterculture and political movements had a profound effect on the development of alternative schools. These influences included drug use, sexual experimentation, mystical spirituality, personal growth therapies, individualism, participatory democracy, anti-intellectualism, communitarianism, and, by the early 1970s, feminism and environmentalism. Theodore Roszak, who coined the term in his *The Making of a Counter Culture*, describes it as "the embryonic cultural base of New Left politics, the effort to discover new types of community, new family patterns, new sexual mores, new kinds of livelihood, new aesthetic forms, new personal identities, on the far side of power politics, the bourgeois home, and the Protestant work ethic."[44] Above all, the 1960s was about freedom and transformation, the primary goals of most alternative schools. This study of alternative schools is, in large part, a story of the 1960s.[45]

Sources

Historical evidence for this study comes from many sources. I have searched out the archives of each school I studied, some of them found in the basements of former teachers or parents. These archives yielded enrollment lists, prospectuses, curriculum reports, financial documents, minutes of meetings, newsletters, correspondence, and "philosophical" statements. I had the benefit of the personal journals of several individuals associated with alternative schools. I have also consulted numerous documents in the public record, including annual reports and financial statements registered under the Societies Act, dozens of accounts of alternative schools in local newspapers and magazines, articles written by former alternative school teachers, Vancouver School Board records, provincial Department of Human Resources documents pertaining to alternative schools, and the federal government files of the Company of Young Canadians.

My second major source has been oral evidence gleaned from my own tape-recorded interviews with over three hundred former parents, teachers, and students from alternative schools. I selected interview subjects in accordance with Neil Sutherland's technique, "chains of acquaintanceship," to explore "common schema, events, rituals, scripts, and structures" through "overlapping memories."[46] Although individuals could not always remember exact details of events that took place over thirty years ago, two observations warrant mention. First, participation in alternative schools was a significant and formative event in the lives of these individuals and their memories are extensive and vivid. Secondly, there was noteworthy congruence among the various individuals' personal accounts of events. Nevertheless, all information obtained from interview was thoroughly cross-checked with the accounts of other participants and with the documentary evidence.

Oral evidence has the disadvantage that memory of past events is fallible and that the events are seen with the perspective of hindsight, giving them meaning according to the subject's

present point of view. However, as Paul Thompson points out in *The Voice of the Past*, there should be little difference in the historical treatment of documentary and of oral evidence. Authors of eyewitness accounts and written documents of all kinds are little different from interview subjects in their capacity for bias. The historian's job is to examine every source, written or oral, for internal consistency, confirmation in other sources, and potential bias.[47] According to Neil Sutherland, even if the accuracy of the details in a personal account is suspect, the "scripts" or personal memories of recurrent situations are generally reliable. Furthermore, oral evidence may be valuable in its very subjectivity since those interviewed recreate the emotional and affective contexts of past events.

This study examines the curriculum, governance, and day-to-day life of ten alternative schools as well as the underlying theories and world view of their founders. A detailed analysis of the social class or ethnic backgrounds of alternative school parents was beyond the scope of this study. However, my estimations suggest that the great majority of parents were middle class (at least 80%). They were educators, other professionals, small business people, and creative artists (visual artists, writers, and musicians). Similarly, parents were primarily of Anglo-Saxon (approximately 75%) and Jewish (15%) backgrounds. I have not extensively analyzed the educational or career attainments of former alternative school students. However, I have gleaned considerable knowledge of what became of the majority of these students after their alternative school experience, an experience which had profound effects on the lives of the participants.

NOTES

1. My use of the term "alternative schools" refers to the non-authoritarian "child-centred" schools that first appeared during the 1960s, as distinct from the socially exclusive or religious private schools that originated much earlier.
2. Jean Barman, *Growing Up British In British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984).
3. These are not unlike the goals discovered by Daniel Duke in his study of American alternative schools, *The Retransformation of the School* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978).
4. I use "Romantic" in its political and educational sense, not in reference to the literary movement.
5. Therapeutic is my term. The educators of the day most commonly used "rehabilitation."
6. For the best summary of Progressive ideas and beliefs at the time see Harold Rugg and Ann Shumaker, *The Child-Centered School* (Yonkers: World Book, 1928).
7. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1916), p. 153.
8. Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 172.
9. Lawrence Cremin describes many of these schools in *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Random House, 1961) including City and Country School, Lincoln School, Edgewood School, Walden School, Dalton School (all in New York), Oak Lane Country Day School (Philadelphia), Shady Hill School (Boston), Putney School (New Hampshire), the "Parker School" (Chicago), Peninsula School (California), and the Organic School. See Susan Lloyd, *The Putney School* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).
10. See David Tyack, *The One Best System* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).
11. The most outspoken of the social reconstructionists was George Counts.
12. Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Random House, 1961).
13. For a discussion of American Progressive ideas in the context of American educational influence in Canada see Alison Prentice, "The American Example," in J. Donald Wilson, Robert Stamp, and L.-P. Audet, *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 61-65.
14. Neil Sutherland, "The New Education in Anglophone Canada," in *The Curriculum in Canada in Historical Perspective*, (Ottawa: CSSE Yearbook, 1979).
15. The fact that J.H. Putman, inspector for Ottawa schools and a well-known proponent of Progressive education, was invited to co-author the report indicates that Progressive ideas were well established in B.C. See B. Anne Wood, *Idealism Transformed: The Making of a Progressive Educator* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985). See also Jean Mann, "G.M. Weir and H.B. King: Progressive Education or Education for the Progressive State?" in J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones, eds., *Schooling and Society in Twentieth Century British Columbia* (Calgary: Detselig, 1980) pp. 91-118.

16. See Robert Patterson, "The Implementation of Progressive Education in Canada 1930-1945," in *Essays on Canadian Education* (1986); and Donalda Dickie, *The Enterprise in Theory and Practice* (Toronto: Gage, 1941).

17. See Grattan Gray, "What Happens When Parents Start Schools Of Their Own," in *Maclean's* 74: 23 (November 18, 1961), p. 57-58.

18. See Michael Welton's biography of Watson Thomson, "To Be and Build the Glorious World," (Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1983); also Michael Welton, ed., *Knowledge for the People*, (Toronto: O.I.S.E. Press, 1987).

19. Neil Sutherland, "The Triumph of 'Formalism:' Elementary Schooling in Vancouver from the 1920s to the 1960s," in R. McDonald and Jean Barman, ed. *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social History, B.C. Studies*, number 69/70 (Spring/Summer, 1986), pp. 182-183. Several articles by Robert Patterson also make this point. Larry Cuban's *How Teachers Taught* (New York: Longman, 1984) makes a similar case for the United States.

20. J.J. Rousseau, *Emile* (1762), trans. B. Foxley (London: Dent, 1911).

21. See Homer Lane, *Talks to Parents and Teachers* (New York: Schoken, 1928).

22. See Ronald Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975) and Brian Hendley, *Dewey, Russell, Whitehead: Philosophers as Educators* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986).

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30. See Richard Allen, *The Social Passion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

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32. George Leonard, *Education and Ecstacy* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1968).

33. See, for example, Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), Chapter 12.

34. Bob Davis, personal interview, October 18, 1996.

35. *This Magazine is about Schools* (Toronto, 1966-1973), volumes 1-6.

36. George Martell, personal interview, April 14, 1997.

37. See George Martell, *The Politics of the Canadian Public School* (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1974). Also Douglas Myers, ed., "Where Have All the Free Schools Gone?" an interview with Bob Davis, George Martell, and Satu Repo, in Douglas Myers, ed., *The Failure of Educational Reform in Canada*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), pp. 75-94. First published in *Canadian Forum* (October, 1972).

38. See J. Donald Wilson, "From the Swinging Sixties to the Sobering Seventies," in Hugh A. Stevenson and J. Donald Wilson, eds., *Precepts, Policy, and Process: Perspectives on Contemporary Canadian Education* (London, Ontario: Alexander, Blake Associates, 1976), pp. 21-36, for a description of the public mood in Canada during this period, particularly as it applied to education,

39. Douglas Yip, *S.E.E.D.: A Preliminary Report* (Toronto: Board of Education, 1971).

40. Robert Stamp, *The Saturday School: How It Began* (Calgary: Saturday School Society, 1973).

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CHAPTER 1: THE NEW SCHOOL: EARLY YEARS

Conception and Ideology

In the fall of 1960, several University of British Columbia professors and their spouses began to talk about developing an alternative school for their children in Vancouver. At a New Year's Eve party that year five couples—Don and Julia Brown, Elliott and Kathy Gose, Norman and Marilyn Epstein, Werner and Rita Cohn, and Mac and Ruth McCarthy— decided to form a weekly planning group. During these discussions they explored aspects of Progressive educational theory and co-operative organizational structure. By the summer of 1961 they decided there was enough agreement among the participants to begin serious planning for the establishment of an independent parent operated school.

The timing was no coincidence. These parents were critical of the Report of the Royal Commission on Education (the Chant Report) released December 29, 1960.[1] They objected strenuously to the report's traditionalist approach to the "three R's" and its relegation of the creative arts and self-expression to frill status.[2] They were frustrated by what they saw as a lack of creative teaching and meaningful enrichment in the public school system and by a pervasive unstimulating atmosphere.[3] In short, they concluded that public school education in British Columbia was "dull and disagreeable."[4]

These parents saw public school as a bureaucratic, lockstep, and conformist system incapable of responding to students as individuals and lacking a basic respect for young people. The parents believed discipline practices were inhumane. Rita Cohn described the public schools as "uptight and conventional" places where her children had no personal freedom to move around, not even to the bathroom.[5] Don Brown objected to the schools' curricular conservatism, their neglect of the arts, and their "authoritarian stiffness."[6] Another parent, Ellen Tallman, expressed her dissatisfaction with rigid and unimaginative schools: "Karen hated school so much.

Something had to be done!"[7] This dissatisfaction led to the founding of the New School.

New School parents held a number of common values, all heavily influenced by Progressive, Romantic, and socialist ideas. American progressive schools began to flourish in the early 1900s and continued to thrive in the area around New York's Columbia University and at the University of Chicago where research into John Dewey's philosophy and methods continued into the 1960s. Cathy Gose, a key founding parent, received her early schooling at Edgewood School, a Deweyan Progressive school in Scarsdale, New York, connected with Columbia Teachers College during the 1930s.[8] These experiences left a deep impression and she subsequently employed Progressive methods herself as a teacher at a two room school in rural New York State.[9] Another founding parent, Barbara Beach, attended City and Country School in New York City, a well-known Progressive school founded in 1914.[10] Rita Cohn, another parent who was also a teacher, had trained in Progressive methods at Columbia[11] and other members of the inaugural parent group were familiar with Black Mountain College in North Carolina,[12] and with The Putney School in Vermont, a Progressive secondary school founded in 1936.[13]

Parents who had come to Vancouver from northeastern United States or the San Francisco Bay area were familiar with alternative schooling elsewhere and Mrs. Beach remembers being "shocked by the lack of alternative schools" when she arrived in Vancouver.[14] Seven of the thirty-two inaugural families were American.[15] Although these parents accounted for only twenty-two percent of the total group, they helped shape the school's philosophy to a significant degree. Almost all were academics who had come to Vancouver to teach at U.B.C. They shared a liberal arts, intellectual, "Ivy League" ethos, valued the fine arts, and enjoyed arguing about abstract ideas. Several taught in the Arts I programme at U.B.C., an interdisciplinary humanities programme.[16] These Americans were individualists who had discarded "competitive individualism" in favour of a "creative individualism" believing that free individuals would produce a free society.[17] Their attitudes affected the curriculum at the New School—an emphasis

on the arts, the freedom of students to explore at their own pace, the value of critical thinking, and the questioning of authority.

New School parents favoured a "child-centred" education that built on each child's interests, creativity, and individuality. They subscribed to the Progressive slogans "learning by doing" and "learning through experience." They wanted their children to develop independent and critical thinking skills and hoped the school would nurture attitudes of co-operation and self-discipline. Many parents termed themselves Progressive but, aside from those who had experienced Progressive education directly, only a few parents such as philosopher Don Brown (a Canadian), had studied Dewey's ideas carefully.

There was also a distinctly utopian vision among some founding parents who expressed a yearning for a closer community and had Romantic notions of the one room schoolhouse.[18] This coincided with Rousseauian, naturalistic, and anarchistic ideas stressing freedom for children, natural growth, and self expression. This view was given a boost by the publication of A.S. Neill's *Summerhill* in 1960 which prompted a great deal of discussion and excitement among the parents.[19] However, just how far they were prepared to go in this direction was always contentious because most parents did not want a strictly Summerhillian free school. Progressives and Romantics never resolved their differences which persisted throughout the life of the school causing repeated and serious disagreement.

A few New School parents were socialists and saw the school as part of a broader movement allowing people to take control of their own lives and transform society.[20] However, although generally on the left of the political spectrum, most parents were not Marxian socialists. They were activists when faced with social problems, democrats committed to resolving issues through participation, egalitarians, and questioners of traditional institutions and social norms. In theory many parents were collectivists, but they respected individuality and were primarily interested in developing the capacities and interests of each individual. They shared many attitudes and values but often for different reasons. Progressives and Romantics frequently

referred to each other as "socialists" and "anarchists" which describes something of the style of the two groups but not their ideology.

Some were active in the New Democratic Party while others were involved in peace and disarmament issues or civil rights. A number of participants had been influenced by politico-religious movements. Some parents had explored non-violence inspired by Quakerism, others were brought up with a Methodist social conscience, still others were active in the Unitarian Church,[21] and several Jewish parents had been active in labour zionism.[22] There was certainly something of the kibbutz spirit present in the New School community.[23] Although the precise political orientations of the founding parents varied, the majority believed that Progressive education would lead children to constructive criticism of their society,[24] thus producing individuals who would help to bring about social change.[25] These views were in keeping with the intellectual and political climate of the early 1960s in Canada—a time of idealism, questioning, and optimism about the future.

Dissatisfaction with the education system was an important aspect of the parents' social and political outlook. They objected to competitive and anti-social values (such as stereotyping of aboriginal children) they believed were transmitted through the public schools. They distrusted large institutions, governments, and strongly religious or nationalistic sentiments.[26] Individualists among the group believed unquestioning nationalism inhibited independent thinking while the socialists equated nationalism with capitalism and war.

New School parents believed strongly in participatory democratic decision making and shared an interest in co-operative organization. Several founding parents had originally met at a parent co-operative pre-school[27] while others had met at the Child Study Centre at U.B.C.[28] Several parents knew Mary Thomson, a consultant to Vancouver's parent co-operative pre-schools, and her husband Watson Thomson, a pioneer of Progressive, co-operative education in Canada.[29] Mrs. Thomson was an important resource during the planning stages.[30] In keeping with their socialist and egalitarian values, New School parents developed a sliding fee scale based

on each familiy's ability to pay. This would ensure that no families were excluded for economic reasons and would replace the traditional private school scholarship system.[31] The sliding scale remained a central New School policy throughout its life.

Progressivism, Romanticism, and socialism all strongly influenced the ideology of the New School. But parents' opposition to the public school system did not help them to agree on what they wanted. Some wanted a Deweyan progressive school, others wanted a Summerhillian free school, some favoured an enriched curriculum, and a few wanted to make a political statement. Some parents investigated the Montessori method and Waldorf Schools. The group's educational theories were not clearly defined and people meant different things by "structure, creativity, interests, and freedom."[32] One parent wondered by 1964 "how many of us are in agreement in our use of the term Progressive?"[33] The founding community never agreed on precisely what kind of school it was to be. This lack of consensus would cause serious problems in the years to come.

A front-page article outlining the goals of the New School appeared in *The Sun*, on February 7, 1961, titled "Four Profs Plan Own School."[34] The article reported that the professors were "disenchanted with the Chant report" and would follow the "Progressive system of education." The school would be "informal, unregimented, non-competitive, and non-conformist" with teaching "geared to the individual needs of each child" on the assumption that "learning is interesting and enjoyable." The fine arts would be central to the curriculum. The school was to be accessible to anyone who agreed with its aims and Elliott Gose was quoted: "Fees will be worked out on the basis of ability to pay. We don't want it to be a school for university professors' children only." The planning process took two years. After long debates about theory, committees were formed to address practical matters such as governance, finance, physical space, and recruitment. "The New School" was incorporated under the Societies Act in February 1962 to "establish and maintain a non-profit co-operative school" to provide an "experimental and Progressive" education on terms which "minimize the exclusion of children on economic grounds."[35]

The first Board was elected that winter with Elliott Gose as President and other board members Don Brown, Charles Christopherson, Gwen Creech, Norman Epstein, Pat Hanson, Ean Hay, Ken McFarland, and Alan Tolliday; adding Ellen Tallman and Andy Johnston the next year.[36] The Board represented all of the competing Progressive, Romantic, and socialist ideologies. Mr. MacFarland and Mr. Tolliday added some badly needed practical and financial expertise.

After many hours of discussion, and numerous drafts and position papers, a comprehensive prospectus was completed in June 1962 that explained the New School's approach to Progressive learning. Much of the school's educational theory came from John Dewey. Children would be respected for their individual nature and humanity and would progress through the curriculum at their own rates and in their own ways. The school would offer individualized instruction, a flexible curriculum, and small classes. Activities would derive from student interests: "the child must do the work of learning; his activity is most satisfying and productive when it stems from his own interests."[37] The encouragement of artistic expression would be an essential goal: "Through the arts a child learns to express and develop his personality more readily and to approach the basic skills more creatively. The arts are not frills but a basic part of the curriculum."[38]

Developing critical thinking and problem solving skills was a primary goal and the New School would encourage students' natural curiosity. The prospectus stated that each student would "actively experience his education rather than passively accept it. The work of a teacher is not only to communicate a body of knowledge but to create conditions under which the students will develop an ability to think through problems and to be creative."[39] This would necessitate an informal classroom atmosphere with inter-disciplinary projects and experimentation. Nevertheless, prospective parents were assured that instruction in the basic subjects would be "at least equivalent to that in the public schools over the long run."[40] In this assertion the founders overestimated their capacity to carry this out.

A central goal of the New School was the promotion of co-operation rather than

competition and there would be no examinations or grading systems. Parents believed that competition "aside from demoralizing some and distorting relations among all, introduces irrelevant motives into children's work and confuses their values."[41] The school would encourage growth in self-discipline, self-reliance, and independence. Tolerance and respect for individual differences would be highly valued and, true to the founders' humanistic and individualist views, the school would not promote any religious or nationalistic bias. Lastly, New School parents were determined that school would be an enjoyable experience for their children and that learning would be fun.

The prospectus outlined the co-operative governing structure based on "individuality, mutual respect, and trust in democratic procedures." Parents would share "a fair distribution of the burden" of supporting the school. The prospectus stated prophetically: "The school is for children but parents are also engaged in an educational experiment."[42]

Parents had to confront a difficult policy issue almost immediately —whether the school would accept children with learning or behavioural disabilities. These included children apparently unable to do certain kinds of academic work and emotionally disturbed children for whom regular teaching practices would not suffice. Although the parents were compassionate individuals who did not want to turn away students they thought they could help, this was to be a school for "normal children" requiring a careful "balancing act."[43] The school accepted several students with reading disabilities and one autistic child, but the number was kept deliberately low (below ten percent) so they could be absorbed without substantially altering the programme. However, even this small number was perceived as a serious enough concern by the end of the second year that the 1964 prospectus warns that the school would not accept children whose "problems require special facilities which the school cannot adequately provide."[44] Parents worried that if the number of "problem students" rose the basic nature of the school would change.[45]

The teachers had little expertise in handling reading disabilities and there were no

diagnostic services. Nevertheless, one parent reports that her child was treated for mild dyslexia that she believes would have been undetected in the public system at that time. Another parent, whose son had a reading disability, believes he would have been in "bad trouble" in public school and praises the teachers who "worked all the time with him and really brought him through."[46] These successes were exceptions, however. The issue was never resolved and by 1965 the school began to accept a higher proportion of special needs students.

New families were attracted primarily through word of mouth. Some parents also read about the school in newspaper advertisements and articles[47] while others saw a television interview with Elliot Gose, Don Brown, and Marilyn Epstein on the C.B.C. programme, "Almanac."[48] Prospective parents were interviewed at their homes by two members of the admissions committee to ensure that the applicants' educational goals and expectations were compatible with those of the New School. By the spring of 1962, thirty-two families had enrolled their children.

Almost half of the parents worked in educational fields, but the school succeeded in attracting a few families from all walks of life. Nine were university professors (28%) and six were teachers (19%). Seven worked in other professions (22%), four in business (13%), three in trades (9%), and three in the performing arts (9%).[49] Parental occupations included business, law, social work, psychology, science, management, architecture, carpentry, theatre, music, and the ministry. Over 60% lived on the west side of Vancouver, 20% came all the way from West and North Vancouver, and a few families came from Vancouver's east side, Burnaby, Richmond, and even Ladner.[50] Despite this diversity, the school had a strong professional and middle class ambiance. This was typical of Progressive schools as Lawrence Cremin explains, "the costliness of private schools and the normal pedagogical conservatism of working-class parents tended to make independent Progressive schools middle or upper class institutions."[51] The New School fit the pattern.

Staffing

The most important task of the new organization was to hire teaching staff. In April 1962 the school hired Lloyd Arntzen, a respected West Vancouver elementary teacher and musician, as head teacher. He had been suggested by Board member Ean Hay, a fellow band leader. Mr. Arntzen was attracted to the New School because of its commitment to innovative teaching, individualized student progress, small ungraded classes, and the creative arts. He had been frustrated by the lack of a support system for students with reading problems "left by the wayside in the public system" and believed that competitiveness in learning was counterproductive.[52] Mr. Arntzen did not subscribe to any particular educational theory. He considered various methods, implementing whatever he thought would work in a given situation. He aimed to discover each student's unique learning style (verbal, written, dramatic, creative, analytical, introspective). He introduced activities that appealed to student interests but, unlike free school advocates, he believed teachers should control the curriculum.[53] Julia Brown reports that Mr. Arntzen conveyed "an excitement and enthusiasm about learning" and "was wonderful with kids."[54]

Joyce Beck, a primary teacher with five years experience in public schools, was hired shortly afterwards. She believed in "students going at their own rate rather than some struggling to keep up while others sit bored." She found her "new freedom an exciting experience."[55] Parents and students remember both teachers as dedicated individuals with a gift for motivating young people while giving them the freedom to be themselves. Both had British Columbia teaching certificates but neither had any special training in innovative methods.

The New School opened in September, 1962, with thirty-nine students in grades one through five.[56] Students were organized in two multi-age groups; Mr. Arntzen taught the older class and Mrs. Beck worked with the younger children. Attempts to locate suitable accommodation for the school had been unsuccessful so the Board decided to rent two rooms from the Peretz School (a socialist Jewish educational and cultural organization). But the

teachers were unenthusiastic about working in someone else's space. It was difficult to operate a school that encouraged work with concrete materials when everything had to be dismantled and put away at the end of the day.

Seeking to resolve the accommodation problem, Alan Tolliday and Ken MacFarland combed the city for an appropriate location. One day in October they noticed a building for sale at 3070 Commercial Drive that belonged to King's College, a former Christian school. They had to act quickly for another school was interested in the site and several parents inspected the premises by flashlight that very night. They were also anxious to purchase the building while it was still licensed for educational purposes. The building cost $33,000. The board asked all members to donate what they could in the form of debentures to be redeemable when the family left the school. The campaign raised $6,500 within a matter of weeks, enough to secure a mortgage for $26,500.[57] The New School bought the building and moved in on November 1.

Although the building needed a lot of work and was far from ideal, the purchase was the culmination of two years of planning and generated great excitement among the parents. The main floor consisted of several classrooms, a science room, music room, office, and lounge. The basement had a large concrete play area for rainy days, an art room, kitchen, and a stage with enough room for an audience.[58] There was no outside playground but students could play at Clark Park across the street. The building was expected to be a temporary home until the school outgrew it. This never happened, however, and its deteriorating condition caused the school serious problems in future years.

The school population quickly became a close community. School events and committee tasks kept families in constant communication. Because students came from all over the Lower Mainland, carpools and visits to each other's homes were frequent. Students looked forward to school each day to the astonishment of their public school friends. The first year was so successful that a third class was added in the fall of 1963 and Carol Williams, a beginning teacher, was hired to teach grades three and four. Enrolment jumped to fifty-five students in grades one

through six and the treasurer announced that the school had broken even after one full year of operation.[59] The school's success was due to the dedication of its participants and it was not until the spring of the second year that any serious problems arose.

With the success of the first year behind them, parents deliberated about the future educational direction of the school. They debated what they wanted their children to learn, how much the teachers should shape the curriculum, and how much should come from the students themselves. Many circulated their views in writing but their opinions were so diverse they were unable to achieve a consensus. However, their discussions were indicative of the intellectual excitement and optimism generated by the New School project.

One parent, Gloria Levi, underscored the school's primary values (co-operation, learning through interest, encouragement of the arts) and raised some basic questions: "What do we want taught and why? How does it differ from a traditional curriculum? Are individual studies organized within a larger scheme?" She advocated a flexible curriculum but one initiated by the teachers.[60] Charles Christopherson expressed the Romantic view arguing against "ivory towerism" in favour of providing young people with practical skills and independent judgement. He believed the curriculum must expand from the classroom into the home and the community with a "balanced interaction among all elements in a democratic society." School should be "a living, organic, built-in participation in life with infinite possibilities of discovery, diversity, individuality, and creative improvisation." Pat Hanson hoped her children would be "glad they are alive, and capable of expressing their feelings and communicating their thoughts." She believed an environment encouraging rational thought and expression in speaking, writing, and art was more important than any particular content. She did not expect school to teach her children to fit into society:

> If the education I want is successful, it will not make life easy for my children. Often what they experience will be painful, what they think disturbing, and what they express misunderstood. They will, however, be given the opportunity to realize their potentialities as human beings.[61]

Don Brown related Progressive education to broader personal and social issues in his paper "Are We A Progressive School?" summarizing his understanding of Dewey's ideas on interest, enquiry, and activity in the learning process. In reaction to more conservative Progressive thought, Dr. Brown believed psychology should play a minor pedagogical role in comparison to the practical experience of professional teachers who "relate material to the child's own experience." He stressed the fundamental importance of the arts and favoured a curriculum "related to life, to equip children with the cultural resources for dealing with the future." Dr. Brown believed that a child whose potential has been brought to maturity "will be a force for greater democracy and social change." He saw Progressive education as part of a way of life equally valued by parents and children:

> Progressivism in education is more than another theory of how to do it. It is the working out in the school of an attitude to life which demands expression in a person's family, job, social relations, politics, and religious commitments. There are live connections between our educational practice and our voluntary association as a group of parents. Willingness to think and act independently; mutual respect and co-operative relations; reliance on democratic procedures; a distribution of the financial burden which resists a class bias and attempts fairness among ourselves—these seem to me to be characteristic of people who also want progressive education, and to imply resistance to some of the strongest influences producing conformity in our society. The school is important to both children and parents as an oasis in which sounder values can develop.[62]

Curriculum

Education at the New School was child centred, individualized, and experiential. Activities were geared to the interests of the students, but unlike later "free schools," the teachers prescribed a curriculum, flexible though it was, and expected the students to learn. The school day began at 9:00 and followed a timetable which included daily reading and mathematics periods. But there were no bells, the schedule was flexible, and each day began with one hour of free activity during which individuals could choose to work on any subject.[63] Students were

responsible for completing assigned material at their level, but "how you did it was up to you." Students busy with special projects could continue the entire day if necessary, although the missed work had to be made up. One student remembers working on a science experiment continuously for three days and doing research interviews out of the school.[64] But when he was finished he caught up on the other subjects. The teachers encouraged spontaneity and unexpected projects. Students learned through their experiences and what was meaningful to them.

The New School's Progressive curriculum interested many educators and Neville Scarfe, Dean of Education at the University of British Columbia, visited in October 1963. He described the curriculum in a letter of support as "constructive, creative, and adventurous."[65] Parents and teachers extensively discussed how much structure would characterize New School classes. Most agreed that the teachers should develop learning situations but in a gentle manner. Lloyd Arntzen describes it this way:

> Basically I directed things. I brought stuff in and if I saw a glimmering of interest I would present the idea. I didn't go to a lot of work to get their ideas, I would just sort of pay attention. I kind of knew what they were interested in.[66]

Mr. Arntzen and Mrs. Beck adjusted their expectations to individual students' abilities and interests and "ideally it would be a different programme for every kid."[67] They developed a "fluid kind of structure, almost invisible; it was there but it wasn't, it was flexible."[68] One student remembers:

> I hardly remember any classes at the New School. I think time was structured somewhat (it wasn't a free for all) but you didn't have to tell anybody what you were doing and you seemed to be able to do whatever you felt like. So as a young kid I just followed and saw what looked interesting and would go and do that. Maybe there was stuff we had to do but I don't remember any sense of pressure.[69]

Students learned at their own pace and textbooks were rarely used. Class size of sixteen to twenty students made individualized teaching more manageable. The senior class worked on an individualized mathematics programme emphasizing understanding of the number system.

Students were tested to determine their beginning level and then worked through a systematic sequence of exercises that included hands-on activities and learning aids considered innovative in the early 1960s. "We got bushels of Cuisinaire rods"[70] and students, accustomed to traditional whole-class teaching, had to get used to doing mathematics "out of file boxes."[71] Two students completed the grade eight mathematics course in grade six.[72] Students used geoboards, made their own protractors, and even used triangulation to measure the height of trees. Don Brown recalls the satisfaction he felt on seeing Mr. Arntzen and his students outside surveying the school building on the very first school day in 1962.[73]

The reading programme was individualized and students chose their own literature, in consultation with the teacher, during weekly class trips to the public library. Although there was virtually no reading instruction for the older students, many read a great deal. Several girls formed an informal reading club and, assisted by a parent, read autobiographical accounts of the Holocaust. This became an intense emotional experience. Students read advanced and controversial books such as *Catcher in the Rye* that were not part of the public school curriculum, and one student remembers reading novels in secondary school that she had read several years earlier at the New School.[74] Another student recalls the excitement of hearing *The Hobbit* read aloud in grade three, and then writing stories about it and making pictures, posters, and puppets.

The primary reading and mathematics programmes were individualized and Mrs. Beck tried to ensure that every child would experience success.[75] Students learned to read when they were ready and most could not wait to get started. Julia Brown remembers her daughter coming home from her first day in grade one excited because Mrs. Beck had asked the students what they would like to learn; they all said they wanted to learn to read and write. Each child was then asked to choose a word they would like to write. "The kids wanted to learn and they were allowed to learn."[76] Hands-on activities were emphasized and grade one students used popsickle sticks to help visualize place value. Social studies, science, and art included individual and group projects emphasizing experience and observation. Students dramatized stories, wrote their own

plays, and did imaginative writing.[77]

The teachers emphasized conceptual understanding rather than rote skills. Phonics and spelling were taught to individuals if problems arose but basic skills were frequently missed. One student reports that she cannot spell to this day because spelling was ignored during her early years at the New School. Later, she learned the experimental International Teaching Alphabet which caused her a great deal of difficulty in grade eight.[78] Another student never learned her times tables, although she readily understood multiplication,[79] and another student reports being exposed to times tables for the first time when he entered public school in grade four.[80] Grammar and handwriting were virtually ignored and there was little formal writing activity. One parent, Jim Winter, was at first concerned about the omission of such basic grammar as parts of speech and sentence structure, but his son had no difficulty picking up those things in secondary school.[81] Most parents were not worried about academic subjects and Ellen Tallman was just happy her daughter wanted to go to school.[82]

The teachers integrated individual subjects through themes, special projects, and group activities. One student remembers spending three weeks building an entire Inca city and learning about Inca mathematics, stories, weaving, and other aspects of Inca civilization. Northwest Coast culture was similarly studied. Students split their own wood shakes and built cedar boxes, masks, and longhouses in the school basement.[83] Mr. Arntzen believed that learning ought to be interesting and fun; one way to achieve this was to encourage students to build things. "When I teach history I always look for what I think will interest them about it; you must make it memorable."[84] These thematic and concrete activities were essentially Deweyan.

Science emphasized inquiry, experimentation, observation, and understanding. Students spent several weeks investigating pendulums using frames they built with parental help and tested objects in a variety of shapes, weights, substances, and lengths of string. In another ongoing project, the group made hot air balloons out of vacumn cleaner bags and alcohol burning lights.[85] They built and flew kites, discussed the mathematics involved, and wrote poetry about them.[86]

When Trout Lake froze over one winter the whole school dropped everything and spent an entire week building ice-boats. In such instances the teachers were flexible enough to discard their schedule and respond to students' sense of excitement. One younger child remembers helping an older student on individual chemistry projects such as making hydrochloric acid and electrolysis.[87] Another student developed a great knack for research and spent many hours interviewing experts and public figures including the chief fire inspector and the mayor. He reports that students were never "spoonfed" information:

> You were given questions but you had to find the answers. There was nothing to regurgitate back. We were taught how to find the necessary tools to answer any question or solve any problem.[88]

The teachers encouraged students to develop an interest in world events. They discussed the significance of the Cuban missile crisis as they were unfolding and when Martin Luther King was assassinated several years later the students talked and wrote about it. "It wasn't just something that they studied about, there was a lot of emotion that they felt and were able to express."[89] Like their parents, many students were aware of social issues. They discussed political questions such as the Vietnam war[90] and devoted an issue of the student newspaper to a discussion of racism in the United States titled "Jim Crow Must Go." Some students distributed literature for the NDP during an election campaign,[91] and on one occasion a group of future activists organized a sit-in, taking over the teachers' lounge.[92] Students were interested in social trends and in the early days of Vancouver's counterculture one group undertook to make "a tape recorded study of the marijuana and LSD scene in Vancouver."[93] One student remembers hearing Bob Dylan for the first time at the New School in 1964 and feeling deeply moved by "The Times They Are A-Changin'." A few parents favoured formal education in socialist ideas but this was never pursued.[94]

Students have vivid memories of music and the other creative arts. Lloyd Arntzen was one of the earliest B.C. practitioners of the Orff method. Students learned to play xylophones

which Mr. Arntzen and several parents had made themselves. He taught rhythm through rhythmic word patterns and intricate clapping techniques, forming a clapping orchestra. Students enjoyed this activity so much that they often sang and clapped the rhythms on their way home in the car.[95] Mr. Arntzen introduced the students to folk music and taught sea songs such as "The Golden Vanity" and "Jack Was Every Inch A Sailor." One student who went on to do a music education degree claims that this "joy in her life was fostered by Lloyd Arntzen."[96]

Students engaged in painting, drawing, and pottery and the school had its own kiln. Cooking was also popular and students baked bread and made ice cream. One classroom was set up as a workshop, rare in an elementary school. One of the parents built workbenches, fitted them out with tools, and Mr. Arntzen, a skilled carpenter, developed a successful woodworking programme. The shop became a refuge for several students with reading difficulties. Cooking and woodworking activities were available to both boys and girls.

New School parents believed strongly in the importance of self-expression and drama was a popular activity. Students wrote their own plays and performed them on the basement stage for other students and for parents on theatre evenings. These student written plays often arose from other areas of study or school activities. During the second year students put on a play about Mrs. Beck (who was pregnant) giving birth that had the parents in stitches.[97] One younger student recalls performing in a three act play about survival on an island.[98] A group of older boys organized at least one play per week, an activity that enhanced acting, writing, directing, and social skills. Drama was an activity at which students who were not proficient in academic work could excel. One boy turned out to be so talented that he started getting parts at the C.B.C., prompting him to learn to read.[99] Students also made films. In keeping with New School goals, dramatic activities encouraged creative work but de-emphasized performance.

The school used community resources for physical education, including Clark Park for soccer, the Trout Lake gymnasium for indoor games, and the local swimming pool and skating rink. The parents purchased gymnastics equipment for the basement. The school had a soccer

team composed of boys and girls and occasionally played games with nearby St. Joseph's Catholic School. Clark Park across the street became the main student playground and students were called back to the school by an old fashioned hand held bell.

The school made use of the outside community and students participated in field trips to such locations as the harbour, a bakery, and a sewage plant. The school invited professional artists, musicians, and actors to come in and work with students and also had an arrangement with Holiday Theatre whereby classes in creative drama were offered at the school in the afternoon. The parents constituted an extensive pool of talent and were invited into the school to share their expertise with students. One father who was a printer brought in an antique printing machine with a heavy roller and boxes of type, and students produced their own newspaper.[100]

Day-to-day life at the New School was informal. Students worked at trapezoid shaped tables (built by parents) rather than desks, a radical innovation in the early 1960s, and were free to move around the school. There were also carrels that fulfilled some students' wishes for a private space "like having their own house."[101] Students and teachers dressed as they liked and girls enjoyed the freedom to wear pants. Strict dress codes were the norm in public schools at that time and Clive Cocking, writing in *The Sun* in May, 1967, wondered if the reader could imagine a school "where a mop-headed youngster can swagger around in a poncho embroidered with golden tigers and dragons" and where a teacher "can sport a beard and doesn't have to wear a suit."[102] He was equally surprised that kids could fly kites in the hall, carry around a transistor radio, and walk in and out of class anytime they wanted. He concluded that it was sometimes difficult for a stranger to tell "when it is recess and when it is not."

New School parents considered freedoms of dress and mobility important in developing self-confidence and responsibility, allowing students to think about more important intellectual and social issues.[103] Parents also wanted their children to express their individuality and to have fun while they were learning. Lloyd Arntzen recalls going to great lengths to summarize for the first annual meeting how much the students had learned, when one Board member interrupted

with "I can see they are learning things but are they enjoying themselves?"[104]

Teachers respected student opinion and allowed them to participate in establishing rules of conduct at weekly meetings. Students helped decide methods of sharing equipment, organization of sports day, and noise limits in the school building.[105] Students learned to negotiate and resolve conflicts. If some children wanted to have water fights outside they would have to find a way to do so without affecting those who wanted to stay dry.[106] Students were permitted to do whatever they wanted in the school basement (within reason) and sometimes painted the whole area black or wild colours in paisley or psychedelic style. However, there was an "edge of formality" at the New School.[107] Teachers were addressed by their last names and made all decisions regarding student safety. The adults listened to student suggestions and discussion was open and free, but the New School did not adopt a Summerhill model of student self-government during its early years.

Teachers emphasized student responsibility and self-discipline and administered no form of punishment.[108] A *Vancouver Province* reporter, visiting the school in June 1963, noted that "there's no strap in the school and little formal discipline."[109] This was a major departure from B.C. public schools where the strap would continue to be used for another decade. There were few formal rules and students were taught to set their own limits in regard to personal safety and behaviour toward others. Discipline was indeed gentle. One student remembers "peeing in the waste basket in grade one and Lloyd coming down the stairs and simply saying 'Don't do that' and I said 'Oh, okay.'" Instead of detentions or other traditional methods of discipline, the teachers could rely on genuine respect from students and regular communication with parents to deal effectively with any problems. Nevertheless, teachers exercised their authority when necessary. One student remembers a sanction that was available to control behaviour—he could be prohibited from going out on research projects. He continues: "we were never a Summerhill. Breaking windows didn't go. But it was very much our school."[110]

The teachers wrote in their annual report that "on the whole the students exhibited good

sense and sensible behaviour at school." [111] This view was echoed by a *Province* reporter who observed that "the school was humming with activity. The discipline was obviously good. Every youngster was busy doing something. There was no sign of horsing around or idleness." In commenting on the wide range of activity, he continued, "one group was busy performing an electrolysis of water experiment; others were painting, reading, composing music, or woodworking."[112] Nevertheless, the energetic and unconstrained New School students could be a handful for the teachers to manage.

Teachers hoped that students would be motivated by their excitement about learning and by the interesting activities offered rather than by examinations and grades. One parent recalls that "the kids would continue their school experience in the car with activities such as mental arithmetic."[113] The absence of exams, grades, and formal report cards was a source of amazement to New School visitors. A 1963 article in the *Province* was headlined "Exams are passe for children at New School,"[114] and a similar story titled "No exams, reports, at New School" appeared in *The Sun* three years later.[115]

Teachers wrote extensive anecdotal comments on each student's academic progress, artistic activities, and social growth. Mr. Arntzen believed in building on student strengths and his remarks were honest but positive. In one report, after outlining a student's need for remedial work in reading and arithmetic, he devoted an entire paragraph to the child's leadership in creating imaginative plays with "a motley crew of boys down in the basement."[116] Detailed anecdotal reporting was unusual in the public schools at that time. In some classes students wrote their own reports at the end of the year as summaries of what they had learned. Teachers often discussed student progress with parents informally but formal conferences were also scheduled.[117]

The elimination of grades was part of an attempt to de-emphasize competition. Mr. Arntzen opposed competitiveness in learning because "the poor learner was in a race he could not win."[118] The teachers reported that students "worked with interest and enthusiasm without the ulterior stimulus of grades." They believed the absence of grades eliminated frustration and

contributed towards a "more friendly, charitable, and helpful atmosphere among the students."[119] Students were fiercely competitive in team sports (A.S. Neill reports the same at Summerhill) but individual competitions were discouraged in favour of co-operative races and games. This was to become a familiar model for Sports Day in public elementary schools some years later.

Students were encouraged to help each other with their work. The drama groups that functioned without adult assistance exemplified student co-operation. One former student says, "I think we learned how to co-operate without being aware of it."[120] Students of all ages worked and played together and the multi-age classes encouraged co-operative learning.[121] One student remembers hanging out with older kids, doing what they were doing: "The thing that strikes me the most is how little I remember the presence of teachers. I don't remember teachers showing us how to do things. I remember much more learning from older students."[122] Most students remember little fighting or bullying on the playground. They were encouraged to work out social problems without teacher intervention and this became an important part of everyday learning. In a small school conflicts could not remain unresolved for long.

Girls and boys played together with little fanfare and, according to one former student, generally did "the boys' types of things."[123] Although gender equality was not a conscious component of school philosophy, the New School was ahead of its time in not segregating activities according to gender. Girls played on teams and worked at carpentry while boys did weaving and sewing. One female student describes how the girls expected to do the same things as the boys and expected to have the same futures, and was shocked when she found that this attitude did not exist in public school.[124] Another student says "it was the natural thing; we never thought anything of it."[125]

The school had a relaxed attitude towards personal modesty and during the second year an intense debate erupted over unisex washrooms. Students took part in the discussions and one parent recalls "the girls didn't care about the philosophy—they wanted their own washroom!"[126] Their wishes prevailed. The school provided sex education evenings for the older students and

their parents, another practice not found in the public schools at that time. During their presentations the health officers had to be on their toes lest a precocious New School student accuse them of being too embarrassed to discuss the subject fully.[127] Parents briefly discussed free sexuality for young people, but most were uncomfortable with the idea and it was dropped.

Respect for individuals and tolerance of differences were taken for granted. One parent praises Mr. Arntzen for creating an "accepting atmosphere" helping her daughter learn to value people as they are.[128] Another wrote that the school extended her son's "human sympathies" towards kids with disabilities.[129] Conformity was not valued at the New School and students were encouraged to be different.[130] Several were extroverted actors and others were gifted scholars. One student brought his typewriter to school and used it continually from grade one. However, Mr. Arntzen states that a pecking order did exist and teachers had to help the "misfits" gain acceptance.[131]

Several parents appreciated the lack of anxiety and pressure their children experienced at the New School. One parent credits the school with providing a supportive environment for his gifted son. Due to the fluid groupings he could work with the older students while spending his social time with the younger group.[132] Another parent took his daughter out of public school when she developed hives in grade one; she spent the rest of her elementary years at the New School.[133] One student remembers a friend in public school who "had gotten the strap for sliding down a bannister. It seemed barbaric and frightening."[134] Parents believe the absence of pressure helped their children become better adjusted individuals.[135] One student reflects movingly on his first year at the New School after three unhappy public school years:

> I just remember feeling that I liked school again. At the New School I felt like a person. You could walk down the hall and not be afraid. I felt stimulated and interested in what I was doing. I felt like I was learning a lot of things and not feeling like I was failing all the time. I just felt happy. In some ways I think that first year saved my life.[136]

Many children had been similarly unhappy in public school though most were bright and

well motivated students. At the New School they developed confidence, independence, and sense of adventure encouraged by teachers who rewarded initiative. Creative thinking was encouraged even if it didn't lead to tangible results. One student recalls:

> Drew (another student) came in with a copy of Hamlet and thought we could do it. I thought it was a great idea—I read the first few pages and there was a ghost and everything. The big problem was how are we going to get scripts. So I got out the carbon paper to type out this copy of Hamlet! I didn't get very far. Another time I wanted to create a machine that would make marbles. I thought it wouldn't be difficult melting the glass and pouring it into a mold and getting the mold to open. I don't think it ever materialized but I spent a lot of time thinking about how this marble machine could be made. I think there was a lot of creative activity going on, some of it materializing, and some of it just figuring. There were lots of schemes and ideas.[137]

One parent describes New School kids as "alive and exciting."[138] This was in large part from growing up in stimulating home environments that encouraged independent thinking.

Students rode the buses all over town to places like Lost Lagoon and Spanish Banks, developing considerable independence. One student recalls taking the bus down Dunbar Street each morning "picking up New School kids along the way."[139] Two other students rode the bus to school from Deep Cove at the age of nine and students in grade two or three often took the bus home.[140] In place of baseball cards, New School kids collected and traded bus transfers. One student remembers "when we were on the bus people would ask what school do you go to and we would say the New School and they would say which new school, and it got to be quite a joke among us like belonging to a club."[141] The feeling of independence that came from riding the buses is a common memory among New School students.

Students became very close and often paid extended weekend visits to each others' homes. Most realized their school was unique and were proud of it. One student remembers that "we always had people writing about us" and another recalls feeling more worldly than the other kids when she went back to public school. For another the New School gave her a "sense of specialness."

Because of the emphasis on thinking skills, it was not always easy to measure exactly how much pupils had learned but the majority of New School students from this period had no trouble adapting later to public school. Norman Epstein says: "Our kids had no problem at all adjusting to the public schools. The freedom to operate at their own pace, being on their own, was helpful. They didn't need to lean on us for help in high school."[142] Rita Cohn maintains her four children "must have learned all the essentials because they have all done very well in school."[143] Other parents report similar observations. Many students were surprised at how little they had missed, caught up easily, and achieved high marks. One student who "didn't feel behind at all" describes her New School activities as "exercise for the mind."

> I realized what they had been teaching us was how to learn, how to teach ourselves. There were things that they had learned [in public school] that I hadn't learned, yet I didn't seem to have missed anything. Whether we were learning what the other kids had been learning didn't seem to make any difference."[144]

However, the reading programme was deficient. Most New School students had already learned to read at public school or at home and had many family resources to fall back on. One former student says, "our parents were well educated and that made up for anything we might have missed in the classroom."[145] But at least four New School students did not learn effective reading skills.[146] One former student says: "I don't remember any reading instruction at all. If I hadn't known how to read already, I never would have bothered to learn."[147] Several former students report having difficulty with grammar and spelling later in their school careers and Ellen Tallman began to worry by the end of her childrens' third year at the New School "whether they were going to have to pay too high a price for our experiment."[148]

Nevertheless, students believed they had real choices—what they wanted to learn, how they would organize their time—and most valued this experience in their further educational endeavours. One former student says "the most important thing you can learn in school is to be self-sufficient and independent and that the New School gave me."[149] Another emphasized that she may have missed some skills but "we learned how to motivate ourselves and regulate our own

time."[150] Many New School students believed they could do anything they set their minds to. One student describes the feeling of empowerment as "a sense of being able to think of something and go and do it; having an idea and being able to follow through on it." He continues:

> The public school did not inspire me and once I realized that I could get A's, it was just a matter of getting by on what was required. There was much less of a sense of working for myself, whereas at the New School there didn't seem to be anybody else to work for.[151]

The Parent Co-operative

The New School was governed as a parent co-operative under strict democratic principles. Decisions were made at regular meetings of the entire school community. The founders hoped that most decisions would be reached by consensus, but if necessary majority votes were taken with each family having one vote.[152] A Board of ten members was elected for a three-year term to manage the affairs of the school. Although the school constitution established a detailed decision making structure, member families never agreed about how much power the Board would have. As with curriculum disagreements, the parents' lack of clarity from the beginning about how decisions would be made caused a great deal of dissension.

Some members of the community favoured a less formal decision making procedure arguing for a system of direct democracy that would eliminate the board altogether. In a comprehensive paper "On New School Governance" in the fall of 1963, Werner Cohn warned of the "inherent inequalities" of any system of representative democracy.[153] He favoured a system with no officers, no voting, consensus style decision making, and a flexible, independent committee structure in which any interested members could participate. A teacher-administrator would perform many of the tasks of running the school but all decisions would be made by the general membership. Much of this argument was based on Rousseau's principle of General Will, which Mr. Cohn admired. Although several other parents favoured this system, there was never

enough support to implement it. A compromise in the spring of 1964 decreased the term of Board members from three years to one year and opened committees to the participation of all members.[154]

Decision making was contentious. Although the founding parents wielded considerable influence, they disagreed over many issues themselves. The organization was subject to "checks, balances, and shifting alliances"[155], but permanent factions developed when a major crisis erupted during the third year. Initially, a high percentage of parents took active part in decision making, but the level of participation decreased as the years passed. Norman Epstein estimates that over three quarters of the parents were active in school affairs during the first year, but that less than one third took part three years later.[156] The school community was not adept at making newcomers feel at home and there was no procedure for integrating new families and as the membership increased from thirty-two to forty-six families more people were content to remain on the periphery of the group. One parent commented, "when you expand to over a hundred people, you don't even know everybody."[157]

Parents were deeply involved in all aspects of school life and developed a comprehensive committee structure to which all members were expected to contribute. Standing committees included finance, building maintenance, admissions, housekeeping, volunteers, carpool, telephone, secretarial, equipment, long range planning, "scrounging," teachers' aid, ways and means (fund-raising), grants, and teacher relations.[158] The committees became so active that by the fall of 1963 board members were unaware of many activities taking place in the school. To facilitate communication President Ean Hay asked for monthly reports from all committees and the Board produced a regular newsletter for the whole membership.[159]

A tremendous amount of energy was unleashed with the purchase of the school building, and participants report feeling a sense of pride and community. One parent describes the excitement she felt as similar to that of "fixing up an old house."[160] Building tasks provided an avenue through which parents with practical skills could assume leadership roles, just as the

academically inclined members had taken the lead in the educational planning. The building committee convened constant work parties on weekends to fix the roof, paint the building, move walls, and make equipment such as tables, shelves, cushions, pendulum frames, or musical instruments. Another group of parents tapped sources for scrounging equipment from books to test tubes.[161] Some of these duties were onerous but all the activity contributed to building community spirit. Work parties became social occasions and many participants remember such experiences as pouring tar and pebbles on the school roof. Parents, teachers, and students all did their share and felt this was indeed "their school."[162]

Parents also performed janitorial duties according to an elaborate rotating schedule in which everyone participated. The maintenance committee prepared elaborate instructions on cleaning tasks and parents were organized into twelve groups according to task. Alan Tolliday considered building maintenance so central to the group's identity that he attributes the beginning of declining community spirit to the hiring of a school janitor at the beginning of the third year.[163] Parents also volunteered their time to drive students to Oakridge Library once a week, telephone members about announcements, put together the monthly newsletter, and perform numerous other tasks.[164] The board acknowledged that the amount of time given by parents was "remarkable."[165]

But the constant work load was demanding of parents. As early as the Fall of 1962 one parent lamented the "sacrifice in time, effort, and money; we like the school, but, oh, it's such an effort!"[166] In an interesting twist to the traditional rhyme, the newsletter announced a school picnic at the end of the first year with:

No more car pool
No more mop
Let's have fun
Before we stop.[167]

Tuition fees were based on each family's ability to pay. The pros and cons of a sliding fee scale were debated extensively during the early planning sessions. Several upper income families

were resentful of the sliding scale at first but politically committed parents such as Norman Epstein and Don Brown insisted on it. They argued that it was consistent with egalitarian values that families ought to pay what they could afford. Furthermore, the school founders had always believed in serving a cross section of the community and did not want to "cater to children of high or low IQ or to children of rich parents."[168] Once adopted, the policy was never questioned as a central school principle and even one of the early opponents agreed that it "brought terrific people into the group who otherwise couldn't afford to come in."[169]

The fee schedule consisted of a base rate plus a percentage of taxable family income. The finance committee chairperson visited the homes of all members to verify their income tax returns. Norman Epstein reports that, although time consuming, no one seemed to mind providing the information and his visits were cordial and enjoyable.[170] After several years the school switched to the honour system for collecting income data which appeared to work just as well.[171] During the summer the finance committee sent each family a formal assessment specifying the coming year's tuition remitted by post-dated cheques.

For the first year the minimum annual fee was set at $110 plus 6% of taxable income. The formula was revised each year and in 1965 the minimum fee rose to $150 plus 9% of income.[172] During these early years the average fee was of $360 per child.[173] The finance committee adopted a maximum of $750 per child and reduced the fee for a second child to 75% of the first.[174]

The sliding scale was successful in assisting low income families and in the early years there was a healthy balance among those who could afford the full fee and those who were subsidized. In 1964/65 seventeen of thirty-eight families paid the full fee of $750, fourteen families paid between $400 and $750, and seven families paid from the minimum of $150 to $400. Fees remained fairly stable during the first five years with the average fee per child ranging from $350 to $450.[175] Member families were also expected to contribute toward the building mortgage in the form of debentures or loans to be returned when they left the school. School fees caused financial hardship for some families as one parent wrote, "sending two kids to private school is

going to be hard,"[176] but participation in the New School was a high priority for most families.

The sliding scale was an ingenious method for measuring ability to pay. The minimum fee was low enough to prevent undue hardship to any members but ensured that every family contributed. The maximum level was set so that no family would have to shoulder too heavy a burden, and the reduction for additional children kept the fees bearable for large families. Although there were occasional complaints about some aspect of the system (one year self-employed parents were criticized for not paying their share), most members considered it fair. The fee policy generated interest outside the New School community and an early story about the school in *The Sun* in March, 1961 was headlined "New School Bases Fees on Income."[177]

Norman Epstein, who was instrumental in conceiving and refining the policy, believes that one of the strengths of the New School was that it exposed students to a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds which created a "life long significant difference" for his own children.[178] One student recalls that she had friends "from the waterfront of West Van to the east end of Vancouver"[179] and several parents have commented on the "wonderful mix of kids" from a variety of backgrounds.[180] Many former parents believe that the social mix increased tolerance among the students.

Although a few parents wanted to exchange work for lower tuition fees, the majority opposed this idea, arguing that volunteer work and money were equally essential elements in the healthy functioning of the co-operative. Since everyone was expected to contribute both, it would be unfair to exchange one for the other. The Board recognized that, as with financial contributions, some families would be able to provide more work than others.

The school undertook to pay its teachers the equivalent of Vancouver School District scale and fringe benefits (public school salaries were in the $6,000 to $9,000 range annually in the mid-1960s).[181] The school offered matching payments for medical coverage, insurance, and retirement benefits. Teachers were given one day per month sick leave and each year the school designated a substitute teacher (usually a parent) to be on call to fill in for any teacher who was

ill. New School teachers were spared most of the bureaucratic paperwork faced by public school teachers.

Teachers' salaries accounted for over two-thirds of each year's operating expenses. In 1962/63 two salaries amounted to $12,100 out of a total expenditure of $17,100. The following year three salaries came to $16,150 out of a total of $22,600, and in 1964/65 salary commitments increased to $23,175 out of a total of $31,600.[182] The school finished the first year with a modest surplus of just under $1,000 and managed to balance its budget three out of the next four years. Tuition income covered about 90% of operating expenses. Fund raising activities produced the remainder and also had to cover capital expenses (mainly mortgage payments).[183] In the meantime the $26,500 owing on the building was reduced by approximately $4,000 per year.[184]

The school owed its members $6,500 in loans or debentures payable within twelve months after a family left the school. Parents were encouraged to contribute more to pay down the mortgage if they could afford it, and were also asked for additional debentures when the school incurred its first deficit in 1965/66.[185] Debentures averaged between $100 and $150, although some families paid less and a few contributed over $200, one going as high as $850. Some families allowed their money to remain with the school for several years after leaving and a few forgave the debt entirely.[186]

Parents spent hundreds of hours on the "constant fundraising" that had to be undertaken for the school to survive financially. They held rummage sales, auctions, raffles, bazaars, dinners, and dances. Events were frequent. During the fall of 1963, the school held a rummage sale in September, an auction in October, a folk song evening in November, a Christmas carnival in December, and a dinner dance later the same month (with music provided by Lloyd Arntzen and friends).[187] Other activities during these years included a showing of short films at the Varsity Theatre, classical guitar concerts held at a member's home, a ten week lecture series in the spring of 1964, and several art auctions including work by Jack Shadbolt, Jack Wise, parents, and friends.[188] Single events often brought in over $500, and from 1963 to 1967 fund-raising

activities were highly successful generating more than $3,000 in annual revenue peaking at $4,000 in 1964/65.[189]

The New School Thrift and Gift Shop, at 4352 West 10th Avenue, opened in August, 1964. Parents spent many hours working in the shop, collecting merchandise, and transporting unsold items to waste material outlets near the waterfront to be made into rags.[190] The shop was open five days a week and depended entirely on volunteer labour and donated clothing. The shop generated a profit of over $2,000 during its first five months of operation but earned smaller amounts from then on.[191] Sales averaged $300 a month for several years with an annual profit of $2,000.[192] But by 1968 sales had fallen and the shop made only $900.[193] The shop moved to 4th Avenue in 1965 and to Main Street in 1967. The parents had hoped to find a "draft dodger" to run it but the shop finally closed in 1969 due to fatigue and declining sales.[194]

The parents ensured that fund-raising activities were in harmony with New School values. Events were not prohibitively costly and their success depended on the time, energy, participation, and creativity of the members. Theatre and lecture evenings were natural outgrowths of the parents' interest in the arts and intellectual discussion. Five of the ten lectures in the 1964 series were given by school parents. They covered such diverse topics as Libertarian vs. Authoritarian Communism, The Revolution in Contemporary Literature, The Canadian Indians Today, The Lesson of Buddhism, Sexual Mores in an Enlightened Society, and The Existential Answer.[195] The art auctions were another example of how New School parents raised money and furthered their interest in the arts at the same time. Such activities contributed to community spirit.

School admissions policy provoked ongoing debate. The procedure was re-evaluated during the first two years after a disagreement over whether admission should be open or selective. Several members circulated a paper claiming the admissions committee made character judgements of prospective parents; apparently a child had been rejected because his mother had a reputation for being "meddling, manipulating, and generally troublesome."[196] A new committee concluded in October, 1964 that the school was too young for a "rigid formalization" of

admissions policy. The report proposed that decisions be made solely by the teachers and that the only criterion be whether teachers think they can work with the child profitably.

The committee recommended that the school "should admit children who require a greater-than-average amount of the teachers' time, but that the proportion of such children in the school will probably have to be limited."[197] This compromise worked reasonably well but the issue of special needs children was always problematic. As the years passed many children with learning difficulties came to the New School to escape the pressure they felt in public school, and because few public programmes for them were available. The increased number of such children eventually strained New School resources severely.

Parents were involved in ongoing professional development. In several panel discussions, individual teachers and parents presented their views on curriculum to the membership. Outside experts, such as Neil Sutherland of U.B.C. on Social Studies, and James Inkster, a West Vancouver principal on experimental secondary education, were sometimes invited to address these discussion evenings.[198] New School parents turned out in large numbers to attend lectures and seminars presented by visiting educators such as Paul Goodman.

Parents were anxious to observe the instruction at the school. There was so much interest that the Board decided to limit school visits to six per week organized by a member of the Teachers Committee on an appointment basis only.[199] Visits were often restricted to one day of the week and were prohibited during September. There were also many visitors from outside the school. They included prospective parents, curious laypersons, education professors, student teachers, and other educators wanting to observe innovative teaching practices. Although the school was very accommodating to visitors there was little attempt to cultivate a relationship with the public school system; according to one parent relations were "neither friendly nor unfriendly."[200] The New School was never inspected by Education Ministry officials.

A curriculum research committee began meeting in 1964. Parents sought to increase their own knowledge of Progressive education so they could formulate policy and advise the teachers

more effectively. Each committee member agreed to read up on one curriculum subject and report back to the group.[201] Parents spent a great deal of time debating pedagogical issues. One parent remembers a heated argument on the pros and cons of Cuisenaire rods![202] The committee organized an educational library and subscribed to a journal on curriculum research. The committee researched the feasibility of implementing a language laboratory and suggested that teachers use school time to visit other experimental schools.[203]

During 1963/64 the long range planning committee initiated serious discussion of the school's future. The original vision was that the school eventually include grades one through twelve and the committee debated how this would be accomplished. Most members thought the school should expand gradually by adding one grade per year as the oldest students progressed. The goal was to have twenty students in each grade for a total enrolment of about 250 and the committee was already preparing to search for a larger building by 1964.[204] Parents were enthusiastic about plans for a secondary programme. Students would have free time for individual study and teachers would be available for tutorials and seminars. The school hoped to arrange student placements in community businesses to learn vocational skills. The planning committee discussed such issues as the lack of equipment, the role of specialists, individualized programmes, and how to reconcile the school's teaching methods with preparation for government examinations requiring memorization.[205]

The planning committee recommended the formation of a Kindergarten class as soon as possible.[206] This would eliminate the adjustment from public school Kindergarten to the New School and soften the boundary between "play and the acquisition of skills." The committee's sense of urgency was evident: "The less our children become involved in competitive, non-creative, teacher-centred school situations, the better for them as individuals and for the future of the school. The younger the child, the more deeply felt the injury."[207]

As it turned out secondary school plans did not progress beyond the idea stage. Internal turmoil and volunteer activities demanded so much parent energy that the school never seriously

considered expansion. The school did grow to include grades one to seven by the third year (1964/65) and enrolment increased from thirty-nine to sixty-nine students. Kindergarten was added in 1966 but the school never expanded beyond elementary and enrolment peaked at eighty students.

There was a strong sense of community at the New School. Parents and children spent many waking hours there—working, meeting, cleaning, carpooling, fundraising, and learning. One student remembers feeling "part of a family; we all participated together, it was really fun."[208] There was a great deal of social interaction and some participants became close friends remaining so years after their involvement with the school ended. Families took vacations together or made excursions to Bowen Island, and students spent many weekends at their friends' houses. Teachers enrolled their own children in the school and professional boundaries between teachers and parents diminished. Many participants saw themselves as pioneers and innovators with a keen sense of adventure, doing something that had not been done before.[209]

Many parents would have been sympathetic to gender issues, but feminist ideas did not arise at the New School until the 1970s. Though several women among the founding families were well respected professionals, some traditional attitudes persisted. Seven out of nine members of the first Board were men and eight out of nine were men in 1964. Only by 1966/67 were women equally represented on the Board. Even in this highly educated group most mothers did not work outside the home and of the seven female board members in 1967 five listed their profession as housewife.[210] Traditionally female activities, such as convening dinners and running the thrift shop, remained the women's domain (though men took an equal part in school cleaning duties). As in many organizations, New School women began seeking equality only after the feminist movement raised awareness of women's issues.

The New School community was extremely diverse. Most parents were professionals but some were in business or trades. Political opinion was predominantly left of centre but a few conservative and "non-political" parents were attracted to the school out of frustration with the

lack of intellectual or creative challenge provided by the public schools.[211] One parent was simply looking for alternatives because her five year old daughter had a January birthday and could not be accepted into the public school system without waiting a year.[212] Another parent had been looking for alternative schools because one of her children was learning disabled and was not given adequate attention in public school. Still another simply thought her children would benefit from a school with less stress. Teachers and board members had to try to satisfy a broad range of opinion since the only view everybody shared was dissatisfaction with the public school system. This diversity was one reason for decision making difficulties.

Decision making was exhausting. Board meetings went on until midnight and parents spent hours at committee meetings or on the telephone with each other. Informal discussions occured almost every afternoon as parents picking up children used the opportunity to talk to each other or the teachers. The serious disagreements were mostly about ideological issues. The parent body was an unusually articulate group with carefully thought out opinions. Many held their views passionately and the experimental and pioneering aspect of the school made the issues seem even more important. This was particularly true for those among the founding group who had difficulty distancing themselves from the school's ongoing evolution.

Several academic parents earned a reputation for being difficult, carrying on endlessly at meetings which occasionally degenerated into shouting matches. Many parents circulated their views in writing on educational, ideological, and administrative topics. One parent, new to the school in 1966, felt so intimidated that she stopped going to meetings.[213] On the other hand, one non-academic parent recalls how she appreciated "being with people who were so well educated."[214] Many New School parents enjoyed the intellectual and political debate and it is not surprising that they spent much of their time arguing. Fortunately for the students, the friction had little effect on day-to-day school life.

Important matters were decided by the entire community. Such meetings were often difficult as the parents tried to honour minority opinions. The group agonized over tough

decisions and sometimes consensus could not be reached, leaving no alternative but to vote. However, after a decision had been made the sense of community was usually strong enough to transcend any bad feeling the disagreements may have generated. This was not the case, though, when it came to disputes about the teaching staff.

Supervising the Teachers

The most difficult functions of parental governance at the New School were the hiring, supervision, and evaluation of teachers. The founding parents had intended to hire teachers who believed in the school's philosophy and leave them free to teach without interference. But parents lacked the skills, experience, and procedures to supervise effectively. Hiring was based on intuition with little attempt to seek teachers trained in Progressive methods. Once hired, teachers were not left alone to develop their programmes. Disagreements about teacher evaluation led to a series of major crises.

The Teacher Committee drafted a discussion paper on evaluation of teachers in November 1963. The suggestions included evaluation by committee, by other teachers, and through surveys of parent opinion. The committee acknowledged that better communication between parents and teachers was necessary and that both groups should "know more accurately what they wanted from the school." The report suggested that evaluators be fully knowledgeable about the schools' aims, but did not discuss the qualifications they should possess.[215]

Another proposal by William and Hillary Nicholls maintained that parent observation was not an adequate basis for evaluation, and the most reliable means of assessment would be "the professional judgement of colleagues with tenure balanced by some form of representation by parents."[216] Despite long deliberations no agreement was reached until 1965 when evaluation by qualified educational consultants was adopted. The lack of procedure permitted serious disputes to continue unresolved for long periods of time and almost wrecked the school.

The first serious crisis arose in April, 1964 during the school's second year. Some parents believed the discipline methods used by Carol Williams were too traditional to be effective in a Progressive school. They complained that she was not able to control the behaviour of some students. The dissatisfied parents lobbied other members for support. Despite Lloyd Arntzen's recommendation that Ms. Williams be rehired for another year, the Teacher Committee decided she should be let go. The Board concurred and did not renew her contract.

This decision generated a great deal of controversy ("chaos" in the words of one parent) and several families threatened to withdraw from the school. To make matters worse, Mr. Arntzen wrote to the Board that he believed Ms. Williams had considerable potential. He felt the decision not to rehire her indicated a lack of confidence in his professional judgement and consequently, he was resigning as head teacher.[217] President Ean Hay also resigned in sympathy with Mr. Arntzen.

The general membership convened on April 9 to resolve the dispute. The Board, believing the loss of Mr. Arntzen would be a "calamity for the school," reversed its position after a private discussion with the head teacher. The Board now recommended offering him a principalship with responsibility for staff supervision and authority (after consulting permanent staff) over the reappointment of probationary teachers.[218] The Board maintained that these changes were necessary to improve the conditions under which the teachers worked. Mr. Arntzen's supporters admired him for taking a principled position, and one parent commented "if my son took a position like that, I'd be proud of him."[219]

The real issue, however, was not the personnel matter but who ran the school. Elma and Alan Tolliday wrote in a letter to the membership that "granting a principal veto powers over his employers and over parent committees amounts to a dictatorial setup."[220] They argued this would undermine the New School's original ideals and transform it into an "ordinary private school." However, it is doubtful that allowing a principal to exercise educational authority would have altered the school's unique character which lay in its ownership and governance by the entire

parent body.[221] Nevertheless, a majority of parents believed that they should retain control over all decisions affecting their children. After an emotional debate that continued until midnight the meeting voted 14 to 9 to uphold the decision to replace Ms. Williams and, consequently, to accept Mr. Arntzen's resignation.[222]

The meeting was full of recriminations and personal attacks. Ms. Williams, who had refused to resign quietly, was present and heard all the criticism. The outcome left such an atmosphere of bitterness that another meeting was held the following week to reconsider the decision. This time the discussion was calm and several parents changed their votes in an attempt to reunite the group. In the end, though, the membership reaffirmed its earlier decision by a close vote of 19 to 16.

Two board members resigned in the aftermath of this decision and a few families left the school. One board member wrote that Mr. Arntzen had become a "convenient scapegoat" for the mistakes of the parent group. He believed that the problem was due to the "very structure and make-up of the New School's organization," citing the failure of the founders to define an "adequate philosophy" for the school. He feared the teachers were being "led to the lions."[223] Years later, many former parents agree. One suggests that "Lloyd was treated badly—not as a professional should be treated."[224] Another remembers Ms. Williams as a good teacher and "couldn't see what the big fuss was about,"[225] and one student recalls that he learned a lot in her "calm, well organized" class.[226] In the end, says a former student, "it came down to letting Lloyd run things or having the parents run things. The parents won the battle but they lost Lloyd."[227]

The teachers were under severe pressure working under the watchful eye of a group of high powered parents. Elliott Gose admits that teachers in the New School were subjected to unrealistic scrutiny and another parent states simply, "you don't treat a beginning teacher that way."[228] Even Lloyd Arntzen was not immune to criticism despite the high regard parents had for him, some thinking he was too conservative while others thought he was not structured enough. Most former parents acknowledge they did not have enough trust in the teachers'

capacity to make educational decisions. Rita Cohn explains that "people take sides in the heat of the moment and sometimes regret it later,"[229] while another parent commented at the time that "democracy is for saints."[230]

Students and parents felt a great sense of disappointment and sadness with the departure of Lloyd Arntzen, admired by everyone at the New School as an "inspired teacher."[231] Mrs. Beck had left the school earlier in the spring for maternity (the board's refusal to grant her leave of absence was in part due to some parental complaints) and the school was faced with the task of finding three new teachers.

The hiring committee spent an enormous amount of time fulfilling this task. They placed advertisements for "creative and experienced teachers" in Vancouver daily newspapers and British Columbia Teachers' Federation publications and received eighteen replies. The applicants were interviewed by several members of the Teachers Committee and detailed written impressions of each interview were circulated. The three teachers recommended by the committee were then interviewed by the full Board, a procedure most parents considered essential.[232] The committee tried to ensure that past mistakes would not be repeated. All candidates had to demonstrate an understanding of the principles of Progressive education, and only experienced teachers were considered.

By the end of May, the school had engaged three teachers. Adele Gaba and Mervine Beagle were hired to work with students in grades one to five. They had developed an experimental curriculum at Inman School in Burnaby and came to the attention of the committee through parent Marilyn Epstein, a psychologist in that district.[233] Having worked together for a number of years they brought a strong and cohesive but somewhat inflexible style to the New School. Phil Thomas, a teacher with twelve years experience in the Vancouver school district and a creative artist and musician, was hired to teach the older students. Many parents knew his work from Vancouver's Summer Art programme and from a talk he had given at the New School about art methods the previous year. Mr. Thomas was enthusiastic about teaching in "an experimental

school committed to a dynamic and progressive educational philosophy" which he hoped would be of value to public education.[234] All three teachers were given two year contracts to protect them from the pressures of anxious or dissatisfied parents.[235]

In the wake of the recent controversy, which some members blamed on the Board, the parents decreased the term of Board members from three years to one year, and further strengthened the committee system.[236] The parents hired a part-time secretary to relieve the overburdened teachers and a part-time janitor to decrease their own workload. The constant stream of visitors which had contributed to stressful teaching conditions was limited to one assigned morning per week. Parents also organized a series of panel discussions on Progressive education.[237]

The New School began the 1964/65 school year with sixty-nine students from forty-seven families and now included grades one through seven.[238] Despite the divisive events of the previous spring, the growing school community looked forward to opening day with optimism. The three teachers met at the end of the summer to discuss timetabling and pedagogy. But from the first week in September communication broke down completely between Mr. Thomas on the one hand, and Ms. Gaba and Ms. Beagle on the other. President Gwen Creech and vice-president Dal Town met with the teachers several times in October but were unable to help them work out their differences. In November the Board informed the membership of "a serious impasse among the staff," and said "this breakdown in communications has reached the point where the teachers cannot function as a team; fundamental differences have prevented basic co-operation or satisfactory communication between their classes."[239]

The major differences were about curriculum, academic standards, discipline, and general housekeeping.[240] Mr. Thomas favoured a graded curriculum and expected students to meet certain standards while Ms. Gaba and Ms. Beagle preferred ideas for classroom activities to be generated by the children. On the other hand, Mr. Thomas gave his students considerable freedom interfering only in cases of serious misbehaviour such as fighting, while Ms. Gaba and

Ms. Beagle followed an Adlerian approach to behaviour management requiring months of disciplined co-operation training.[241] But the most striking contrast was in personal organization.[242] Mr. Thomas was unconcerned about mess and confusion and created a museum-like classroom rich in materials, whereas Ms. Gaba and Ms. Beagle organized their physical space with precision. As one parent put it, "Phil brought incredible amounts of clutter into the school while Mervine and Adele were pristine. The arguments were not about philosophy, they were about where things were."[243] The breakdown amounted to a combination of conflicting personalities and widely differing educational philosophy.

Ms. Gaba and Ms. Beagle painted the entire school white with mauve trim and created a quiet, carefully arranged environment with cushions on the floor and very little furniture or materials other than books. Their students were to remove their shoes, walk barefoot through the classroom, and sit silently on the cushions awaiting the beginning of the school day. During the first months their programme emphasized co-operation and citizenship. Ms. Gaba and Ms. Beagle developed an integrated approach to reading not substantially different from the whole language methods in use today.[244] Students chose their own literature and read silently, read to each other, wrote stories, and did group work. Reading and writing periods were scheduled daily; students could chose not to participate but they had to be quiet and couldn't do other work.[245] Students enjoyed singing folk songs and protest songs like "We Shall Overcome" and "Little Boxes." But several students remember feeling uncomfortable that boys and girls had to change in the same room prior to gym class[246] and some parents objected to the use of Driekers' behaviour theories by Ms. Gaba and Ms. Beagle, believing such methods too manipulative.

Mr. Thomas organized a full schedule of traditional subjects and a member of the younger class remembers Mr. Thomas's students doing a lot of work.[247] However, students were permitted several hours of free time per week to work on individual or group projects. An individualized reading programme was based on student-chosen novels, and written work grew out of other studies. Language skills were taught individually when necessary, and mathematics

was handled in small groups of about six. Some students were behind in reading skills while some skilled readers were not reaching their potential. Mr. Thomas attempted to vary his expectations for each individual, and on his suggestion, the school hired two part time teachers to provide help with remedial reading but there was little systematic diagnosis of students needing assistance.[248] The social studies programme included world geography and ancient history, the standard B. C. curriculum for grades six and seven, emphasizing open-ended research on such topics as primate evolution and stone age tools. Music activities consisted of folk singing and playing Orff instruments, while art classes included painting, balsa wood design, clay modelling, and pottery. The school continued to use Clark Park and the Trout Lake Community Centre for soccer, gymnastics, and skating. Mr. Thomas expected his students to take responsibility for their own discipline and he wrote in his teacher's report that "the fundamental feeling is one of understanding and co-operation."[249]

Mr. Thomas was an insatiable collector and his room was full of objects piled from floor to ceiling. He had bottles of animals in formaldehyde, a banana tree, rocks, old machinery, a deer skeleton, a wide variety of art materials, and junk of all kinds that he had picked up from the city dump, the U.B.C. dump, and other places. Some students found him interesting and intriguing and liked him a great deal, while others found his expectations too great and his manner overly eccentric. One parent suggests some students were slow to accept Mr. Thomas out of loyalty to Mr. Arntzen.[250]

Mr. Thomas angered some parents when early in the year he reported that student standards in reading, spelling, and arithmetic were appallingly low. He was also frustrated that the other teachers would not meet with him to develop common academic goals and objectives.[251] Soon after school opening several parents expressed concern about Mr. Thomas's teaching methods.[252] They acknowledged his creativity, innovation, and enthusiasm, but felt he was too directive about academic requirements and not directive enough about behaviour.

The Board convened a general meeting in November, attended by almost one hundred

people, to address the staff problems.[253] Some members pressed for an open and "democratic" discussion of the issues among the entire school community, but most parents dreaded another "public pillorying" based on personalities similar to the previous year. After a long debate the meeting voted 23 to 15 to strike an ad hoc committee of three parents, Gwen Creech, Don Brown, and Gloria Levi, to investigate the situation privately.

The committee presented a five page report to the membership at another charged meeting in December. The committee acknowledged the difficulties of teaching in a parent run school and identified several staff problems regarding timetable and facilities, disruptions of one class by another, and disapproval of each other's programmes. The report concluded that the main causes of the impasse "lie in the personalities on both sides."[254]

The committee recommended the appointment of an administrator to arbitrate day-to-day disputes. The meeting accepted this and denied a proposal from Ms. Gaba and Ms. Beagle to partition the school into top floor and basement (one parent wondered if she could "pay lower fees for the basement!"[255]). Most parents wanted the two classes to spend more time together, not less. Mr. Thomas proposed school wide assemblies and interclass reading groups and was anxious to contribute his art and music expertise to the other class. Parents wanted this as well but it never occurred.[256] Finally, the committee recommended that the perceived problems in Mr. Thomas' class be considered separately from the general issue of disagreement among the teachers themselves.

The Board appointed Gwen Creech as temporary administrator. She was a conciliator with moderate views about education, but she was not able to bring peace to the staff. After meeting with the teachers in January, she drafted a new timetable she hoped would satisfy everyone. There would be a minimum of interaction between classes but "the children should all feel that the building is theirs and should be able to move around freely providing they respect what other people are trying to do. If they can't do so then even a Progressive school has to impose limits so as not to have chaos."[257] But, all three teachers found aspects of the proposal

unacceptable and there was little improvement in overall co-operation.[258]

By January most parents had taken sides in the conflict and two factions developed. A large group of parents who believed Mr. Thomas' "talents, temperament, and teaching methods were not suitable for the New School" began to organize against him. They conducted a telephone campaign, held meetings in homes, and circulated a petition. They stated that Mr. Thomas was unable to accommodate individual student interests or abilities and that he could not manage simultaneous activities, resulting in "random and disorganized teaching and learning in his class."[259] One story had it that some students had lit a fire in the waste basket while Mr. Thomas, busy with another group of students, remained unaware. Although Mr. Thomas had a two year contract, his opponents hoped he could be convinced to resign at the end of the first year. A few parents also disapproved of the teaching methods of Ms. Gaba and Ms. Beagle believing their standards were low and students were learning little.[260] One student describes the year he spent in their classroom as "games and pattycake; we didn't do anything."[261] However, this did not become a major issue.

Mr. Thomas hoped that solutions to the problems could be discovered without calling his professional integrity into question but he was under great pressure from "a group of parents acting on their private initiative." Although expressing a willingness to accept assistance from "qualified" people, he maintained that his class was developing a positive spirit and he had no intention of resigning.[262] Mrs. Creech regretted the harassment but urged him to accept legitimate concern about the "tone and progress in your class." By this time she believed only an objective outsider would be able to help.[263]

A minority of parents who supported Mr. Thomas claimed the charges against him were exaggerated and were based on hearsay and unreliable evidence from students. Several thought the children were learning a great deal in his class, and one parent feared, "they just aren't going to give him a chance."[264] In an open letter in February, William and Hillary Nicholls reminded members of their legal and moral obligations to the teachers and pleaded for restraint. They

pointed out that the teachers had taken professional risks to teach at the New School and that the Board had a duty to protect them from unreasonable pressure. They maintained that annual staff changes were damaging to the children and urged that no action affecting a teacher's tenure be taken. They warned that it would be an injustice if the situation were not resolved through proper procedures and suggested that the Board authorize an assessment of the teachers by an outside professional:

> Great self-restraint and wisdom will be needed if the present crisis is not to prove fatal to the school. We continue to believe that the professional judgement of colleagues with tenure in the school balanced by some form of representation of the parents is the most reliable means of asessing a teacher. In the case of the present staff, we therefore think it urgent to find some outside professional assessment of all the teachers before their contracts are renewed.[265]

The membership narrowly defeated a motion to ask Mr. Thomas to resign and the Board engaged two experienced educational administrators from Seattle as consultants.[266] They visited the school in February and were "enthusiastic about the programme." They offered "sound advice" as to how the parents could effect better communication in the school, make their expectations clearer to the teachers, and develop a more positive atmosphere.[267]

But the conflict persisted and the Board criticized Ms. Gaba and Ms. Beagle for organizing an evening parent meeting which they thought was called for political reasons and was an imposition on overcommitted parents.[268] The teachers were accused of "generating considerable agitation among the parents" and even involving the children in classroom meetings. The requirement that the teachers clear parent meetings with the Board prompted one parent to accuse the Board of "discourtesy, arrogance, and bureaucratic mindlessness." The Board responded that such "ill-advised" statements could "only contribute further to the dissolution of the group."[269] Mrs. Creech continued to mediate day-to-day complaints about supervision scheduling and monthly reports but claimed that much of the quarrelling was about "trivia," and expected the teachers to resolve their disagreements.[270]

Meetings endured into the early morning hours and parents expressed their feelings in

letters and lengthy position papers. One parent wrote about what she saw as "an unremitting, unfair, and relentless pressuring of one of our teachers in order to obtain his resignation." She appealed to the school's commitment to co-operativeness, fairness, and justice in human relationships to bring its practice into line with its principles.[271] But personal attacks and rehetoric intensified. One parent was "rude and abusive" at a Board meeting, and one parent accused another of "Stalinism."[272] The President stated in a letter to the membership in April that she "can no longer contribute anything to this organization as long as present attitudes prevail" which she described as "a total lack of confidence on the part of an active and vocal minority in any regular forms of organizational structure."[273] Parental governance had reached a complete impasse.

Meanwhile, the two classes avoided each other during the school day and didn't even get together for the Christmas party. One student described the situation as similar to being in a war zone.[274] Feelings were so high that some parents transferred their children from one class to the other in the middle of the year even though this removed them from their correct age group. However, although students were aware of the conflict and obviously felt the tension, their lives in the classroom remained relatively uneventful. In retrospect most parents admit they overreacted. The real pity was that "the school had degenerated to the point where parents can't talk to the teachers and the teachers can't talk to each other."[275]

On April 26, 1965, Phil Thomas resigned, effective at the end of the school year. He wrote about how he had hoped to be part of a team building a "rich and varied programme with a flexible curriculum adapted to the needs of all the children" and to provide "a creative, stimulating, and challenging educational experience based on the belief that each child holds the key to his own growth." He urged the parents to appoint a director who would receive their support and co-operation in establishing a firm educational basis for the school. However, he warned that:

> Ways must be found to solve the problems concerning the structure of the school and the role of the parents in its operation. But it seems that many parents are unwilling to accept the limitation that would be imposed on their conduct.[276]

Looking back, Mr. Thomas thinks the main problem was that "there was no way of handling the interface between legitimate parental concern and the educational situation." Ironically, he concludes that he was "much freer in the public system."[277]

Phil Thomas was misunderstood by many. Some thought him brilliant and ahead of his time while others thought he could not motivate or control his students. He was a convenient target for the school's structural and ideological shortcomings and even those who were most critical at the time agree that he remained gracious and dignified throughout a difficult situation.[278]

Mervine Beagle believes that at first the teachers thought they agreed on basic principles: "We really thought we would get along, but when we started working together we found we didn't agree at all."[279] She suggests that the New School was a difficult place to teach despite good intentions of the parents. Parent evaluation of teachers was unworkable and "some people felt so strongly that compromise was impossible." Ms. Gaba and Ms. Beagle left at the end of the year and the school would once again have to begin in September with a new group of teachers.[280]

The turmoil affected the New School deeply. Many parents lost their spirited enthusiasm for the project and questioned whether this kind of school could survive.[281] The arguments had continued for too long and had been too intensely personal. Some parents describe how friendships, even marriages, were strained; some close friendships were seriously damaged and remained so for many years.[282] Other parents remember returning home from meetings with "insides churning" and one key board member, Norman Epstein, seriously doubted that the school would carry on. He describes the stress vividly:

> It was emotionally all-consuming. In the midst of the conflict people began to behave inconsiderately towards others and didn't spare their feelings. I tried to be a conciliator even though I did take sides, and I tried to specify the issues in less personal terms to save wear and tear on people, but I don't think I succeeded. People simply stopped behaving according to normal rules of procedure, and some individuals started to behave very irrationally. Many people got burned out. It looked like the school was coming to an end.[283]

Another parent, Ellen Tallman, remembers meetings that were like "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolff." "The fights were enormous; it was constant drama. The things people said to each other—obsessive, hollering, shouting, losing their tempers! We tried not to talk in front of the children but they heard."[284] A third parent describes individuals who were "brilliant, but couldn't figure out how to work things out."[285]

Several founding members, completely exhausted, withdrew their children at the end of the year. Norman Epstein explains "when we looked into what was happening in the public schools we found that the difference wasn't as great as we had imagined it to be; and the relief of not having to go to incessant meetings."[286] Another parent "sadly decided she couldn't stand it" and found that her kids had begun to suffer and were glad to have some structure.[287] Julia Brown, another parent who left, explained that "there is a limit to what we can put up with. The sacrifice of the school is too much; our kids are strong enough to survive in the public school."[288]

Parents were much too directly involved in day-to-day professional matters at the New School and did not live up to their commitment to "protect teachers from arbitrary pressures."[289] Every parent had an opinion about the performance of the teachers, and many overstepped reasonable bounds of criticism. Teachers were criticized for "not being creative enough, not being individualized enough, or not giving enough grounding."[290] One parent believes that since it was difficult to find Progressive teachers who "had experience with what we wanted, we expected them to make leaps and bounds that they weren't prepared for."[291] Another concludes that "we as parents were no better at choosing teachers than the public schools were. The teachers "weren't given a chance."[292]

The ad hoc committee summed up the problems of parent evaluation. "The New School is a difficult place for teachers to work because they are directly exposed to the criticism of a large group of articulate and aggressive parents. The evaluation of teachers is full of dangers from unnecessary harassment, undue influence of gossip and informal caucusing, and the involvement of students in the discussion of teachers."[293] Norman Epstein echoes this view in a

movingly honest farewell letter to the teachers that June:

> The teachers did develop good working relationships with most of the children despite the split between the classes and if we are able to start a fourth operating year of the New School it will be because the teachers served us and our children until the final day. They had every reason to walk out on us many months ago after the way they were treated by us, the parents.[294]

Temporary Stability

The New School survived the crisis and the membership decided to install a director with decision making power who would take charge. Criteria for the position included responsibility for putting into practice the individualized and Progressive education described in the prospectus. The director would have authority for the school's day-to-day operation in curriculum, staff relations, admissions, and all personnel decisions including hiring, rehiring, and dismissal of staff. The director would also be expected to promote co-operation among teachers, maintain clear channels of communication with parents, and implement school policy within the confines of the finance committee's budget. Ironically, this job description was not much different from what the membership had refused to offer Lloyd Arntzen a year earlier.

The parents finally developed realistic evaluation procedures whereby the director's performance would be evaluated each year by outside consultants with appropriate educational background. The teachers would be evaluated by the director who would make personnel recommendations to the Board.[295] To protect the teachers from the kind of attacks that had been all too common during the first three years, no complaints regarding a teacher would be considered by the Board or parent meetings. Complaints were to be taken up with the director and any serious concerns would be dealt with by the consultants.[296]

Two serious candidates for school director emerged and each was asked to submit long personal biographies and philosophical statements. One candidate was Bob Barker who had

taught at Summerhill and then founded his own school in New York State (see Chapter 4). His educational theory emulated that of A.S. Neill. He believed in the Summerhill model of student government, and he would not compel students to attend classes. Rita and Werner Cohn interviewed him in New York and were impressed with his background, honesty, charm, knowledge of Progressive methods, and his experience in working closely with parents.[297]

The other candidate, Graham Smith, had a background in secondary teaching, mostly in the public school system. His experience included teaching in Britain, four years in Nigeria, and the principalship of a two room high school in Hixon, a small town near Quesnel in northern British Columbia. Although he had little Progressive experience, he had taken courses in innovative methods and professed to be conversant with Progressive ideas. He favoured an informal but not permissive style of discipline and a flexible curriculum emphasizing research skills to help students learn to "think and act for themselves." He was a pragmatist who disliked jargon and emphasized the importance of supporting good teachers.[298]

Five parents drove all the way to Hixon to interview Mr. Smith. They encountered a strong character who was not afraid to struggle with difficult situations such as dealing with his abused and neglected students from alcoholic families. He broke up fights, looked after children who did not want to go home in the evening, and even arranged for their dental care.[299] In recommending him, the Teacher Selection Committee described Mr. Smith as self-confident, realistic, honest, straightforward, firm but flexible, with a sense of humour, a broad outlook, and an ability to communicate with adults. He was "not a public relations type but possessed a tolerant, pragmatic attitude to education rather than an incisive educational philosophy."[300] He believed children ought to be able to read by the time they were eight or nine and not just do what they liked when they liked.

Graham Smith's application was approved by a large majority and he was given a two year contract in May 1965. The choice of Mr. Smith, despite his lack of commitment to Progressive principles, indicates that the school was seeking a measure of stability after the previous chaotic

year. Mr. Smith was a proven administrator who would deal with situations before they got out of control. Mr. Barker, on the other hand, was too Summerhillian for most parents who favoured a Progressive school based on Dewey's philosophy. One parent remembers that she became suspicious when Mr. Barker talked about "love all the time." Mr. Smith appealed to a wider range of opinion, including a few parents who were more conservative.[301]

Mr. Smith turned out to be even more traditional than most parents expected. He believed in a skill-based curriculum with formal English and mathematics classes, and text books were used at the New School for the first time. Students sat in rows and copied pages of notes from the chalkboard.[302] One student recalls that physical education classes included "a lot of slow deep knee bends."[303] Mr. Smith was interesting and compassionate but there was an "English hardness about him."[304] Some students and parents experienced him as aloof and there were strong disagreements about his methods of discipline.

However, he developed a definite programme and pushed students to achieve academically. Several students report having "learned a lot from him."[305] He livened up classes with stories and slides of his experiences in Africa and read to the students often. Mr. Smith made some attempt to individualize his programme, but he was certainly the most traditional teacher to work at the New School. He was not overly popular but most students accepted him well enough and, compared to previous years, parents gave him room in which to operate.

Mr. Smith was a strong advocate of outdoor education and led the older students on a two week hiking trip to the Rockies. The adventure included an eighteen mile hike in Yoho National Park, an excursion to the Columbia icefields, and a climb to an 8,500 foot peak near Banff. Students hiked through glacial areas sighting moose and mountain sheep, walking for hours without stopping, testing their endurance.[306] For one student the trip inspired a life long interest: "It was one of the great experiences of my life; my love of hiking stems from that trip."[307]

Else Wise taught the grade one/two class in 1965/66. She had experienced family

grouping classrooms and the "free activity method" during two years of teaching at an infant school in London. Influenced by Sylvia Ashton-Warner and Maria Montessori, she instilled in her students an excitement for reading and writing. Although she seemed to know when a student was ready to read, she waited for the motivation to come from the individual. Mrs. Wise also taught art classes in which students created their own films and worked extensively with clay. Parents remember her as a creative, intuitive, and outstanding teacher and were disappointed when she left after her first year at the New School to pursue a career as an artist.

The other staff member was Doris Gray, who worked with the grade three and four students. Her previous teaching experience had been in California and with Inuit children in Alaska.[308] Mrs. Gray had a science background and had become discouraged by the emphasis on rote rather than conceptual learning in the public schools. She initiated microscope work, and encouraged groups of students to work together independently. She did individual and remedial work with students in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Music and French were taught by part time teachers.

Mrs. Wise was one of the few New School teachers to develop a comprehensive reading programme:

> I had my students going at their own speed and teaching each other. I didn't mention anything about reading. I just read them stories and read them poetry and played reading readiness games. And finally after a few weeks of school one little girl said 'when are we going to learn to read?', so I handed her the first preprimer and didn't say anything about it except 'here you are.' She read all the way through it and the next two preprimers in one morning. She was thrilled; nobody had to teach her to read, she already knew. It spread like measles. Everybody came up and asked and when they asked that's when they started reading, so they all ended up doing individual reading. I would have two or three children together to listen to them read every day and there was only one child that I had to encourage.[309]

Students wrote their own stories and built up a collection of spelling words on individual flash cards. Students traded words with partners, eventually learning everybody else's words. Some children began writing poetry and produced a book of poems with the help of the school

secretary. One boy completed three years of the English programme that year and most others finished two years.

Mrs. Wise believed in children learning from each other:

> It was their programme. They could talk and move around and ask each other for help. If I was busy with one child and another one needed help they would have to ask another child. I really learned to trust them; the more rope you give them the more creative they are. If you don't put any limits on what is possible, and if you show them the next place they can get to, they'll go. I really expected something from them too. I did not encourage competition but they pushed each other.[310]

The small class size (seventeen students) and the background of the children contributed to Mrs. Wise's effectiveness. In addition to the British primary school influence, her methods are reminiscent of the co-operative learning pioneered by Celestin Freinet in southern France from 1920 to the 1960s.[311]

Both teachers had successful terms but left the school at the end of the year. They were replaced in September, 1966, by Anne Long and Beth Jankola. Mrs. Long had become disillusioned with traditional methods during two years in Vancouver public schools. After an "idealistic and impassioned" first year she was deflated by a district inspector who expected silent classrooms. She was assigned to another school and "toed the line but I was much less inspired; definitely the edge was off."[312] Mrs. Long had met several New School parents while studying English at U.B.C. and when an opening arose to teach the grade 4/5 class she gladly accepted. Mrs. Jankola taught the primary children and the school's first Kindergarten class was taught by Margo Morgan. Mr. Smith continued to work with the grade 6/7 class.

The year was relatively uneventful. Anne Long describes her experience: "There was much more leeway than in public school and I was able to get kids involved in creative work. But the days were structured; we had subjects scheduled and we basically followed that schedule."[313] Mrs. Long trained her students to be self-directed and reading was individualized.[314] Students chose their own books and had little whole class instruction due to the range of skill levels. Art

activities were memorable, the small class size making innovation more feasible. They did batik work with dye vats in the basement, a tricky process that she "would never have tried in the public school." Mrs. Long formed strong bonds with her students and was the first New School teacher to be called by her first name. Later that year a student coined the name Anna Banana which she has gone by ever since.

Despite the director's more traditional approach, the New School retained its essential elements. Students learned at their own pace and were encouraged to pursue individual interests while the arts and critical thinking skills were emphasized. Curriculum and timetabling were flexible, classes small, and exams non-existent. Students had freedom of movement throughout the school and could spend time in other classrooms.[315]

Mr. Smith enjoyed working with special needs students and many were accepted during his tenure. Mrs. Long estimates that almost half of her students had had learning and/or behavioural difficulties in the school system, and she feared the New School was becoming "a catch-all for kids with problems in the public schools."[316] But the teachers did not want to turn these children away since there were few public school programmes for students with learning disabilities at that time. Some parents saw the New School as simply a "safe haven for their children" where they would not be under so much pressure to keep up.[317] Many of the founding families had left the school by 1966 but the major exodus of academic and middle-class families did not occur until about 1970.

Mr. Smith proved to be a capable administrator and the school was spared the kind of personnel and organizational problems that had occurred in previous years. He supported the methods and teaching styles of the other teachers. As a result, parent meetings during these two years were relatively uneventful. But like his predecessors, Mr. Smith found that teaching in such an intimate, experimental environment had taken its toll and in early 1967 he announced his intention to resign at the end of his second year. Anne Long wrote that he was "constantly under the gun from the parent body for being overly authoritarian"[318] and one parent suggests that he

was "bowled over by the amount of parental involvement." Whatever he did half the group would disapprove. Mr. Smith was not a diplomat and made no attempt to parrot the views parents wanted to hear. He would say things like, "if these children don't get some education soon, they'll be sweeping the streets of Vancouver when they're adults."[319] He was accused of having a short fuse and occasionally resorting to physical punishment.[320] His students could be a handful to manage and some parents suspect the pressure almost produced a nervous breakdown. But he was a fighter and stuck it out until the end of his contract.[321]

Conclusion

As the New School approached its fifth birthday in the spring of 1967, it had achieved a great deal. It had grown to 73 students from kindergarten to grade seven, employed three full time teachers, owned a substantial equity in its building, and successfully administered a budget of $36,000. Ideological and personal disagreements had tested the commitment of its members, but the community was still optimistic. Many parents believed what they were doing was important and supported the project with an enormous amount of time and energy. They were convinced that the New School was "the best school in Vancouver."[322]

Although many parents found their association with the school emotionally draining, "the kids were having a great time."[323] Rita Cohn describes the school as a "wonderful experience" for her children. Most New School graduates from this period entered the public school system without great difficulty and managed to acquire the skills they had missed. Many found that their critical and creative thinking skills made high school easy, albeit boring. Most former students also report they developed confidence and independence at the New School.

However, some students found it difficult to adjust to a more rigid system than what they were used to. One parent describes how her daughter felt like a "misfit" in grade eight, and a student says: "You weren't supposed to question what the teachers said but I did. Some teachers

had difficulty with that. You didn't speak about issues."[324] For students who reacted poorly to large authoritarian schools, there were soon to be several alternative secondary schools and a few innovative programmes at such public schools as Point Grey (the Integrated Programme),[325] Lord Byng (S.E.L.F. Programme), University Hill, and West Vancouver's Sentinel Satellite.[326] Some former New School students became reunited while attending such programmes.

The public schools themselves had differing opinions about New School students. One former student was put into the bright class when she registered at secondary school, while another reports that the elementary school she transferred to "put me into a remedial class and gave me all kinds of psychological tests."[327] It is fair to say, however, that most New School students from this period had successful school careers, attended university, and ended up in professional, academic, artistic, and business careers.

The fact that students fared well in future academic endeavors was partly due to circumstance, however. Although there was no continuity in teaching methods, there was enough good teaching that students learned. Graham Smith, disliked as he was by some, was responsible for filling in gaps for many students. The stimulating home environments where education was valued made up for the fact that few teachers taught reading in any systematic way. Even so, a few students did not learn effective reading skills. Later in the school's history, when some students had less educational support at home and many had entered the school with reading problems, the results were more serious.

Effective co-operative governance was difficult for New School members. Power struggles and factionalism among the parents had brought the school close to the breaking point. The ongoing crises were partly the result of an inadequate foundation, as the parents never reached a firm agreement on what type of education they would offer. As a consultant wrote: "The New School came into being as a protest against existing educational opportunities rather than as a positive programme with a clear identification of goals."[328] Nor did parents agree on what their decision making approach would be. Despite the formal decision making structure,

they wanted to operate in an open and non-hierarchical manner. But from the outset the more articulate and politically aware among the group formed an elite which dominated the school.[329] Another problem, typical of co-operative organizations, was the large commitment of time and money expected of parents, which could not be maintained over time.

Parents greatly overestimated their ability to hire and supervise teachers effectively. Their hiring employed few systematic criteria and the school's teaching methods lacked continuity. All teachers were formally trained and certified but, aside from their general dissatisfaction with the public school system, the teachers had little else in common and teaching styles varied widely. Although the school was founded on Progressive principles, not one teacher hired during six years of parent administration had any training in Progressive theory or methods. Even Lloyd Arntzen, arguably the best teacher during those years, developed a programme based more on intuition than on any firm methodological foundation.

Once hired, the teachers were not given the freedom to exercise their professional judgement without interference. Teacher evaluation was frequently based on hearsay and carried out by individuals who had no training or experience in supervision and a workable evaluation procedure was not implemented until the fourth year. This was common among North American Progressive schools. W.A.C. Stewart, in *The Educational Innovators*, states that parents hiring teachers was the "usual American pattern" and describes one headmaster's "exasperation with the assumption by uninformed parents that their views on education and teaching could be pressed upon teachers."[330] Unreasonable pressure from parents was a principal cause of the high teacher turnover at the New School. New School parents spent too much time working out their own political and intellectual interests, often losing sight of the original educational goals.

The New School had come to a crossroads by 1967. The parents were tired and, lacking energy and will, would soon be ready to let the teachers determine the direction of the school. Furthermore, volatile cultural change during the late 1960s would result in pressure on the New School to leave its Progressive orientation as it was swept along with the free school tide.

NOTES

1. John Arnett, "Four Profs Plan Own School," *Vancouver Sun*, February 7, 1961, p. 1. This was corroborated by several parent interviews.
2. Gloria Levi, Marilyn Epstein, taped interviews, April 1987. The encouragement of the creative arts was also a central goal for the parents who founded Saturday School in Calgary. See Robert Stamp, *About Schools* (Don Mills: new press, 1975): 144.
3. Neil Sutherland, "The Triumph of Formalism: Elementary Schooling in Vancouver from the 1920s to the 1960s," *B. C. Studies*, 69/70 (Spring/Summer 1986): 182-186.
4. John Arnett, "Four Profs Plan Own School," *Vancouver Sun*, February 7, 1961, p. 1, and Kathy Gose, interview April, 1987.
5. Rita Cohn, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
6. Don Brown, tape recorded interview, January, 1991.
7. Ellen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
8. Edgewood School was associated with Marietta Johnson, a leading proponent of American progressivism.
9. Kathy Gose, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
10. Barbara Beach, tape recorded interview, June, 1991. The founder was Caroline Pratt. For more on early Progressive educators see Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Random House, 1961): 147-152 and 202-207.
11. Rita Cohn, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
12. Black Mountain College was one of several universities incorporating Progressive ideas into its undergraduate programme during the 1930s and 1940s. See Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Random House, 1961) page 308.
13. Jim Winter, tape recorded interview, April, 1987. See Susan Lloyd, *The Putney School: A Progressive Experiment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). Putney was founded by Carmelita Hinton who also taught at Shady Hill School in Boston.
14. Barbara Beach, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
15. Americans among the inaugural group were the Beaches, Cohns, Goses, McCarthys, Tallmans, Winters, Marilyn Epstein, and Gloria Levi.
16. Discussion with Jean Barman. The American academics were also influential in such U.B.C. programmes as Arts I and the history undergraduate honours programme.
17. I am indebted to Hilda Thomas for this idea, December, 1991.
18. Jim Winter, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
19. A. S. Neill, *Summerhill* (London: Hart, 1960).
20. Julia Brown, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
21. Unitarian minister, Reverand Philip Hewett, was a New School parent in the mid-1960s.
22. About 10% of New School families were Jewish. They were evenly divided among those on the political left and those holding more traditional business views. However, there was a perception among some later participants that the school had been started by a group of "Jewish professors." There is no evidence that their Jewishness alone had an impact on the life of the school.
23. Jim Winter, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.

24. Don Brown, tape recorded interview, January, 1991.
25. Norman Epstein, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
26. In his study of alternative schools in the United States, Daniel Duke found a common belief among parents that they had "lost control of their institutions." *The Retransformation of the School* (Chicago, Nelson-Hall, 1978) p. 115.
27. Rita Cohn, Ellen Tallman, Julia Brown, interviews, April, 1987.
28. Laura Jamieson, tape recorded interview, June, 1991; Reverend Philip Hewitt, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
29. Several founding parents knew Watson Thomson and were familiar with his work (see Chapter 5). See also Michael Welton's biography *To Be and Build The Glorious World* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of B.C., 1983).
30. Ellen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
31. Norman Epstein, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
32. Barbara Beach, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
33. Charles Christopherson, "Re The New School," April 20, 1964.
34. John Arnett, "Four Profs Plan Own School," *Vancouver Sun*, February 7, 1961, p. 1. It was actually five.
35. New School Constitution, February 13, 1962.
36. The New School Prospectus, 1962, page 3. Significantly, Elliott Gose became a Vancouver School Trustee ten years later (see Chapter 12).
37. Prospectus, page 1.
38. Prospectus, page 1.
39. Prospectus, page 1. Many of these ideas are Deweyan.
40. Prospectus, page 2.
41. Prospectus, page 2.
42. Prospectus, page 1.
43. Gloria Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
44. The New School Prospectus, 1964, page 2.
45. Norman Epstein, tape recorded interview, April, 1987. Also Charles Christopherson, "Re The New School," April, 1964. Some fears were exaggerated in 1964 but proved to be well founded five years later.
46. Ellen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
47. Gloria Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
48. Alan and Elma Tolliday, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
49. More than 80% of the occupations are known. The percentages are approximations but nevertheless provide a useful picture of the occupational backgrounds of New School parents. Only women working outside the home were included in the figures.
50. New School enrolment and membership lists, 1962-1966. The figures for the 32 families in 1962 were: Vancouver, west of Main Street, 20; North Vancouver, 5; West Vancouver, 2; Vancouver, east of Main Street, 2; Burnaby, 1; Richmond, 1; Ladner, 1. Levi Collection.
51. Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988): 240.
52. Lloyd Arntzen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
53. Lloyd Arntzen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.

54. Julia Brown, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
55. John Arnett, *Vancouver Sun*, September 10, 1962, p. 11.
56. New School enrolment and membership list, 1962.
57. New School Budget, 1962/63. A portion of the mortgage was held by an individual, Percy Easthope, and the remainder was a bank loan.
58. Lloyd Arntzen, Annual Report, June, 1963, page 1.
59. Treasurer's report, New School Newsletter, June, 1963.
60. Gloria Levi, untitled statement, early 1964.
61. Pat Hanson, "Thoughts Re New School Philosophy," September, 1963.
62. Don Brown, "Are We A Progressive School?," September, 1963.
63. Lloyd Arntzen, Joyce Beck, Annual Report, June, 1963, page 4.
64. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
65. Neville Scarfe, Letter to the New School, October 31, 1963.
66. Lloyd Arntzen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
67. Norman Epstein, tape recorded interview, April 1987.
68. Julia Brown, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
69. Eric Epstein, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
70. Lloyd Arntzen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
71. Karen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
72. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
73. Don Brown, tape recorded interview, January, 1991.
74. Jill Tolliday, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
75. John Arnett, *Vancouver Sun*, September 10, 1962, p. 11.
76. Julia Brown, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
77. Joyce Beck, Annual Report, June, 1963, page 3.
78. Karen Tallman, Ellen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
79. Rita Cohn, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
80. Eric Epstein, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
81. Jim Winter, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
82. Ellen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
83. Karen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
84. Lloyd Arntzen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
85. Karen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April 1987.
86. Jim Winter, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
87. Eric Epstein, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
88. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
89. Rita Cohn, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
90. Paul Nicholls, tape recorded interview, April, 1991.
91. Karen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
92. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
93. Clive Cocking, *Vancouver Sun*, May 12, 1967, p. 14.
94. Norman Epstein, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
95. Rita Cohn, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
96. Jill Tolliday, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
97. Elma Tolliday, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.

98. Eric Epstein, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
99. Lloyd Arntzen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
100. Lloyd Arntzen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
101. Karen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
102. Clive Cocking, *Vancouver Sun*, May 12, 1967, p. 14.
103. Some New School parents believed that dress codes are often used in more traditional schools to keep young people from being interested in real issues.
104. Lloyd Arntzen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
105. Lloyd Arntzen, Joyce Beck, Annual Report, June, 1963, page 5.
106. Lloyd Arntzen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
107. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
108. Lloyd Arntzen, Joyce Beck, Annual Report, June, 1963.
109. Wilf Bennett, *Vancouver Province*, June 12, 1963, p. 17.
110. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
111. Lloyd Arntzen, Joyce Beck, Annual Report, June, 1963, page 5.
112. Wilf Bennett, *Vancouver Province*, June 12, 1963, p. 17.
113. Rita Cohn, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
114. "Exams are passe for children at New School," *The Province*, June 12, 1963, p. 14.
115. "No exams, reports, at New School," *Vancouver Sun*, April 26, 1966, p. 27.
116. Lloyd Arntzen, Student Reports, June, 1964, Thomas Collection.
117. Lloyd Arntzen, Joyce Beck, Annual Report, June, 1963, page 5.
118. Lloyd Arntzen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
119. Lloyd Arntzen, Joyce Beck, Annual Report, June, 1963, page 5.
120. Laura Jamieson, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
121. Daniel Greenberg of the Sudbury Valley School believes "age mixing" creates mature children who are not dependent upon adults. See Greenberg, *The Sudbury Valley School Experience* (Framingham, Mass.: Sudbury Valley School Press, 1985): 96-112.
122. Eric Epstein, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
123. Karen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
124. Laura Jamieson, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
125. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
126. Gwen Creech, interview, January, 1991.
127. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
128. Gwen Creech, interview, January, 1991.
129. Julia Brown, Personal Journal, December 2, 1964.
130. Tamar Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
131. Lloyd Arntzen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
132. Barry Promislow, tape recorded interview, January, 1991.
133. Ken McFarland, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
134. Eric Epstein, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
135. Julia Brown, Hilary Nicholls, and others.
136. Paul Nicholls, tape recorded interview, April, 1991. He is now a practising teacher.
137. Eric Epstein, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
138. Ellen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
139. Paul Nicholls, tape recorded interview, April, 1991.

140. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
141. Jill Tolliday, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
142. Norman Epstein, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
143. Rita Cohn, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
144. Laura Jamieson, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
145. Jill Tolliday, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
146. Lloyd Arntzen, Ellen Tallman, Kay Stockholder, tape recorded interviews, April, 1987.
147. Laura Jamieson, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
148. Ellen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
149. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
150. Tamar Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
151. Eric Epstein, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
152. New School Constitution, February, 1962.
153. Werner Cohn, "On New School Governance," November, 1963.
154. Amended Constitution, June, 1964.
155. Robert Sarti, "Decision Making in a Vancouver Alternate School," unpublished undergraduate paper for William Bruneau, U.B.C., 1974.
156. Norman Epstein, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
157. Julia Brown, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
158. New School committee lists and newsletters, 1962-65.
159. New School newsletter, September, 1963.
160. Cathy Gose, tape recorded interview, November, 1963.
161. Ken MacFarland, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
162. This was a common feature of independent schools. See Donald Erickson et. al., *Characteristics and Relationships in Public and Independent Schools* (Educational Research Institute of B.C., 1979).
163. Alan Tolliday, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
164. New School Newsletters, September 30 and October 29, 1965.
165. Special Bulletin from the Board, 1963; Epstein Collection.
166. Julia Brown, Personal Journal, November 21, 1962.
167. New School newsletter, June, 1963.
168. Don Brown, quoted in the *Vancouver Sun*, March 29, 1961, p. 12.
169. Elliot Gose quoted in Julia Brown, journal excerpt.
170. Norman Epstein, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
171. Gloria Levi, Bary Promislow, tape recorded interviews.
172. Finance Committee reports and minutes, 1965.
173. Financial Report and Fee Schedule, June, 1963, Epstein Collection.
174. Finance Committee minutes and New School Newsletter, 1964.
175. Finance Committee records, 1962-1966.
176. Julia Brown, Personal Journal, August 24, 1963 and April, 1964.
177. *Vancouver Sun*, "New School Basis Fees on Income," March 29, 1961, p. 12.
178. Norman Epstein, tape recorded interview, April, 1987. Of course, public schools do this to some extent as well.
179. Jill Tolliday, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
180. Gwen Creech, interview, January, 1991.

181. New School budgets and financial statements, 1962-66, Epstein Collection.
182. New School budgets and financial statements, 1962-66.
183. Annual Financial Statements, 1963-1968, Registrar of Companies, Victoria; New School Budgets and Treasurer's Reports, 1963-1968.
184. Annual Reports and Financial Statements, 1963-1968, Registrar of Companies, Victoria.
185. Pledge form, June, 1966, Epstein Collection.
186. Ron Hansen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
187. New School newsletters, September to November, 1963.
188. New School Newsletter, October 29, 1965; New School Art Auction price list, November 22, 1968.
189. Financial Reports, 1964-1969, Registrar of Companies, Victoria.
190. Julia Brown, Personal Journal, May 19, 1964.
191. New School Thrift and Gift Shop, Financial Statement, 1964, 1965.
192. Thrift Shop sales records, June, 1968 to January, 1969, Randall Collection.
193. Income Statement, June, 1969, Registrar of Companies, Victoria.
194. New School Annual General Meeting minutes, June 21, 1968.
195. Lecture Series publicity flyer, 1964.
196. Private letter to the Board, September, 1964.
197. Admissions Committee Report, October, 1964.
198. New School newsletter, December 16, 1963, Levi Collection.
199. New School newsletters, 1962-64.
200. Norman Epstein, November, 1991.
201. Curriculum Committee minutes, 1964.
202. See J. Donald Wilson, Robert Stamp, and L.P. Audet, eds. *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1970) p. 491. Cuisenaire rods had just become popular in the early 1960s. Considerable research was done with them at U.B.C.
203. Curriculum Committee, minutes, September 20, 1964.
204. Planning Committee Report, undated.
205. Planning Committee Report, undated.
206. Planning Committee Report on Kindergarten, undated.
207. Kindergarten attendance was still optional in B. C. at this time.
208. Jill Tolliday, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
209. Julia Brown, personal journal, Gwen Creech, interview.
210. New School annual reports.
211. Barry Promislow, tape recorded interview, January, 1991.
212. Gwen Creech, interview, January, 1991.
213. Nomi Growe (Promislow), tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
214. Olive Balabanov, personal interview, October 15, 1997.
215. Teacher Committee, Report on Evaluation, November, 1963.
216. William and Hillary Nicholls, open letter, February, 1965.
217. Julia Brown, Personal Journal, April 11, April 14, 1964.
218. Board recommendation to the membership, April, 1964.
219. Andy Johnston quoted in Julia Brown, Journal, April 14, 1964.
220. Alan and Elma Tolliday, open letter to the membership, April, 1964.

221. Most independent schools had individual or corporate ownership structure and were governed by appointed boards.
222. Vote totals from Julia Brown, Journal, April 11, April 14, 1964.
223. Charles Christopherson, "Re The New School," letter to members, April 20, 1964.
224. Gwen Creech, interview, January, 1991.
225. William Nicholls, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
226. Paul Nicholls, tape recorded interview, April, 1991.
227. In Robert Sarti, "Decision Making in a Vancouver Alternative School," U.B.C., 1974.
228. Elliot and Kathy Gose, taped interviews, April, 1987.
229. Rita Cohn, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
230. Don Brown quoted in Julia Brown, Personal Journal, April 6, 1964.
231. Jim Winter, tape recorded interview, April, 1987. Mr. Arntzen combined periods of teaching in the Vancouver School District with his career as a professional musician.
232. New Teachers Committee, Report, May, 1964.
233. New Teachers Committee, Report, May, 1964.
234. Phil Thomas, letter to Vancouver School Board, May, 1964.
235. William and Hillary Nicholls, open letter, February, 1965.
236. Constitutional Amendments, June, 1964.
237. New School newsletters, June and September, 1964.
238. Enrolment and membership list, 1964/54.
239. Special bulletin to the membership, November, 1964.
240. Report from the Board, November, 1964.
241. Mervine Beagle, telephone interview, June, 1991. See Rudolf Dreikurs and Vicki Soltz, *Children The Challenge* (New York: Hawthorne, 1964) and Rudolf Dreikurs, *Psychology in the Classroom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).
242. Many alternative schools, such as the Russells' Beacon Hill, have suffered over the years from criticism about mess and confusion.
243. Gwen Creech, interview, January, 1991.
244. Mervine Beagle, personal interview, June, 1991. See Victor Froese, ed, *Whole Language: Practice and Theory* (Vancouver: U.B.C. Department of Language Education, 1988.)
245. Mervine Beagle, telephone interview, June, 1991.
246. Cal Shumiatcher, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
247. Paul Nicholls, tape recorded interview, April, 1991.
248. Jean Affleck and Doris Gray.
249. Phil Thomas, Teacher's Report, 1965.
250. Ellen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
251. Phil Thomas, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
252. Julia Brown, Personal Journal, October 28, 1964.
253. Julia Brown describes this meeting in detail, Personal Journal, November 8, 1964.
254. Report of the Ad Hoc Committee, December, 1964.
255. Marilyn Epstein quoted in Julia Brown, Journal, December 2, 1964.
256. Maureen Beddoes, Phil Thomas, letters to the board, October, 1964, Thomas Collection.
257. Gwen Creech, letter to the membership, January, 1965.
258. Gwen Creech, Phil Thomas, letters, December, 1964, January, 1965.
259. Parents' petition, January, 1965.

260. Julia Brown, Personal Journal, December 15, 1964, January 31, 1965 and Hillary Nicholls, taped interview, April, 1987.
261. Paul Nicholls, tape recorded interview, April, 1991.
262. Phil Thomas, letter to Mrs. Creech, February, 1965.
263. Gwen Creech, Phil Thomas, letters, January/February, 1965.
264. Julia Brown, Personal Journal, October 28, 1964.
265. William and Hillary Nicholls, Open Letter to the Membership, February, 1965.
266. Julia Brown, Personal Journal, February 17, 1965.
267. Report from the Board, February, 1965.
268. Letter from the Board to Miss Gaba and Miss Beagle, March, 1965.
269. Norman Epstein, Dal Town, letters, March, 1965.
270. Gwen Creech, Open Letter to the Membership, March, 1965.
271. Ruth McCarthy, open letter to the membership, February, 1985.
272. Correspondence between Don Brown and Norman Epstein, January to March, 1965. Epstein Collection.
273. Gwen Creech, Open Letter to the Membership, March, 1965.
274. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
275. Barbara Beach, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
276. Phil Thomas, letter of resignation, April, 1965.
277. Phil Thomas, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
278. Norman Epstein, taped interview, April, 1987, Julia Brown, Personal Journal, October 28, 1964.
279. Mervine Beagle, telephone interview, June, 1991.
280. Phil Thomas taught in Vancouver public schools until the mid 1980s. He remained active in both art and music. Adele Gaba and Mervine Beagle continued to work together on the west coast of Vancouver Island and at Discovery School, an alternative elementary school in the Surrey School District, where Ms. Beagle was principal until 1989.
281. Ellen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April 1987.
282. Don Brown, tape recorded interview, January, 1991.
283. Norman Epstein, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
284. Ellen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
285. Phillip Hewitt, interview, June, 1991.
286. Norman and Marilyn Epstein, taped interviews, April, 1987.
287. Barbara Beach, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
288. Julia Brown, Personal Journal, November 28, 1964.
289. The New School Prospectus, 1962, page 2.
290. Gwen Creech, interview, January, 1991.
291. Barbara Beach, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
292. Julia Brown, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
293. Ad Hoc Committee, Report, December, 1964.
294. Norman Epstein, farewell letter to the teachers, June, 1965.
295. Policy Paper, "The Position of Teacher-Director at the New School," April, 1965.
296. New School Newsletter, October 29, 1965.
297. Robert Barker, Biographical and Educational Statement, April, 1965.
298. Graham Smith, Educational Statement, May 1965.

299. Hillary Nicholls, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
300. Hiring Committee Report, May 1965.
301. Barry Promislow, tape recorded interview, January, 1991.
302. Cal Shumiatcher, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
303. Eric Epstein, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
304. Paul Nicholls, tape recorded interview, April, 1991.
305. David Levi, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
306. Karen Tallman, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
307. Paul Nicholls, tape recorded interview, April, 1991.
308. Kathy Hassard, *Vancouver Sun*, July 8, 1965, p. 38.
309. Else Wise, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
310. Else Wise, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
311. Celestin Freinet, *Co-operative Learning and Social Change* (Toronto: Our Schools/Our Selves, 1990). In his "natural method" Freinet led children at their own rate through a progression of shared drawing, free writing, and reading activities using student poetry, wall journals, classroom magazines, and other techniques.
312. Anne Long, tape recorded interview, May, 1987.
313. Anne Long, tape recorded interview, May 1987.
314. Cal Shumiatcher, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
315. Bob Sunter, *Vancouver Sun*, April 26, 1966, p. 27.
316. Anne Long, tape recorded interview, May 1987.
317. Cathy Gose, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
318. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," in *Radical School Reform*, Gross and Gross, eds. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969): 275.
319. Barry Promislow, tape recorded interview, January, 1991.
320. Robert Sarti, "Decision Making in a Vancouver Alternate School," U.B.C., 1974.
321. Mr. Smith went back to teach in northern British Columbia. Some believe he later returned to England.
322. Wayne Levi, quoted by Clive Cocking, *Vancouver Sun*, May 12, 1967, 14.
323. Jim Winter, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
324. Jill Tolliday, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
325. An interdisciplinary programme for students in grades ten and eleven, started by vice principal, Jim Carter. Mr. Carter, a New School parent in the late 1960s, later became deputy education minister.
326. Sentinel Satellite offered a humanities and drama based programme headed by Barbara Shumiatcher, a long-time New School parent. Jim Carter was the school principal.
327. Laura Jamieson, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
328. Coolie Verner, Consultant's Report, March, 1968. Professor Verner of U.B.C. prepared this report during a later school crisis in 1968 (see Chapter 6).
329. Hilda Thomas, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
330. W.A C. Stewart, *The Educational Innovators*, Vol. 2, (London: Macmillan, 1968): 140. The comment was made by W.B. Curry who headed the parent-run Oak Lane County Day School, a Progressive school in Philadelphia, before returning to England to become headmaster at Dartington Hall in the early 1930s.

CHAPTER 2: ARGENTA FRIENDS SCHOOL

Beginnings

The Argenta Friends School was born in a remote mountainous community in the West Kootenays at the end of the 1950s. The earliest independent Progressive school in British Columbia, it was rooted in American Quakerism. But the school also embodied many important Progressive principles and practices even though the founders never explicitly mentioned John Dewey or other Progressive thinkers.

Argenta began as a prosperous silver mining town at the northern tip of Kootenay Lake in the 1890s. After the mining industry declined around 1910, a number of families originally from Europe settled in Argenta to try their hand at farming the benchland above the lake.[1] They sent their weekly produce down the lake to Kaslo and Nelson on the sternwheeler, *Moyie*. But the land was marginal and less than six families were left by 1950. Then, the community was given new life with the arrival of another wave of settlers, a group of Quaker families mainly from California.

John and Helen Stevenson were teachers and members of a small Quaker farming community in Tracy, California in the 1940s along with their friends Bob and Ruth Boyd, John and Anne Rush, and later George and Mary Pollard. The Stevensons and their friends were dissatisfied with life in the United States. It was difficult for small farmers to compete with large California "factory farms." They also opposed the growth of militarism, violence, materialism, and the attitude that "it's okay to do anything as long as you don't get caught." The last straw was McCarthyism, which grew out of the Cold War and the fear of Communism in the early 1950s, and the loyalty oath which had then to be sworn by all teachers. Objecting to such a requirement on religious principles, the Stevensons refused to take the oath.

In 1952 they decided to move to British Columbia. They were drawn to Canada because it seemed less materialistic and militaristic than the United States. They appreciated the "world

political view of Lester Pearson," Canada's apparent lack of nationalism, and the absence of a military draft.[2] After travelling the province for months looking for a place to settle, the Stevensons chose Argenta for its inexpensive land suitable for agriculture, its magnificent physical setting, and a history of co-operation in the community. They bought an abandoned hotel left over from Argenta's mining days and converted it into their family home. They were joined by the Pollards, Boyds, and Rushes, and within the next five years by non-Quaker families sharing a similar world view—Elmo and Ruth Wolfe, Chuck and Helen Valentine, Hugh and Anna Elliot, Hugh and Betty Ector, and Hugh and Agnes Herbison. By the late 1950s Argenta was known among North American Quakers and among people looking for a communalist, alternative lifestyle. It was an isolated community with poor transportation links and no electrical power or telephone service. The Quakers saw it as a place where they could develop a large degree of economic self-sufficiency and where they could guard against the effects of a future depression or war. Drawn to the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, they saw Argenta as a place where they could "live their philosophy" and pursue a "considered life."

Although local old timers viewed the Quakers with some suspicion, the new group revitalized the community technologically and socially. One of the newcomers developed a water-powered generating system to supply electrical power to the community and others helped expand and maintain the local crank telephone system. They successfully lobbied the government for a new bridge across the Duncan River, thus making transportation to the village much less difficult. Musicians among the newcomers created an amateur orchestra which played at popular monthly dances for the entire community. The Quakers were well educated, serious, and concerned about large world problems. They added enough children to the area that the local one room school was reopened. Helen Stevenson was hired by the school district and taught at the school for five years. By all accounts she was an excellent teacher.

But making a living was difficult. In 1955 six families formed the Delta Co-op, a producers' and consumers' co-operative. They worked on farming, logging, and construction projects, pooled the income, and distributed approximately $75 per month to each participant

family.[3] They even secured some local government contracts to build bridges and roads. But although industrious, the group still needed to generate more income. During a discussion in 1957 co-op members realized that over half of the adults in their group had teaching experience. A small independent high school would bring in extra money and the students could be boarded in homes throughout the community.

John and Helen Stevenson had extensive educational backgrounds and would become the driving force behind the school. Helen graduated from Whittier College in southern California with a degree in biology and a secondary school teaching certificate. She taught for three years in a rural California high school. John studied mathematics at the University of California. After spending the war years in alternative service as a conscientious objector, he taught high school. Helen Stevenson helped establish Pacific Ackworth Friends School, a Quaker school in southern California where she taught for three years. During this time she studied at a Columbia University outreach programme in Pasadena where she learned about John Dewey's ideas of "child-centred classrooms" and "education for democracy." Since the early 1940s they dreamed about establishing their own school, a dream the Stevensons shared with the Boyds.

Quakers (members of the Religious Society of Friends) believe each person has an Inner Light that should guide human action.[4] This Light arises during group meditation (Meeting for Worship). Participants "try to use silence for the growth of our inward self" and search for ideas that can be formulated "into something useful in ordering our everyday lives."[5] Friends also seek wisdom through social interaction and emphasize the importance of community: acting in the interests of the group, building trusting relationships, and making decisions by consensus.[6] They oppose hierarchy and encourage each individual to follow his or her own conscience. Quaker practice emphasizes pacifism, social activism, direct and truthful speech, and simple living. The Stevensons hoped to incorporate these principles in a "clock-round educational experience" that would "unhinge the students from preconceived ideas," expose them to alternative political, economic, and religious views, and encourage them to find their own values.[7]

The Friends School would aim to contribute to world peace and to encourage ethical

social relationships. The founders asked big questions about the connections between economic and political life:

> We are trying to understand those conditions which lead the world to choose ways of violence or of non-violence. How do we keep the golden mean between "mine" and "ours?" How do we keep our co-operative as a means rather than an end? How do we stay clear of economic dependence on huge corporations or governments? How do we reduce our capital assets so that we avoid special economic privileges which are the seeds of war? What obligations do we have in the light of world hunger? How do we nurture faith in each other that allows us to withstand our personal weaknesses and limitations?[8]

The ultimate school objective was to produce citizens who would strive to create a better world. The school prospectus stated: "We attempt to practice simplicity, harmony, equality, and community. We hope that we may be a seed in the larger society."[9] This is not unlike John Dewey's emphasis on educating citizens to take part in genuine democratic life.

The Friends School would be under the "care" and guidance of the Argenta Friends Meeting. This group included people whose professional or life experience would be an asset to the school. Bob Boyd had trained as a minister at the Chicago Theological Seminary and at the University of Chicago during the 1930s while he and his wife, Ruth, were doing volunteer work in settlement houses. Concluding that social change in large urban areas was impractical, they moved to rural California, formed an agricultural co-operative, and did organizational work in the community. Elmo Wolfe met Mr. Boyd while also studying in Chicago to become a Congregational minister and working in a depressed area of the city. In the meantime his wife, Ruth, earned a Masters degree in elementary education. Mr. Wolfe was hired by a congregation in central California at the height of the McCarthy period in the early 1950s but was asked to leave after four years because of his pacifism. The Wolfes did not want to raise their children under these circumstances and moved to Canada. George and Mary Pollard had also worked in rural co-operatives and had been (with the Stevensons) among the founders of Pacific Ackworth School in California.

Like the founders of the New School, the Argenta Friends were thoughtful and deliberate,

and spent over two years outlining the theoretical position and practical details of the school. A series of four working papers titled "For the Study of Argenta Friends School," were written in 1958 by John Stevenson, Helen Stevenson, Bob Boyd, and Ruth Wolfe. Discussion continued until the group agreed on the general parameters of the school.

In the spring of 1959 the Friends Meeting authorized the Stevensons to open the school that September. Members contributed a modest five dollars each and a wider appeal raised $2,000. The School Committee wrote to everyone they could think of who might be interested in sending their teenagers to the school. The weeks leading up to school opening were exciting but stressful. An American teacher slated to join the staff was disallowed entry into Canada because of a health condition and the Stevensons suddenly had to find a replacement. They finally hired Jonathan Aldrich, a recent Harvard graduate from Boston. He knew about Progressive ideas and practices having spent nine years as a student at Shady Hill in Cambridge, Massachusetts, an important American Progressive school.[10] At the last minute, immigration officials at the border crossing south of Nelson threatened to hold up the arriving American students. The three teachers drove more than one hundred miles armed with diplomas, professional references, and school documents to convince the officials of the school's legitimacy.

The Argenta Friends School opened in September, 1959 with three teachers and ten students in grades ten, eleven, and twelve. Tuition was set at $800 per year (including room and board) and teachers would earn $75 per month. The founding families decided not to accept any of their own children for the first year because they wanted to begin with a group of students who did not know them. Students were recruited from among Quaker families and friends of the Stevensons in California. John Stevenson taught mathematics, Helen Stevenson taught biology and Canadian geography, and Jonathan Aldrich taught English, mathematics, and French. Friends School teachers had to be generalists.

The school was located in the old one room public schoolhouse, empty again in 1959 because the district had built a larger school in a village eight miles away. The Friends School rented the building for five dollars a month. Since the school needed more space and was right

across Argenta Creek from the Stevensons' home, they offered their living room, kitchen, and a cabin on their property for extra classes. The old hotel served as the library and office. In the summer of 1961 a group of teachers, students, and Meeting members began constructing the Argenta Friends Meeting House which would also serve as a large classroom for the school. It was built entirely with volunteer labour and materials were financed by donations totalling $2,000. Work continued throughout the spring and summer of each year. The school began holding classes in the building when it was enclosed in 1963, but it was only usable as a fair weather building until the heating system was finally installed in 1964. John Stevenson called the building a "monument" to the dedication and generosity of school supporters.

Educational Goals

Unlike the founders of other Progressive schools, the Argenta Friends did not have deeply-held educational theories. But they were passionate about the development of a social conscience and learning the skills and wisdom to live together in a community. John and Helen Stevenson hoped to provide "education for community building."[11]

A primary objective of the Friends School was the growth of the "whole person." The prospectus stated: "Our programme is clock-around, and classes, recreation, worship, work, and home life are considered as a whole."[12] Although the school would cover the basic academic requirements to prepare students to enter university, academics were considered to be just one component of the programme. Whereas many private schools might claim similar aims, the Friends School had important distinguishing features. Its students would come to understand the value of "wholesome rural living" and would learn how to build, plant gardens, and survive in the woods. They would be affected by the beauty of the mountainous environment and learn valuable lessons from the pervasive peace and quiet. Students would live with local families and participate in the economic and family life of their hosts through the numerous chores that are a part of rural living. Students would have the opportunity to gain spiritual insights through

attending the Friends silent worship services. The exploration of Quaker values of non-violence and consensus decision making was another central objective. In summary, the school offered experiences in religious observance, group government, family living, academics, and awareness.[13]

In contrast to traditional schools where the adults formulate a set of rules and penalties for breaking them, the Argenta Friends' vision was for students to participate in most aspects of running the school. John Stevenson wrote: "We have set out to give students freedom and accompanying responsibilities. There has been a minimum of emphasis on rules and penalties and a maximum on group decision followed by group evaluation."[14] Students helped set school policies in the areas that affected their lives including curriculum, scheduling, daily routines, and personal relationships. The teachers rejected an authoritarian attitude in favour of a "hands-off" approach throwing responsibility for decisions back onto the students. The goal was to develop "self-regulated people."[15]

The school was governed by the Friends Meeting which set the basic patterns and philosophy "within the framework of Friends principles."[16] In keeping with the Quaker belief that "there is that of God in every one," the school rejected a hierarchy or "ladder of command" in which individuals might take an "elevated position."[17] Instead, the founders set out to create a democratic structure in which all students and staff were encouraged to participate.[18] School policy was set by the whole group and students had to take personal responsibility for the group's welfare. For several years the school had no Principal and administrative tasks were performed by John Stevenson as "Co-ordinator." Students would learn to take responsibility for the group's welfare. Staff and students based their relationships on trust according to the school motto, "we're in this together."[19] The Prospectus stated:

> The Argenta Friends School is an attempt to give students the opportunity to live in a situation in which they participate in the decisions which affect almost every phase of their living. In addition they have the responsibility of helping implement those decisions. This works only when each member is seeking for good of all members of the group and of the group itself.[20]

A fundamental goal of the school was that students would learn to make decisions through

seeking "unity" according to the methods of a Friends business meeting. Decisions could be revised only if the entire group changed its mind in a subsequent discussion. The founders believed that most of the world's problems and conflicts arise from a misunderstanding of the meaning of democracy. They hoped the Argenta Friends School would develop citizens who could make decisions more inclusively. The prospectus stated: "Today the world is faced with a need for new skills in resolving conflict before its problems become overwhelming. We seek unity for we feel the world can no longer afford to merely out-vote minorities and then ignore them."[21] Another school document stated:

> We believe that differences within all groups have too long been settled by the strong or the majority imposing wishes on the minority. Our very survival may depend on learning new techniques. Our four years together have shown that young people and adults working together can govern themselves with sensitivity to the welfare of the total group. When anyone does this successfully, he is preparing himself to be a valuable world citizen."[22]

Curriculum was divided into academic and enrichment subjects. The school provided all essential high school courses, and the staff tried to ensure that academic offerings suited students' interests as well as university entrance requirements. Enrichment subjects, usually taught by Argenta residents, covered the arts and rural life skills. Because Quakers valued physical activity and citizenship, physical education and a course called World Problems were compulsory. Unlike in later "laissez-faire" schools, students were expected to attend class and do their assignments. However, an essential principle of the Friends School was that "different students need to proceed at different rates." For some this might mean taking an extra year of school to "find themselves" in Argenta and explore personal and ethical values.

The school originally accepted both general and university bound students, but by 1961 the staff believed that "there was a limit to the range of abilities we could integrate into our small group."[23] Since most students planned to go to university, the school would specialize in the university programme. The school opened with grades ten to twelve, and even included grade nine in the second year, but eventually the staff decided that only students in grades eleven and

twelve were old enough to benefit fully from the freedom and responsibility the school offered. Argenta remained a senior high school throughout most of its life.

Although the Friends School did not use the term "Progressive," it shared many principles of educational theory with Deweyan Progressive schools. These included an emphasis on the "whole student," self-paced learning, small and informal classes, student decision making, support for artistic expression, an emphasis on "active learning," and education for citizenship.

Students

After the successful first year with ten students the student body expanded to seventeen in 1960/61. Five were returning students from the previous year who provided continuity and leadership. The founders hoped that senior students rather than teachers would be the principal source of socialization to the school's values.[24] The majority of students (70%) came from California. However, one student was from Vancouver and four were local—from the Stevenson, Pollard, and Wolfe families, as well as one student from nearby Johnson's Landing.[25] Enrollment averaged eighteen students throughout the 1960s with a peak of twenty-three in 1963-64. As the general interest in alternative schools grew by the end of the decade, Argenta enrollment rose to twenty-one in 1969/70 and peaked at twenty-six students in 1970/71. But students and staff believed the school would be more cohesive if the student body was limited to twenty students.[26] Enrollment dropped to twenty-two the next year and after 1972 returned to an average of eighteen students.[27] Since by this time public enthusiam for alternative schools had already declined and the number of applications decreased, enrollment would probably have fallen anyway.

During the first decade the majority of students were American as the Argenta Quakers had deep roots in the United States. Moreover, the United States had a strong Progressive private school tradition and strong pockets of liberal population more amenable to alternative education than most Canadians of the day. In 1963/64 fifteen of twenty-three students were

Americans, thirteen from California. Of the eight Canadians four were from Argenta and four from other parts of British Columbia. Californians remained the largest single group until 1971 averaging six per year during the late 1960s. Several students came from Oregon and, by the end of the decade, from such other states as Colorado, Michigan, and New York (six in 1970/71). Canadian students accounted for one third to one half of the total. British Columbia provided most of the Canadian students and during the mid- and late-1960s an average of four students per year came from Argenta itself, and four from other parts of British Columbia. By 1970 some students were coming from other parts of Canada but only from 1975 on did Canadian students outnumber those from the United States (60%-70%). In summary, student geographical backgrounds were more diverse in the later years than in the 1960s.[28]

About half of the students had Quaker backgrounds and many American students heard about the school through Quaker channels. Some were children of friends of the Stevensons, others heard about the school through participation in Quaker annual meetings, and a few had been to other Quaker schools such as John Woolman School in California and Scattergood School in Iowa. One student at John Woolman met a former Argenta student there and was attracted by his account of the school. Some students were drawn by what they already knew about Friends education while others were interested in the emphasis on pacifism and consensus.

Individuals chose Argenta for a variety of reasons. Some were attracted to the rural environment, such as one student who "wanted to leave crowded smoggy Los Angeles and was attracted to the wilds of British Columbia."[29] Others were looking for the personalized experience that could be offered by a small school. Still others were attracted to anything "alternative" during the 1960s and a few students were simply looking for adventure.

As with almost all alternative schools, many students applied to Argenta because they were having difficulty in mainstream schools or with their parents. As early as 1963 John Stevenson wrote that many students applied because of unhappiness due to "a lack of success scholastically, in home adjustment, socially, with personal problems, or with difficulty in matching parents' teaching with North American culture. The improvement in some of the more severe

cases has led to the feeling that we are a rehabilitation centre." Mr. Stevenson worried that "we get many applications from students who have problems beyond the scope of our school. We need the strength of a number of fairly normal students to carry the one or two who have more severe deficiencies."[30] The school was not equipped to help students with serious problems. Accepting too many troubled students contributed to the downfall of several later alternative schools.

This became a bigger problem during the mid- to late-1960s when some desperate parents hoped to send their children away from the influence of the counterculture or drugs. In such cases the Personnel Committee tried to ensure that application to the Friends School was primarily the choice of the student. Students who did not really want to be in Argenta did not last long. But staff and students had to cope with some difficult individuals. Some students had emotional problems or came from "chaotic" families. Some found it difficult to adjust to the rural environment, whereas others were simply unwilling to go along with school policies. One former student recalls: "Students sent there for the wrong reasons felt like they were in reform school because they couldn't drive their car."[31] Another remembers:

> There were problems. Some kids coming from big city life were thrown into an isolated rural environment, either going wild or not knowing what to do with their time. Some urban dissatisfied kids were not adjusting well to the policies of the school and were unwilling to live by them.[32]

The founders wanted the school to be accessible to students of all social and economic backgrounds. As in other alternative schools, most students came from middle class homes with well educated parents, but the school did attract students from modest income families by keeping the tuition so low. The founders also hoped to attract students from ethnic minorities and this happened from time to time. The students usually formed a close group like an extended family or "brothers and sisters."[33] They maintained a "non-competitive environment," treating each other with respect.[34] The senior students helped the new arrivals adjust to Argenta and "each year the school would constitute itself anew, each person participating in forming the community."[35] Several marriages and long-term friendships developed and Argenta graduates still correspond

with their teachers and fellow students. Many former students report that the experience was of major importance in their lives, as one puts it "strong friendships, bonding, idealism, dreaming, and high hopes; an all time high in our lives."[36]

Staffing

John and Helen Stevenson were dominant members of the school staff for over fifteen years. Other staff members came from three principal sources. Some were Quakers who were attracted to the Argenta Friends community and their experiment in Friends education. Most of these were from the United States and saw Canada as a refuge from American militaristic attitudes. A second group were adults in their early twenties who had left the United States specifically because of the Vietnam war. Most of these individuals were young idealists attracted to Argenta for its rural location and its reputation for tolerance of unconventional lifestyles. Thirdly, some staff members were already Argenta residents. Most taught the electives such as art, music, or construction on a part-time basis.

Although the Stevensons and a few other Friends School staff members were trained teachers and had teaching experience, most were not. But almost all staff members had university degrees and led active intellectual lives. Most were generalists—adaptable, fast learners, people with divergent skills and interests. Some of the teaching was idiosyncratic and, according to former members of the school community, a few staff members were ineffective or did not subscribe to the school's values and left after one year. But the majority of teachers were capable despite their lack of training or experience. Former students report that most of their teachers conveyed the necessary course material well and a few were outstanding. Because the staff was small, teachers had to be able to teach courses outside their field of expertise. One individual was hired as the school secretary and ended up teaching French. She took a crash course in French the next summer so she could do a better job the following year. A full staff load was three courses, but many staff members doubled as houseparents which ensured that their duties would

be twenty-four hours a day.

For new staff members life in tiny, isolated Argenta was "total immersion." Adjusting to a rural lifestyle was not easy—"learning to use a chain saw, cooking and heating with wood, just staying warm was a challenge."[37] Some staff thought they were coming to a rural paradise but found it "hard, cold, wet, dirty, and uncomfortable."[38] As the Staff Handbook suggested "we need staff with energy, flexibility, commitment, imagination, patience, and a good sense of humour."[39] Staff members also had to adjust to living on a very low income and the Handbook included two full pages of "tips on stretching dollars in Argenta." For some, teaching in Argenta resulted in a financial and personal sacrifice.[40] As one former teacher put it, "we loved the rural setting and the physical life was wonderful, but we couldn't manage on the small income."[41] The majority spent one or two years there and then moved on to a permanent career or a larger community.

There were different needs and attitudes felt by what Helen Stevenson called "resident and non-resident" teachers. By resident teachers she meant staff members who lived in the community on a permanent basis and had been associated with the school for several years. Non-residents were young idealists for whom teaching in Argenta was a satisfying experience for a year or two. According to Mrs. Stevenson, teaching at the Friends School could be an alienating experience for these "non Argenta-rooted staff."[42]

A few teachers stayed for many years, became long-term members of the wider Argenta community, and influenced the development of the school. Besides the Stevensons, these were Jonathan Aldrich, Betty and Norman Polster, Brenda Berck, Michael and Lynne Phillips, Donna and Bill Sassaman, Edith Gorman, and Alaine Hawkins. The backgrounds of these and other staff members reveal individuals who were well educated, socially conscious, and service-oriented. Many worked with Quaker service or peace organizations and were committed to values of peace, participatory democracy, and social activism.[43]

Jonathan Aldrich was the son of a Boston lawyer and judge. Raised as a Unitarian, he enjoyed working with Quakers. After graduating from Harvard in the late 1950s he went to

Mexico to do volunteer work with the American Friends Service Committee.[44] He had no formal teacher training but was familiar with Progressive ideas and the writings of John Dewey and William James. Mr. Aldrich taught at Argenta for six years between 1959 and 1967, the last two years as Principal. Former students praise his "gifted and flexible" teaching style, his delight in English, and his sense of humour. One recalls that "he catapulted me into wanting to be a writer."[45]

Betty Polster grew up in Pennsylvania, graduating from the University of Pennsylvania.[46] She was active in such Quaker organizations as the Centre for Intentional Communities and the Pendle Hill Quaker Study Centre in Philadelphia where she met John and Helen Stevenson in 1966.[47] She and her husband, Norman (a research scientist and inventor), were income tax refusers and welcomed an opportunity to leave the United States. Mrs. Polster had done some teaching at camps and recreation schools but did not have teacher training or formal classroom experience. Nevertheless she and her husband arrived in Argenta in 1967 and she taught at the Friends School for fifteen years. She taught social studies and a variety of other courses while her husband taught mathematics and science. In 1970 she succeeded John Stevenson as Principal, a position she held for most of the next ten years. As the Stevensons' influence waned during the 1970s Betty Polster became the school's leader throughout that decade. Students and colleagues considered her an excellent leader and problem solver— energetic, compassionate, and consultative.

Brenda Berck was one of the few Canadians on staff during the 1960s. She grew up in a United Church family in Ontario and was influenced by the Student Christian Movement and the "social gospel" in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[48] She became an activist in the peace movement where she first worked with Quakers. She served with the Friends Service Committee in Toronto assisting draft dodgers and sending aid to Vietnam. She met John and Helen Stevenson there and accepted an offer to move to Argenta as school secretary in 1968.[49] Having trained as a teacher at the Ontario College of Education in 1965, she soon filled a vacant staff position and taught French and English at the Friends School from 1968 to 1973. She became

the first single houseparent in 1968, initially a startling idea for Argenta Meeting members. Ms. Berck served as school principal in 1972.

Mary and Steve Holland taught at the Friends School and served as houseparents in 1965/66. Mary Holland (Wolfe) had been the first local student at the Friends School and was a member of the first graduating class in 1961. She returned to Argenta after completing a degree at the University of California. The Hollands' acceptance of a position at the school made it possible for the Stevensons to take a much needed sabbatical.

Dan and Jan Phelps grew up in Oregon and New Hampshire and came to Canada in 1962 because of their opposition to American militarism and the military draft. Mr. Phelps had a Unitarian background and attended Reed College, a liberal arts college in Portland, later earning a Ph.D. in optics at U.B.C. Upon moving to Ontario both were active in the peace movement and Mrs. Phelps spent a year with the Company of Young Canadians. They first encountered Quakers through their work sheltering draft dodgers. The Phelps met Helen Stevenson at a Quaker education conference in Toronto and agreed to come to Argenta as houseparents in September 1967 while Mr. Phelps became the science teacher. As a young couple without children they found looking after six teenage girls a challenge. They also had difficulty subsisting on the low salaries and, though valued staff members, they left Argenta after two years.[50]

Arnold Porter grew up in San Francisco graduating from university in the middle of the Vietnam era. He claimed conscientious objector status as a pacifist, did draft counselling with the American Friends Service Committee, and worked with a Unitarian youth group. Mr. Porter experienced "great stress around the war" and he and his wife finally decided to "get out of this country and start a life of our own." He met Helen Stevenson at the Quaker Pacific Yearly Meeting in San Francisco and accepted a position at the Friends School in 1967.[51]

Michael and Lynne Phillips did their undergraduate studies at the University of Washington in Chinese history (Michael) and Russian literature (Lynne). They moved to Berkeley in 1966 where Mrs. Phillips did graduate work in psychology. During the next three years they became disenchanted with life in the United States, citing "Vietnam, police riots,

Chicago," and felt like "political exiles."[52] They heard about Argenta while doing peace and social justice work with a Quaker organization. The school needed houseparents and teachers and the Phillips moved to Argenta in 1968 where they taught for five years.

Hugh Herbison was a native British Columbian and another trained teacher. He grew up in a C.C.F. family and, like Brenda Berck, had been impressed by the "social gospel" movement. He became a United Church minister stationed in Alert Bay but left the ministry and became principal of the Quadra Island school.[53] Because of his experience with aboriginal people and other minorities he was appointed to a U.B.C. research group to investigate the Doukhobor school issue in the early 1950s. Mr. Herbison lived in a Doukobor community from 1951 to 1953 but when relations deteriorated between his hosts and the newly elected Social Credit government in 1952, he resigned.[54] After working for several years with the Canadian International Development Agency in Southeast Asia, Mr. Herbison and his family settled in Argenta. He taught at the Friends School in 1969/70.

Donna and Bill Sassaman had been active in the anti-war movement in the United States and were "fed up with the political situation" there. Both graduated from the University of New Hampshire, Mrs. Sassaman with a degree in education and two years teaching experience, Mr. Sassaman with a degree in science and forestry.[55] Bill Sassaman taught at the Friends School from 1970 to 1972, and both returned in the late 1970s when Donna Sassaman became a member of the school administrative team.

Two important teachers during the school's later years were Alaine Hawkins and Edith Gorman. Alaine and John Hawkins moved to Argenta in 1975. Mrs. Hawkins, from Ontario, was one of the few Canadians to play a major role at the Friends School. She studied history and languages at the University of Toronto and taught in Ontario for several years prior to teaching in Argenta from 1975 to 1982. Edith Gorman studied education in Vermont specializing in English, mathematics, and music. Like Mrs. Hawkins, she taught for several years in the public school system before coming to Argenta.

Teaching at Argenta was demanding of time, energy, and expertise. During the early

years the staff averaged four full-time teachers and was a fairly cohesive group. But by 1967 the staff began to expand significantly as more teachers took part-time rather than full-time assignments. The increase in part-time teaching resulted from the retirement of the original houseparenting families; most teachers now had to double as houseparents and thus have smaller teaching loads. Furthermore, an increasingly behaviourally difficult student population, due to 1960s counterculture influences, stretched staff resources. Other alternative schools experienced a similar increase in staff size. For instance, at the New School in Vancouver, exhausted teachers required more colleagues by the late 1960s leading to financial difficulties.

Many teachers with impressive educational backgrounds arrived to teach at the Friends School between 1968 and 1972: Pat Harroff with a chemistry degree specializing in herbicides, and Judy Harroff with a degree in secondary education of the deaf and two years teaching experience left the midwestern United States because of the Vietnam war; Russ Pannier with a Masters in philosophy from Harvard and Ann Pannier with four years teaching experience in Illinois; Andy Kinnaird, a Scottish baker and Christine Kinnaird, an Ontario office worker; Wayne Smith with a teaching certificate from the University of Saskatchewan and Judy Smith, a Regina registered nurse; Jur Bekker with a degree in soil microbiology from Utrecht Agricultural College in the Netherlands and Cornell University, and Haru Bekker with a Masters degree in education from Putney Graduate School in Vermont;[56] Gary and Margo Williams who were trained teachers from Utah and had done service work in the Virgin Islands; and Derryll White, a poet from Nova Scotia. Later, other teachers were Sylvia and Bill Powers who studied at Queens University and Royal Military College in Ontario, and Elizabeth Tanner who graduated in English and Library Science from the University of Iowa.[57] That so many educated individuals were available to teach in a small out-of-the-way school was largely due to the exodus of liberal and well educated young people from the United States during the Vietnam period. It also indicates how appealling alternative education was for some well educated young adults during the late 1960s.

Besides Mary Holland, several former Friends School students came back to teach during the 1970s—Mary Winder from eastern United States, Ed Washington from California, Lynne

Campbell from Oregon, Gillian Davies from British Columbia, and Tom Stevenson (John and Helen's son) from Argenta. The large number of former students on staff indicates that the school was largely successful in producing graduates with the values and knowledge envisioned by the founders. As well, the school elders considered alumni to be one large extended family. In the early 1970s several undergraduate students from Wilmington Friends College in Ohio helped at the school for one term to fulfill "field term" requirements. There is a Friends School organization and, although it did not have the resources of the larger Waldorf or Montessori organizations, it did provide the Argenta school with a Quaker network of educators. This kind of established network was not available to most other alternative schools.

Numerous Argenta residents, including several school founders, taught individual courses ranging from the creative arts to rural living skills. An underlying school principle was that "there is merit in having a variety of occupations" and that a well-rounded person could work comfortably with "hands and head."[58] Staff members were encouraged to be active intellectually as well as with their hands. For this reason part-time teaching was encouraged at Argenta, and the school provided long-term staff members with unpaid sabbaticals for further education or a different type of employment.

In a small school staff changes can make a big difference and staff chemistry varied from year to year. A few teachers did not fit in, but for the most part co-operation was good. Staff members respected each other as people and as teachers, and enjoyed camraderie and "esprit de corps."[59] But there were exceptions such as in 1961/62 when there was an ongoing disagreement about academic policy. As well during the late 1960s when the staff had to deal with serious lifestyle issues, there was considerable disagreement as staff members considered each other either too moralistic or too permissive. The teachers often worked together best when there was a combination of "older more experienced staff members" and younger adults who understood the world of the students. However, the dominance and experience of the Stevensons sometimes "made it difficult for younger members to feel they are really sharing the responsibility of the school."[60] Several other alternative schools had a mix of ages on their staffs leading to a

"generation gap" and some conflict in most cases. Most younger staff members were less interested in academics, willing to give the students more freedom, were more tolerant of drug use and teenage sex, and were sympathetic to the 1960s countercultural lifestyle.

Curriculum

The academic programme at the Friends School was based on the standard British Columbia public school curriculum for students planning on university. They studied English literature, mathematics, Canadian and world history, geography, biology, chemistry, physics, and French. They had regularly scheduled classes, assignments, homework, exams, and report cards.

The school day began with twenty minutes of silence in the style of a Quaker Meeting. Since a major goal of the school was to provide students with an opportunity to develop spiritually through the use of silence, this daily meeting was compulsory. Throughout the years daily meeting was scheduled at different times of the day but most agreed that 8:00 in the morning was as good as any. (Mid-morning interfered with classes, before lunch students were too hungry, after lunch they fell asleep, and at the end of the day they wanted to go home.) The meeting was followed by announcements and decisions about the day's events. Three class sessions were held in the morning with one mid-morning break. Students ate lunch in the Meeting House or outside in the spring and early fall. Electives and study periods were held in the afternoon. Students were permitted to leave when their last class was over, usually between 3:00 and 4:00. Most courses met three to four times per week. The timetable and daily schedule were adjusted many times over the years according to student suggestions. For example, short three-month courses were instituted one year so students could take a greater variety of classes.

As in more traditional schools there was regular homework and students were expected to be in class on time, to have their work done, and not to talk unnecessarily. Study period was compulsory but after 1963 students who demonstrated mature study habits were exempted, and after 1970 study period became optional for everyone. Students were still encouraged, but not

required, to spend spare periods studying.[61] Attendance at classes was compulsory until 1964 when the staff finally gave in to student pressure that classes be voluntary. Nevertheless, most students continued to attend classes regularly.

Students were evaluated three times per year and had a choice between a credit/no credit grading system or letter grades on their permanent record.[62] The school was accredited in British Columbia and students could choose either American or B.C. graduation requirements. Grade twelve students wishing a B.C. graduation wrote government examinations administered by the teachers. American students had the option of receiving a U.S. diploma or completing the more demanding requirements of B.C. graduation. Most American students also wrote the S.A.T.s for university entrance. According to John Stevenson, students did well above average: "Students who wanted to go to Harvard didn't get in but students were accepted at many different universities."[63] The great majority of graduating students did go on to post-secondary education, in some years as many as ninety percent.

Although traditional in some aspects, the Argenta Friends School differed markedly from mainstream public or private schools. Most classes numbered from three to six students excepting English classes, which could be as large as ten and physical education and "World Problems" which included the whole school. Even if only one or two students enrolled in a course, it was offered. The small classes encouraged informality. Students called teachers by their first names (unusual in the early 1960s) and student-teacher relations were close since students also knew their teachers as houseparents. Students sat around tables rather than at desks and most teachers encouraged discussion. Teachers seldom lectured and with such low numbers it was relatively easy for students to work at their own speed. Classes were interactive and, at times, intense. Although teachers were in charge in their classrooms they often solicited student input when designing courses and sometimes altered their plans if student suggestions seemed practical. Some teachers, after setting the tone and expectations for a course, asked students to take turns doing some of the teaching. One year Mr. Aldrich allowed his students to organize their own study of English literature with mixed results. Most teachers emphasized the gaining

of understanding in their courses rather than the accumulation of facts. Classes emphasized values, themes, and problem solving, and even the algebra teacher emphasized "real problems useful to the intelligent person in understanding today's and tomorrow's problems." Academic courses often had practical applications (the calculation of beams needed to carry a given load over a certain span; arboreal lichens available as winter feed for deer, elk, and caribou).[64]

Teachers were free to determine the content and teaching style of their own courses although they were somewhat limited by government examinations. New teachers often consulted with Helen Stevenson about their courses because of her many years of experience. Some teachers planned elaborate course outlines while others "just tried to keep ahead of the students."[65] Because classes were so small, the teachers could be flexible and spontaneous. One student remembers a beautiful day when the lake had frozen over, and Jonathan Aldrich let his students go skating rather than attend class.[66] One year John Stevenson thought his mathematics course was not going well so he turned the class into a study of automechanics and the students worked on their Model A Ford.

The classroom settings encouraged informality as well. During the 1960s classes were held in several locations. The larger classes met in the "old school," a former one room public school renovated by staff and students. After 1963 some classes also met in the New Meeting House, built by the school community. A cabin near the meeting house was used as a laboratory and the "old hotel" housed the school library. Some classes even met in the Stevenson's kitchen and dining room during the first two years. The school buildings were heated by wood and each week two students were responsible for lighting the stove early each morning. The day-to-day informality made classroom learning more enjoyable for students, but the school retained a basically traditional approach to teaching.

Students chose their courses with the help of an adult counsellor according to their interests and the requirements for the university they hoped to attend. In 1963/64 the school offered grade eleven and twelve English, grade eleven and twelve mathematics, grade eleven history, grade eleven science, chemistry, and two levels of French.[67] Despite the small staff, the

basic high school courses were usually covered. If a basic course had to be omitted because of unavailable staffing, it would be offered the following year. For example, students might have to take grade eleven and twelve history in reverse order. Students could also take courses by correspondence and some arranged supervised "independent studies" on a variety of topics from Russian history to the philosophy of Neitzsche or Martin Buber. If some students needed to brush up on basic skills in English or mathematics the teachers would provide this. One student remembers that teachers were always available to provide individual attention, to help work through a problem.[68]

English literature courses were similar to those offered in any high school. Teachers' reading lists might include *Oedipus Rex*, *Macbeth*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *Night*, or *The Edible Woman*. Some students were avid readers. As in many alternative schools writing was taught sporadically and one year all students and staff participated in writing improvement tutorials. Several students fearful of mathematics report that Mr. Stevenson successfully guided them through a difficult subject.

The school offered a full science programme even though there was little laboratory equipment. Teachers were creative. John Stevenson designed courses in "kitchen chemistry" and "pots and pans physics," and Dan Phelps "could make a flask or a bunsen burner out of anything."[69] Teachers used the nearby streams and lake to study ecology and one year Helen Stevenson taught biology with nothing more than an old-fashioned microscope that her mother had given her. In later years an earth science course explored astronomy, oceanography, ecology, land structures, the earth's evolutionary history, ancient astrology, and Velikovsky's catastrophy theory.

Because Quakers believed individuals had an obligation to be active citizens in their community and in the world, John Stevenson developed a required course called World Problems. He brought newspaper articles to stimulate discussion of world events and students expressed their opinions on the causes of and solutions to various international problems. Students studied and wrote about such issues as the Vietnam war, Quebec separatism, recognition of China, over-

population, the military draft, totalitarianism, property expropriation, and law enforcement. Mr. Stevenson asked students to write about whether they would consider participating in a restaurant sit-in, a vigil at a germ warfare plant, a programme for registering Black voters, or a peace walk.[70] Some students remember serious discussions about the Cuban missile crisis and the assassination of Martin Luther King. Students developed critical thinking skills as they evaluated arguments and ideas about subjects ranging from pacifism to capital punishment. The final examination asked students to defend their positions on a variety of issues. Most students found this course valuable, and a teacher who sat in on the discussions remembers that it caused him to question the validity of the Vietnam war for the first time.[71] One student recalls that "John taught us to compare sources, that you can't trust a single source. This was memorable."[72] Students even requested and received special permission from the United Nations to fly the world body's flag in front of the school.

School members also became involved in local issues. The building of the Duncan Dam, just upstream from Argenta, became a contentious issue in the early 1960s and generated considerable protest in the area. Students were encouraged to make their own decisions and some participated in demonstrations while others did not. A few staff members wanted a more overt course in political activism, but the World Problems course was mainly for awareness and reflection. According to almost all students there was very little prosletysing about political issues but a great deal of discussion and debate. Social and political awareness was an integral part of Quaker life; the Friends' perspective was "definitely a world view."

In 1967 in response to student requests, Helen Stevenson designed a course called Social Ecology—an exploration of how people live together in communities and "what patterns of interaction tend to foster the greatest degree of human satisfaction?" Students read such diverse authors as Ruth Benedict, Victor Frankl, and Konrad Lorenz. They examined the influence of culture and the perspective of different schools of psychology. Students also studied and visited intentional communities, particularly the Doukhobors, and read Watson Thomson, a Canadian communitarian socialist.[73] Another year the school offered a course on communal societies in

traditional Africa and revolutionary China. Still another course was called "Conflict—to study the nature of conflict and to better understand ways to work for creative resolutions." Students studied aggression, non-violence, competition, co-operation, authority, law enforcement, punishment, and satyagraha.[74] They engaged in role playing and examined local conflicts in the school and the community. At the heart of these courses was the Quaker view that taking a moral position on public issues was an obligation for all citizens.

In keeping with its goal to expose students to the spiritual realm, the school offered spiritually-oriented courses. If there was enough interest, a staff member would teach the history of Quakerism, and one year Bob Boyd taught a course on world religions. In later years as religious pursuits gained popularity in the aftermath of the 1960s, the spiritual offerings were expanded with courses in comparative religion, Quakerism, yoga, spiritual exercises, meditation, and a course called Core/Outer. The comparative religion course dealt with mysticism and gender roles in the major religions, science and religion, prehistoric and "primitive" religion, prophesies, spiritual trends, and aboriginal spirituality, particularly the teachings of Black Elk. A major objective of this course was to develop tolerance.

Courses were also taught in the creative arts. Drama was popular and Mr. Aldrich directed several successful productions such as Androcles and the Lion enjoyed by many in the community. Opportunities for music instruction were varied because of the number of musicians in Argenta and in later years music and theatre classes combined to put on musical productions. Art was often taught by a team of local craftspeople. One year the crafts included sketching, pottery, batik, weaving, and leatherwork. Creative writing, speech, graphics, and photography were also offered over the years.

The Friends School offered practical electives teaching skills for rural living. These courses were usually taught by non-teacher members of the Argenta community and included machinery maintenance, forestry, livestock management, homesteading, cooking, electricity, child care, camping, and community recreation.[75] These were serious courses with regular meeting times and specified activities. Homesteading was taught from an environmental perspective

exploring "ways of living that are less exploitative of the world's resources than the current North American standards of living."[76] Construction courses were popular often growing out of real projects like the construction of the school building itself. One year, John Stevenson offered a course in how to cook for a large group of forest fire fighters. Students in the community recreation and child care courses applied what they learned by organizing activities for children in the local elementary school and by working with young children of Argenta residents. Students learned life skills by doing them.

The staff considered recreation and physical activity very important. Daily physical education was compulsory for students, and staff members were encouraged to participate as well. The school was located in a "recreational paradise" and students had ample opportunity to pursue such outdoor activities as hiking, mountain climbing, skiing, swimming, and snow-shoeing. Students also enjoyed volleyball and playing hockey when the lake froze over. One interesting activity was "balancing," described by one teacher as "a form of gymnastics in which the only equipment required is people." Students practised until they could create formations involving two or more individuals balancing on each other's thighs or shoulders. This was to develop strength, balance, and agility as well as non-physical attributes such as trust and co-operation. One former student describes:

> One person is underneath and one on top. The person on top would do an acrobatic activity with the help of the person underneath such as standing on the person's thighs or shoulders. Sometimes three people would be involved all balancing in various positions on each other. The person on the bottom had to be strong. We always had spotters so it wasn't dangerous.[77]

Staff and students organized two major school hikes each year in September and June. These were three day trips to a local mountain peak or valley—Hamil Creek, Fry Creek, Meadow Mountain, Kokanee Glacier, and many others. Students carried everything they needed on their backs and learned wilderness and survival skills. Besides providing a valuable introduction to the outdoors, the beginning of the year hike was also an important experience in group bonding and getting to know each other. One student wrote about the very first school hike in September

1959:

> Our three-day hike was a fine way to begin the school year. It gave students and teachers a chance to get acquainted with each other and with the beautiful country we passed through. On the first morning we arranged our sleeping bags and food on our backs. It was a beautiful day and we set out at a good pace, though we weren't so energetic when we reached our campsite by roaring Clint Creek. The bright autumn colours, ferns, and mushrooms made our hike more interesting and the snow-capped peaks made a majestic background. On the first evening, as we sat around the campfire, we discussed the purposes of the school. The next morning John Stevenson explained to us the history of Argenta and its people. On that day we explored farther up the trail. We came to Hamil Creek and crossed it on a cable chair. We passed some beautiful scenery as we walked along the bottom of the creek and looked up to the mountains towering above on both sides.[78]

Another student remembers "amazing Northern Lights." Staff considered the hikes a major component of the programme and many students remember these camping trips as a highlight of their Argenta experience. The hikes continued to be popular through the later years and one student describes the school hike to Meadow Mountain in September, 1978:

> We camped in an alpine meadow, just below the summit of the mountain. The first night a group hiked to the top to see the sunset. Later we all sat around the fire singing songs, telling stories, and huddling close together for warmth. The next day was spent doing day hikes around the area with snowy mountains and ridges towering above us. There was lots of wildlife observed and we heard coyotes howling at the moon. We arrived back in Argenta the next afternoon in good spirits.[79]

Physical work was an important component of the school curriculum and each year up to ten regular school days were cancelled to provide "work days" around the school or in the community. One essential task was to prepare for winter by chopping and splitting fifteen cords of wood to feed the school furnace during the year.[80] Students also participated in office work and the maintenance, repair, and upgrading of school buildings. The school took its commitment to service seriously and work days were also spent helping families in the wider Argenta community.[81] One student remembers how the school brought in firewood for an older community member.[82] School members also helped Argenta residents with building projects, gardening, tree pruning, canning, chicken coop maintenance, window washing, and other jobs.

Work crews were managed by local adults and both students and staff took part in these projects although at times staff members requested exemption due to overwork and exhaustion. The school allowed course credit for students who participated in ongoing work crews.

A popular innovation beginning in 1968 was called "intersession." This was a two week period in February when classes ceased so that groups of students could organize in-depth projects usually away from Argenta. These often involved community service, peace and disarmament work, or other kinds of social activism.[83] In one memorable project the whole school participated in a training workshop in non-violence with the Pacific Life Community in Vancouver. The students then used their new skills to take part in non-violent direct action and "public witness" at the Trident nuclear weapons establishment at Bangor, Washington. Another year the group attended a United Nations symposium on human rights and disarmament in Vancouver which included workshops, a concert with Pete Seeger, a "Walk to Moscow," and a brief stay at Ground Zero.[84] Other projects involved service work sometimes under the auspices of the Friends Service Committee, a Quaker social service organization. One year students volunteered at several Calgary service agencies including Alcoholics Anonymous, a hospital, a daycare centre, a seniors' residence, an agency for the blind, and an aboriginal programme. Another year students helped build a hostel for autistic adults on Saltspring Island. The school made extended visits to Doukhobor and First Nations communities to learn about their culture and history. Students spent time with the Blood people in Alberta and on the Colville Reservation in Washington.[85] Argenta students visited and studied Doukhobor communities on several occasions since Quakers and Doukhobors share some common values including pacifism and simplicity. One student recalls his visits to the Doukhabor communities at Grand Forks and Brilliant as a high point of his school years.[86]

Students took part in a variety of other intersession projects. Some involved creative arts workshops in writing, silk-screening, printing, flute, recorder, and guitar-making.[87] Students visited the fishing village of Bamfield on Vancouver Island and an ashram on Kootenay Lake, and helped clear a portion of the Earl Grey Trail in the Selkirk Mountains. In 1977 the school spent

several days at the Powell Lake Farm community, a rural programme of a Vancouver alternative school, Total Education (see Chapter 8).[88] Students also participated in an exchange programme with a school in Trois Rivieres, Quebec and spent a week there in the late 1970s.

For a small school the Argenta Friends offered a remarkably full curriculum. Students were provided with a basic academic education, experience of nature and a rural lifestyle, an appreciation of the importance of physical work and recreation, opportunities to pursue the arts, exposure to spiritual practices, and a solid grounding in service and world citizenship. These learnings were combined with a unique feature of the school, the development of communal values through the experience of living with Argenta families.

Home Life

Living in family homes provided students with valuable support and companionship to help them adjust to an unfamiliar life far from home. As the prospectus stated:

> Since students live in homes, their problems are faced in the warmth of a home atmosphere. The give and take of chores, cooking, and family fun are activities which give balance and zest to a young person looking ahead.[89]

Students were treated like members of the family and in return were expected to abide by family rules and practices and to participate fully in the economic life of the household. The guideline established by the school was that students would work on their host family's homestead for an hour a day during the week and four hours on Saturday. These chores included chopping wood, working in the vegetable garden, milking cows, gathering eggs, pitching hay, picking and canning fruit, cooking, and helping with building projects. Helping secure the winter supply of wood was the most important chore, as all households depended on wood heat and the amount needed was formidable—up to ten cords per household. Some households canned "massive amounts" of fruit each year. Working in the garden, preparing large meals, and putting away food for the winter were enjoyable communal efforts. One student recalls the typical morning routine at the Wolfe

household:

> We would get up at 7:00. One of the chores was to light the fire. Everybody would take a five minute shower. Ruth made breakfast and a crew of two students would pitch in as much as we could. In good weather we all took the shortcut to school straight down the hill.[90]

Student daily life was highly regulated. Due to the rugged terrain surrounding Argenta, students were responsible for letting their houseparents know where they were going and when they expected to return. Visiting between houses on week nights was discouraged and was allowed only with prior permission of both sets of houseparents. Otherwise, students were expected to spend the evenings at home. Part of the evening was designated as quiet time for study, while the rest of the evening could be spent making music, playing games, or listening to the radio. On weekends students visited other households or attended school and community social events but had to be home one half hour after the function ended and were restricted to "one late night a week." Although dress was practical and informal, students were required to wear modest clothing. Consistent with Quaker standards and wider social norms of the day, students were not allowed to wear mini-skirts or shorts to school during the early 1960s. Students were not permitted to use cars while they were in Argenta except for the few local students, and then only for legitimate family business or chores. Hitchhiking was discouraged. In addition to the school's restrictions, parents could prohibit their children from engaging in "hazardous activities" including using a chain saw, riding motorcycles, or working with farm animals. Students were permitted to leave Argenta four weekends per year by invitation and with permission from home.[91]

The staff tried to develop uniform expectations for houseparents but some had stricter rules than others. Teachers hoped to meet with the houseparent group every month to discuss standards and common problems. But due to time constraints this schedule was rarely observed and most houseparents worked out whatever system suited their own personal style. "Though students and houseparents bear mutual responsibility for making it a place where love and unity prevail, the houseparents have the final responsibility. Some take almost complete authority while

others decide rules by house meetings."[92]

The group living experience was a key educational component of the the Friends School. The school founders hoped students would seek creative solutions for getting along with each other: "In our rural environment we find ourselves living at close quarters where we must learn to live together. Group living results in an examination of ideas and attitudes which need not end in mere conformity."[93] One teacher wrote: "Education takes place on a twenty-four hour a day basis. It is when we attend our meetings , participate in committees, and share in interpersonal relations that we see ourselves growing. The adults find ourselves challenged to grow as new insights are thrust upon us."[94] John Stevenson observed growth in human relations:

> It is the sometimes abrasive twenty-four hour a day contact which is different from a large school where students can dismiss the faculty as impossible and the faculty can ignore individual differences in the students they see. There are always adjustments for houseparents and students as they struggle to be sensitive to the needs of each. Out of it comes a working relationship which is far from perfect, but most of us have grown in the process. We have gained some experience in the art of conciliation.[95]

Two students wrote about their own growth in this area:

> With six other people in the household I had to adapt my life to make room for the needs of other people. I was only allowed one bath per week because of limited hot water supply. Everyone was assigned household jobs and I found myself being taught how to do things that were strange and unfamiliar to me such as chopping wood and harvesting carrots. The most difficult thing I faced was learning to live with people of varying temperaments, backgrounds, and ideas.
>
> My home in Argenta consists of seven people crowded into a small wooden structure with an outhouse. You soon learn that there is no such thing as privacy. While there is a lot of bumping into each other which can create tension, there is a strong sense of warmth, love, and caring.[96]

Most students enjoyed the group living. Since the host families boarded four to six students in addition to their own children, the large households provided camaraderie and fun. Students remember large meals around the dinner table and family music making in the evenings. If the family went on an outing the students went too. One former student says he "benefitted from the family living as much as from the education."[97] Another recalls that "for the first time

I felt I was part of a family." As one might expect, close relationships developed among students, teachers, and houseparents.

Students gained a great deal from this experience. This included learning how rural families live, being exposed to the skills of a new pair of adults, learning how to use tools, learning to live with older and younger children, adjusting to a different family pattern, and living with peers twenty-four hours a day.[98] One student learned how to play chess from his houseparents. Above all, the houseparent was to be a teacher: "a friendly, firm person who helps students fulfill the agreements they have with the school; seeing that they are in nights and after week-end activities, and quiet when study is supposed to be taking place."[99] As John Stevenson suggested:

> Houseparents should set the tone of the home, provide warm understanding love, be a resource person expert in operating a home in a rural environment, and have some knowledge in the ways people can co-operate. The houseparent is the member of the household who has experience and maturity, but not the one who dominates or decides, nor does the work others have left undone. The houseparent advises and watches for opportunities to step back when the students seem ready and able to take responsibility."[100]

Houseparenting was a demanding job. Houseparents received fifty dollars a month per student most of which was designated for food. Most Argenta residents had huge vegetable gardens so a few dollars could go a long way. During the first decade the original Quaker families did most of the houseparenting. The Boyds were houseparents for nine years, the Pollards and Ectors for eight, the Wolfes for seven, the Herbisons for five, the Seamarks for six, and the Stevensons for most of the first twelve years.[101] Most considered it a rewarding experience, but by the late 1960s the original host families had grown weary and it became more difficult to find houseparents. In 1967 and in several subsequent years the school almost closed due to a lack of suitable homes for students.

The school hired a young couple without children to look after a student house as early as 1962/63, but by the late 1960s this became more frequent. The school built a student home in 1968 and later acquired another local house, both of which were staffed by couples. Many of

these young houseparents were also staff members. Most found the twenty-four hour a day job more difficult and stressful than they had expected. Their inexperience as parents also took its toll. Several had to give up exhausted in the middle of the year, and in at least one case their marriage broke up a short time later. Although teaching in Argenta was hard on relationships, it could strengthen marriages as well. Beginning in 1969 several single women served as houseparents even though at first the Friends Meeting frowned on this as inappropriate and too demanding for one person. This did turn out to be a difficult job for one person, but some single houseparents were successful. In general, having teenagers of their own and having experience dealing with typical teenage problems and discipline proved advantageous to being successful houseparents. One couple suggested the following attributes as helpful for successful houseparenting: prior experience with teenagers, a stable proven marital relationship, objectivity, openness, honesty, reasonableness, patience, ability to keep your mouth shut, nerves of stainless steel, and the conviction to be a good model of Quakerism to young people.[102]

The development of trustworthiness was a major goal of the Argenta Friends School. Difficulties were worked through without punishment. John Stevenson remembers one year when he could hear two girls regularly sneaking out of their upstairs bedroom at night. But when they denied it each morning he accepted their word. Eventually they stopped of their own accord as they realized they were undermining the system of trust.[103] In another incident three boys went on a spontaneous hike one evening in the middle of winter. They spent the night in a barn and their worried houseparents found them the next morning having breakfast with a family several miles down the road. Instead of punishing the boys, the adults helped them plan a more practical overnight hike two weeks later.[104] As Helen Stevenson says: "We believed that encouraging people to live with a trusting attitude was perhaps the most important education we could offer."[105]

Gender equality was a basic assumption among the Argenta Friends as men and women having equal voice was part of Quaker belief.[106] As early as the 1950s the Friends co-operative considered all work to be of equal value and allocated equal income to each adult regardless of

his or her role in production. However, the Quakers maintained a somewhat traditional division of labour with men doing the heavy work and women in charge of the home. Country life can be conducive to traditional relationships because of the physical nature of the work. "The boys spent a lot of time out getting wood"[107] and one female teacher was discouraged from using a chain saw.[108] However, boys were still expected to help in the kitchen, girls took auto mechanics, and boys learned how to knit and darn socks. By the late 1960s, according to one student, there was "little or no differentiation of chores based on gender."[109] As Betty Polster puts it "everybody collected firewood, everybody did the cooking, everybody did the building."[110] The school leadership was primarily female throughout the 1970s. Feminist issues were discussed in class and one year everybody read Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*.[111] Several years later a consciousness raising session with female students and women from the community grew into a weekly womens' group on gender roles. One staff member wrote that "the sharing of feelings and experiences among women of different ages seems to be very valuable to all involved."[112]

Argenta residents were good at organizing their own entertainment. There was no television before 1970 and the nearest movie theatre was miles away. Since there were numerous musicians in the community, Bob Boyd organized an orchestra which played at many events. The school helped organize pot-luck dinners, National Film Board movie nights, coffee house evenings, and monthly Saturday night dances featuring folk, square, or ballroom dancing. The orchestra often played during these events. Students and teachers enjoyed participating in the social activities. Since almost all Argenta residents attended, the dances were an effective way to build bridges between the Quakers, the earlier settlers, and (later) the countercultural arrivals. School leaders took seriously the school's role as part of the community. They saw community service as a fundamental component of the curriculum. As well, the school was an economic benefit to Argenta bringing in money and providing employment. In turn, the local community provided the school with an extensive curriculum resource.

Former students cite the rural environment as one of the most important aspects of the Argenta Friends School. Since most were from cities, students had to be taught how to use a

chain saw, how to camp overnight, how to garden, and how to cook. Although environmentalism was not overtly emphasized, composting and recycling were integral to the way of life. As one former student says: "In rural areas people have always recycled their garbage; it is economical, sensible, and natural."[113] One teacher recalls that "the wilderness and rural way of life was a profound experience for staff and students; walking by orchards, chickens, sheep, and goats, making apple cider; we were very touched by that."[114] Students walked to and from school through the woods each day and many had to adjust to the lack of familiar urban stimulation. Although it was hard for some, most came to appreciate the peace and quiet, and the meditative quality of the wilderness. One student was particularly moved by the wilderness setting:

> The rural environment was a highlight for me. Isolated, beautiful, close to trees, snow. It provided an ideal setting to grow and mature in a silent way. It opened up my heart and mind to wilderness. I got close to the spirit of nature.[115]

Decision Making

The Argenta Friends Meeting was the ultimate authority in the affairs of the Friends School. The Meeting set the overall philosophy, oversaw the hiring of staff, arranged student accommodation, was the final authority on policy issues, and decided each year whether the school should continue. The Friends Meeting also provided a number of individuals experienced in co-operative ventures who could offer meaningful advice to the school staff. John and Helen Stevenson, Bob Boyd, Mary Pollard, and Ruth Wolfe (from the founding families) formed the School Committee, an advisory group meeting once a month. In 1961 Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson asked the Meeting to appoint two members to a Personnel Committee to help the school co-ordinator with staff hiring and student admissions. Eventually these two committees were combined to form one advisory group to provide guidance to the staff on school policy, finance, planning, publicity, staff relations, housing, student selection, hiring, and maintenance.[116]

At first, a portion of every Monthly Meeting was devoted to school matters and since

most teachers and virtually all houseparents were longstanding Meeting members, governance was smooth. But over the next few years the advisory committee met less frequently and the Friends Meeting became less involved in the everyday affairs of the school. As the school grew the Meeting only had time to discuss major issues or moral questions and most decisions were made at the school level. The Stevensons provided the main link between the Meeting and the school staff and their opinions carried a lot of weight. But as early as the second year tensions developed. John Stevenson wrote:

> During the second year we expanded to include some adults who had not been through the Delta Co-op experience with us, and some who were not committed Friends. There were different interpretations of the abstract ideas in the purposes, different moral standards, and different degrees of commitment. These tensions resulted in a less unanimous adult position.[117]

The difficulties escalated in 1962 when an ongoing staff disagreement convinced the founders that decision making needed to be more formal.

However, they were opposed to a hierarchical structure and rejected the idea of a principalship. Instead, John Stevenson was appointed "co-ordinator" responsible for overseeing the day-to-day functioning of the school, meeting with committees, helping to solve individual problems, overseeing the use of buildings, and (with the help of others) making recommendations on student admissions. These essential administrative duties took all the co-ordinator's time and other tasks such as office work, finance, and publicity were hardly touched until the school hired a part-time secretary in 1963.

In 1962 a serious philosophical difference arose among the staff even though they had talked about education all summer and thought they agreed on basic principles. One teacher wanted a more traditional academic orientation, a selective admissions policy based on academic ability, and a traditional headmaster. Although the teacher left at the end of the year and the school retained its original character, John Stevenson agreed to became "headmaster" for the rest of the year. The potential for staff disunity and an increase in necessary daily decisions convinced the school community by 1964 that a Principal in charge of basic operations could be helpful.

However, as a subsequent Principal, Betty Polster, explained: "From the first we have been trying to de-emphasize the Principal as the spokesman and head of the school and have looked on the Principal's role as a necessary function of co-ordination and administration."[118] John Stevenson was Principal throughout most of the 1960s and, according to his colleagues, he was an effective leader and an excellent mediator. He was not afraid to make decisions, but he consulted widely and was quick to call meetings whenever a potentially contentious issue arose. Betty Polster served as principal for most of the early 1970s and was also highly respected. Jonathan Aldrich and Brenda Berck served successful short terms, and after 1976 a committee of four teachers took on the role together.

Teachers were given the autonomy to design their courses as they saw fit although they often sought input and advice from each other. Staff meetings were held weekly, sometimes in the informality of a teacher's home during the evening. This was a time for teachers to discuss individual students, grading, and educational theory. Staff decisions were made by consensus in the Quaker style. However, John and Helen Stevenson strongly influenced staff discussions since the school continued to be an embodiment of their vision.

Although the staff continually enlisted the talents and skills of many Argenta residents, some community members believed the school was insufficiently open to outside input. At a "school vision" workshop in 1965 one participant said:

> Too little use has been made of local talent both inside and outside of the Friends group. Observing the scene for five years, I have the impression that a person must conform to the attitudes and demands of the founding Friends group before one is thought fit to work with or help develop the school.[119]

This was an exaggeration but the leadership expected staff to subscribe to basic school philosophy.

In 1963 the school began to develop a more formal structure. Some argued for the formation of a School Board composed of Meeting members and other Argenta residents, but the founders rejected traditional models of both public and private schools in favour of a structure "more indigenous to the lives of the Argenta Friends. We are searching for a pattern for

governing the school which in essence is similar to a Friends business meeting."[120] Authority would rest in the whole group. The Staff Handbook described the school's method of business:

> We value each person's contribution to whatever is being discussed and go ahead with a decision only when we reach consensus. Meetings make up the institutional life of the school. As they are often tedious, redundant, and seemingly counterproductive, sooner or later everyone reaches a point where another meeting seems unbearable. Yet without them the fabric of the school would disintegrate. From meetings come the deepening of our working relations.[121]

A major objective of the Friends School was for students to play a key role in day-to-day decision making. The Prospectus stated: "The Argenta Friends School is an attempt to give students the opportunity to participate in the decisions which affect almost every phase of their lives."[122] Or as the "School Discipline" put it: "We assume that senior high school students can work closely with adults in a group in which the students have a voice in all matters but the basic framework."[123] The founders believed this aspect of school life was the school's most important contribution.

> The unique characteristic of the Argenta Friends School is the opportunity to experience a method of decision making uncommon in our world today. It depends upon a group of people working together to reach the best plan of action they can envision.[124]

Students were expected to participate in virtually all levels of school decisions, particularly in the Student-Staff Meeting which guided the day-to-day running of the school. This group was composed of all staff and students and met once a week to discuss practical items such as scheduling, activities, work projects, special events, and school maintenance, and issues arising out of living together as a co-operative group. The meetings were chaired by a student "clerk" (a valuable learning experience) and students were encouraged to voice their opinions on all matters. As the school brochure stated: "This brochure was written by a group of students and staff who struggled to get unity on the wording, picture selection, and layout. This is just one example of ways in which our small school involves students and staff in the workings of the

school."[125] The only areas not under the jurisdiction of the Student-Staff meeting were academics (realm of the staff), personnel (Personnel Committee), and the fundamental school vision (Monthly Meeting).[126] The Student-Staff meeting also developed policies on such difficult issues as sex, drug use, compulsory classes and study halls, smoking, evening visiting, use of cars, and attendance at meetings. Since all policies had to be approved by the Monthly Meeting, the Student-Staff Meeting did not have decision making authority. However, policy recommendations were rarely overruled except when it came to sex, alcohol, and drugs when the Meeting generally disallowed any liberalization of existing policy.

The Student-Staff Meeting followed the model of a Quaker business meeting reaching decisions only if there was consensus or "unity." Theoretically all participants were equal although in a Quaker meeting the opinions of some individuals may carry extra weight due to their experience or particular expertise. Quaker methods for building consensus have developed over many years.[127] The school prospectus explained how the Argenta Friends applied the method to the school:

> The method involves searching for the best in each person and in the group as a whole. In the Student-Staff Meeting each individual, regardless of age, has a voice. During the discussion it is necessary for individuals to reassess their opinions. To arrive at a group decision it is often necessary for an individual or several people to give way. One gives way when he doesn't feel strongly, recognizing the validity in others' opinions. On occasion, a person will feel strongly that the changes involved in a decision would be harmful and his objection will prevent its acceptance. There is enormous pressure felt by this individual but his opinion is respected. Hopefully a consensus will emerge incorporating the best ideas acceptable to the group. This may not be unanimous, but it is a decision to which no one objects strongly.[128]

A fundamental principle of consensus building is respect for the views of the minority. The Prospectus stated:

> An opposing minority, however small, is not disregarded, especially if it contains members whose judgement is highly respected. If an individual lays a concern before the meeting, if he feels it deeply and brings it up again and again in spite of opposition, the meeting may finally acquiesce even though a degree of hesitation is still felt by some.[129]

The Staff Handbook put it this way:

> The belief is that when a group waits until all are satisfied, the decision will be better than when only a majority are in agreement. It means that there are fewer disappointed or disgruntled members after the decision is made. It also means long meetings and occasional delays as a minority struggles to incorporate its concern into the final outcome.[130]

An example of consensus in practice occurred in the winter of 1969 when the school planned a three-week visit to a First Nations community on Lesser Slave Lake in northern Alberta.[131] Students were to live with individual families in unfamiliar and difficult conditions. Helen Stevenson describes what happened:

> One year the school became excited about a proposal to spend two weeks living with impoverished Indian families in Northern Alberta. A student/staff committee had worked out the logistics. Though a bit scary to some students, it seemed like a challenge that we could handle. All seemed ready for final approval when one student, who himself wanted to go, stated boldly that he didn't believe we should go. Disbelief was a first reaction. It soon became clear that he had been listening to some of the less vocal students who were more afraid than they had been willing to admit. With encouragement from him they were able to express their fears. We didn't go. Later we learned that our going could have been a disaster.[132]

Another basic principle of Quaker deliberation is that individuals genuinely listen to each other and try to understand others' points of view ("listening for understanding"). It was customary that a moment of silence follow each speaker "to hear the echo of the message in our own souls" and as a guard against interruption.[133] Staff members tried to model good listening, as one former student puts it "the best way to learn to listen is to be listened to."[134] If issues were contentious meetings could be long and some students found them tedious. But the underlying objective was to teach the students responsibility and wisdom in decision making.[135]

Members of the school community examined the relationship of the individual to the group. "Does the individual need to submerge his will to that of the community? Does an individual lose his identity in becoming a part of the collective?"[136] The student handbook addressed the question this way:

> The emphasis of all we do is on the importance and uniqueness of the individual. Yet emphasis is placed on integrity, sensitivity, and interdependence of the group. Group standards must be upheld and thus act as a limiting factor. Although one is encouraged to be an individual, one is limited.[137]

Quakers strive to achieve a "reasonable balance between freedom and order; group authority tempered by individual judgement. Each year is an experiment to adjust the delicate balance between allowing people free time to follow their own pursuits and providing for that work which we need to do together."

The school was governed by "policies" rather than rules, indicating that school guidelines were formulated by the entire community and could be changed by a meeting of the community. As the Student Handbook stated: "The policies have been drawn up after many hours of group consideration. Changes in policies occur only if all agree that the change seems to better implement the philosophy of the school.[138] As "guidelines" rather than rules, policies were amenable to a flexible interpretation: "Policies can be stretched to cover individual needs whereas rules imply a hard and fast set of penalties if broken." As the Discipline put it:

> We believe that an average group of students can operate in a flexible group-directed situation without rigid rules or penalties. The school policies are guides for action flexible enough to be adjusted to individual situations. This results in the young person feeling largely self-governed and in learning that he must take responsibility for his actions instead of blaming an adult imposing rules.[139]

Contentious policies were handled through ongoing discussion:

> Within the school we have had many policies challenged. In some cases flexibility of interpretation has left the policy intact as a guideline, in others new wording had to be considered. Through it all the important fact has been the growth in individuals as open discussion gave opportunities to understand each other and the school better.[140]

The Student Handbook listed all school policies and new students were asked to sign an agreement to abide by them: "I understand that Argenta Friends School has some definite policies that will not change. It also has policies that are open to changes as needed. I have read the policies and I believe they describe a school I should like to be part of."[141] Following the policies

was basic to school membership:

> The school's aim is to develop a close community of students and staff, experiencing joys and hardships. The policies act as a framework within which the student operates, patterns of action which must be observed. A student must attempt to learn to live within the rules of the school community.[142]

When policies were disregarded, students were given a second chance, for the development of trust and a commitment to the wellbeing of the community were more important to the elders than specific behaviours. The Student Handbook described the Argenta approach to discipline: "Thoughtfulness and consideration for others makes up the foundation upon which our regulations rest. The school is based on a growing degree of trust."[143] Quaker tradition is based on the principle that "when you break the law you should do it openly for a good reason."[144] School leaders preferred that students defy a policy openly so that the policy could be addressed. In rare cases when a student continued to disregard the policies after counselling and numerous second chances, this was taken as an indication that the student did not really want to be there, and he or she was sent home. The Student Handbook explains further:

> We recognize that when a policy is broken, people not rules are involved. Counselling takes place, and each situation is looked at considering the needs of individuals, the school, and wider circles of people. The effort is to find a new working relationship rather than to blame or punish. Only when we have tried many times and fail to find a working relationship do we consider asking anyone to leave."[145]

According to John Stevenson, no more than six students were asked to leave over the years.

The school developed an elaborate committee structure to carry out decisions. Some of the committees were: building maintenance, finance, secretarial, janitorial, library, publicity, sports, social, work crews, and publications. Staff members and students spent hundreds of hours per year on committee work. The three most important committees were curriculum, ministry and counsel, and personnel.

The Curriculum Committee determined the course offerings for the following year and consisted of any staff members and non-graduating students who wanted to participate. The

committee considered the academic requirements and interests of the student body in deciding what would be offered. This would then influence staff hiring. Students on the Curriculum Committee played an important role and attended many meetings. Sometimes their suggestions led to the development of new courses. Helen Stevenson's Social Ecology course was generated by a student request to study how people get along with each other. The Curriculum Committee also evaluated courses and made recommendations about content, scheduling, and intersession plans. However, teachers had autonomy to design their own courses and organize day-to-day instruction.

The Ministry and Counsel Committee's principal job was to help any student experiencing personal problems. Some students had trouble adjusting to the Argenta lifestyle, others had difficulty abiding by some school policies, while others simply needed help with normal adolescent problems. Four well respected students were appointed by the student body to sit on this committee with one staff member, usually the principal.[146] Ministry and Counsel was also expected to keep watch over the "tone of the community" and report to the whole group if they noticed any attitudes prevalent in the school that might suggest policy changes. If an issue needed discussion they called a meeting. Often this kind of pre-emptive problem solving was invaluable. The committee provided a liaison between students and staff when necessary.[147] As one school document summarized: "This committee considers how to best meet the needs of the individuals and the group."[148] Former students believe the committee dealt effectively with problems in a "caring way" and with respect for privacy.[149]

The Personnel Committee consisted of the Principal, one or two teachers, and several members appointed by the Monthly Meeting. The committee reviewed applications for staff positions and student placements, reviewed present staff, decided which current students would be accepted back, organized student housing placements, and counselled with staff members when necessary. The committee interviewed applicants to find personnel "who will benefit from the school and will be able to contribute to the school in ways that meet school aims and needs."[150] The Personnel Committee came to include students by the late 1960s as, influenced by the

prevailing attitudes of the times, students pressed for a more significant role in school governance. Prospective students were encouraged to visit Argenta for a personal interview or they could be interviewed by former students in their area. John Stevenson recalls that the students themselves were the most effective interviewers of prospective students and staff members.

How much influence students really had in overall policy was a matter of opinion. Most students found Argenta a refreshing change from public high schools. They believe the adults genuinely listened to and considered their views.[151] One says that although the adults' opinions carried more weight, students still had "lots of input."[152] Another recalls: "In the big issues we didn't really have input. But we were young and needed guidance. We understood and accepted the school's position."[153]

However, some former students question the significance of their input. One describes the adult attitude as "we want you to decide how to run things but we want the last say. This was confusing to many students. When the Stevensons would veto an idea at the last moment the students felt 'what was the point'?"[154] One student suggests that decision making was primarily an exercise in generating creative ideas and another former student adds: "I didn't realize there would not be a conclusion to those issues—it was the process that was important."[155] Certain issues were non-negotiable and some students believe decisions on contentious matters were made in advance by the adults who had their minds made up. These students resented the long deliberations. One says: "We felt we did have a say. But we had the impression that some decisions had already been made by John and Helen, that we were going through the motions."[156] Another says observers had "the impression that students had more say than they really did."[157] A former teacher says "the adults made the decisions in the large matters, students in the small matters only."[158] Another teacher summarizes his feelings this way:

> It was always difficult. I was never entirely comfortable with the way it was done. There was tension between the adults and the students and a suspicion on the part of the kids that the adults had already determined the outcome. There was some manipulation but we worked hard at it. Students did have significant input into the policies but I'm not sure how effective it was. There were limits.[159]

The school elders had a coherent world view with definite opinions on moral and social issues. Although they genuinely wanted students to share in running the school, their strong views prevented them from accepting student decisions with which they did not agree. On the other hand, even though the elders knew what behaviour they wished from the teenagers, they were ambivalent about imposing their wishes directly. They never resolved this basic contradiction.

The Argenta Quakers, for all their openness and courage regarding political and social problems, were found by some to be emotionally guarded and puritanical about "moral issues." Their positions were not always clear and they sometimes masked disagreements with hazy words like "expected but not compulsory." Furthermore, according to several staff members, the adults were not consistent enough in following through with the consequences of policy violations. Students found the lack of clarity frustrating. Many also found consensus tedious. One former teacher says "consensus was such a long drawn-out process; the kids got discouraged. Some students wished the school had been more authoritarian, then they could have rebelled."[160]

Another frustration for students and staff was that once a decision was made it was difficult to achieve consensus to change it. One former student says "it took a lot of momentum to change a policy once it was made."[161] This dilemma was acknowledged in the Staff Handbook:

> This process can make the school seem inflexible to someone who is here for a year or two. Changes which we all agree need to be made seem to be delayed as the group tries to meet the needs which originated the pattern, yet to also meet the needs of changing times and changing attitudes. We have policies about alcohol, drugs, sex, and others which we all agree could be improved, yet we have not changed these yet for we haven't reached unity as to how to write them in a better way.[162]

Every year it seemed there was more discussion and both students and adults remember "too many endless meetings." A student recalls:

> Both years I was there crises arose that questioned the school's existence. Emotional meetings sometimes went on for hours and hours. It was horrendous at times. But I did learn to balance my views and the needs of the group.[163]

The staff and Monthly Meeting reexamined and fine-tuned the school governance structure continuously over the years. As the system evolved it became more elaborate and somewhat unwieldy with a good deal of overlap among committees and decision making bodies. Furthermore, since the Monthly Meeting had to approve any major decisions, the same discussion would often have to occur more than once. In 1969, in an attempt to streamline decision-making, yet another group of students, staff, and Meeting members called "School and Meeting Community" was formed. But in over twenty years the overall structure changed little. Although it never satisfied everyone, and many participants complained about the amount of time and energy required for decision making, most former students and teachers believe the system worked reasonably well and resulted in valuable personal growth. The majority of students accepted the programme and did their best to make it work.

Almost every year there were soul-searching discussions about whether the school should remain open. In 1966 as the small Quaker group began to grow tired and as houseparents became more difficult to recruit, the Monthly Meeting considered turning the school over to the wider community. However, they rallied enough support and commitment among the members to continue as a Friends School. At the end of the 1967/68 academic year there was again serious discussion of "laying the school down." The school elders believed increased personal freedom during the 1960s led to an "anything goes" attitude in North American society and a disturbing trend of disrespect for the welfare of the larger group:

> The growing temper of the times all over North America and particularly in the younger generation is one in which the criterion of action is the moment and the self. The school, not being set up on this pattern, seems too much of a shock and a jolt for young people who are growing up and coming out of this increasing pattern.[164]

But the uncertainty caused by raising the question of school closure every year had a detrimental effect on teacher and student morale and caused some parental anxiety. Therefore, in 1969 the Meeting decided that discussion about whether or not the school should continue would only occur once every five years "barring an emergency or major crisis."[165]

Finances

Like most independent alternative schools, the Argenta Friends School struggled to make ends meet. The school founders did not want lack of funds to prevent students from attending and when the school opened in 1959 tuition fees were only $800 per year including room and board. Families in need of assistance could apply for even lower fees. This was only possible because staff salaries were only $75 per month. The cost of living was low in Argenta and most residents had ingenious ways of reducing their expenses. But the low salaries were a serious problem for many teachers and only the most committed stayed more than two years. John Stevenson acknowledged in 1963 that "very few people can afford to come here to teach or act as houseparents."[166]

The staff hoped long-term loans from supportive individuals or grants from foundations would improve the financial situation. But no one had time to undertake a major fund-raising or publicity campaign. Small donations from a wide network of supporters were the school's only reliable means of extra support. The school had a mailing list of over seven hundred people by 1970—Quakers, friends, and other interested people. Many made small regular donations averaging ten dollars year after year. Donations rose from $1,000 per year in the early 1960s to over $8,000 in 1974, almost 25% of the school's income.

As already mentioned, in the early 1960s the community built a Meeting House which was used as a school classroom to supplement the old school building. This was inadequate by the late 1960s and in 1970 a crew of six began work on a new school building that would contain the school library and office, a classroom suitable for art and science, two seminar rooms, and a print shop.[167] Work continued only as labour and funds were available. The two-storey building was not finished until 1978 but portions were usable as early as 1973 even though a heating system was not yet installed. School volunteers also built a Student Home in 1968 to house some of the students.

Construction, improvement, and maintenance of school buildings was done with student

and adult volunteer labour and therefore required little capital. This was a significant factor in keeping the school solvent. Building projects were time consuming and work proceeded only as money was available to buy materials and supplies financed exclusively by donations. School leaders were practical enough to realize that the school might not continue more than a few years and they were determined not to go into debt for capital expenses. This policy remained in effect throughout the life of the school. As John Stevenson wrote: "We are building on a pay-as-you-go basis and will stop when our money does. We wish to remain a debt-free school, with the independence that that entails."[168] During the 1970s the school acquired another building to house students, but it required a good deal of renovation and all the school buildings needed constant maintenance. Building projects were also slow to be completed because as one construction teacher wrote: "human interaction tends always to get first priority here—which is to say we have to stop work frequently to go to meetings."[169] Apart from buildings, the only other capital needs were vehicles for school trips and hauling wood. The school usually managed to find suitable used vehicles locally.

Fees rose gradually but with each increase a larger portion of the budget was used to assist families who could not afford the full fee. In 1964 one third of the students received some tuition relief from the school and 35% of the school's income went into the scholarship fund.[170] By 1965 tuition had risen to $1,800 per year where it remained for several years. Fees increased modestly in 1969 (by $50) and increased again in 1974 to $2,200. School leaders considered implementing a sliding scale based on family income, a system used successfully by The New School in Vancouver. But this was rejected because the group believed each family had unique circumstances. After 1975, tuition increased rapidly reaching $3,000 by the late 1970s, but the increased income was partly negated by the fact that the school was by then subsidizing over half of the student body.

The low school enrollment exacerbated the financial difficulties. Enrollment averaged nineteen students, although it reached as high as twenty-six in 1970. The school could have handled more students as it was well staffed and classes were small but with more than twenty

students it was difficult to maintain a cohesive group. Housing was another limiting factor. It was often a struggle to find placements for even twenty students and on several occasions the school almost closed due to lack of accommodation. The student house built in 1968 alleviated the problem somewhat, but it still had to be staffed with houseparents. After 1972 as interest in alternative schools declined, the school did not receive enough applicants to increase its numbers even if it had wanted to and enrollment continued to average just under twenty students. Declining enrollment was to become a problem for all independent alternative schools during the 1970s.

The school managed by keeping teacher salaries low. During the early 1960s teachers worked full-time for $750 per year. This increased to $1,500 in 1965 but was still only $2,000 in 1974.[171] Even in Argenta where the cost of living was low and where most families grew their own food, it was still a hardship for teachers to make ends meet. Houseparents received $80 per month per student, not much more than when the school began fifteen years earlier.

Although the school was always close to the edge financially, it survived for over two decades through careful management, the avoidance of debt, the use of volunteer labour, and a solid donor base. Most important however, was that idealistic staff and houseparents were willing to work for very little money. As Mr. Stevenson puts it, the school survived "on the backs of the teachers and houseparents."[172]

Contentious Issues

Staff and students at the Friends School lived harmoniously and managed to solve most problems within the established decision making structure. However, questions about lifestyle and day-to-day behaviour generated widespread student discontent and were never resolved satisfactorily.

Students were expected to attend Sunday Meeting as well as a daily period of silence. Although some students attended enthusiastically most would have preferred not to go. The

week night visiting policy also bothered some students. Although exceptions were permitted, visiting other households during the week was discouraged because "some students find it difficult to study if others are constantly dropping in, and houseparents need some serenity." In 1969 a committee was struck to "consider what pattern might be proposed to meet the particular needs of this situation" but the policy remained intact.[173]

Compulsory classes and study hall also led to much discussion. The staff believed it was their responsibility to regulate student study habits and students were expected to attend all classes and study periods. In 1963 the policy was relaxed so students who proved they could keep up a good standing in their courses were exempted from study hall after the first term. Students were placed on compulsory or free schedules based on academic performance. But students wanted more freedom and believed they were old enough to regulate their own schedules. In 1964 they lobbied for non-compulsory classes and the staff reluctantly gave in. Despite the policy change students were strongly encouraged to attend all classes and most did. Students were still expected to participate in school work projects, committee duties, and in the many decision making meetings.[174]

Smoking was another contentious issue. Meeting members believed smoking was a health hazard and should be discouraged but were prepared to allow it, provided the students had their parents' permission and that they not smoke in the school buildings, the homes of non-smokers, or in the presence of children. The student handbook stated:

> Smoking is discouraged. A number of students smoking tends to act as a pressure toward encouragement. For those few who feel a real need, and are willing to restrict their smoking to a pattern set by the school, smoking is allowed with parent's permission."[175]

In a policy statement in 1962, John Stevenson wrote: "The school discourages smoking. The aim of the policies, and the spirit intended, is to prevent a spread of smoking to other students."[176] He considered this so important that "any future breach of the agreement will result in my recommending that the student involved be sent home. We need to feel that agreements are being kept without setting up a system of policing." Only a few students actually smoked (three in

1962), but several over the years found it difficult to abstain from smoking in their family homes. One student adjusted only with the help of the Ministry and Counsel committee.

But smoking and compulsory classes were minor matters compared to what became known as the "S.A.D. Syndrome"—sex, alcohol, and drugs. For John and Helen Stevenson the policy on alcohol was obvious: since the consumption of alcohol by minors was illegal, Argenta students must not drink. Students did some drinking on the sly, but mostly in moderation and only occasionally. After the end-of-year graduation ceremony, students would frequently go off on their own to a private house or into the woods to celebrate with alcohol. In 1971 a great conflict erupted when the students decided to bring this matter into the open. They wanted to change the policy to permit an evening party for students and staff after the ceremony at which beer and wine would be available. Although this was a relatively innocent request, staff and Meeting members raised several objections. The objectors were concerned about who would be permitted to attend, worried about the sensibilities of the wider community, feared that something could go wrong, and wondered about the feelings of students who did not wish to partake. During the three days before graduation, staff, students, and Meeting members met for more than twelve hours of soul searching over this issue. In the end unity was not achieved and the party was not held. As usual some students drank after graduation anyway.[177]

The sex policy caused even more dissension. In the early 1960s teenage sex was not the socially divisive issue between the generations that it would become a few years later. But Argenta students, living and working together in a close and isolated community, certainly had their share of romantic attachments. The school's position was that students had to agree not to engage in sexual relationships. Teachers were concerned about pregnancy, disapproval of parents, and disapproval in the wider Argenta community. As well, the Stevensons argued that it might be detrimental to the small school community if students paired off in couples. They feared that couples would restrict their attention to each other thus removing their energy from the group as a whole. As one statement on sex policy put it:

> The problem is this: how to maintain the group bonds between people in the larger school group when a coupling bond is taking place? In the larger group, people are interdependent so a group spirit emerges; but when couple bonding takes place one begins to withdraw attention, care, and willingness to be fully a member of the larger group."[178]

Or as the Monthly Meeting expressed it: "The school was created as a group experience; an experiment in which young people were invited to participate in the search for truth as a group. Coupling off fragments the group." Since the welfare of the group was paramount, this was enough reason to prohibit sexual relations. Furthermore, the statement continued, "involvement in a deep sexual relationship will make it impossible or more difficult for the acquisition of academic skills and community involvement skills."[179]

Many students believed they were old enough to make their own decisions about sexuality and discussion of this issue in Staff-Student meeting was endless and unresolved. One former student, who came back to Argenta as a teacher in the 1970s, wrote:

> The school should make it clear that it intends to firmly enforce the law of the land regarding alcohol and drugs. However, there is no law stating that it is illegal for a sixteen year old to have sex with another sixteen year old. A student's love life should be primarily the business of the student and his parents.[180]

Nevertheless, the writer agreed that a couple should not be overly involved in their love life to the detriment of group life, and that they should not "scandalize the general community." One long-time Argenta resident known for his liberal views on sexuality agreed:

> The school should withdraw from standing in loco parentis on matters of sex. While not actively encouraging sexual relations among its students, the school should not have its own rules on the subject, nor should it be an enforcement body for rules set up by others. If parents want certain attitudes upheld by their children, that is a matter of agreement and understanding between parent and child. Today there is no way a school can impose actions in this realm on the individual. Universities have had to drop this impossible role; so should the Argenta Friends School.[181]

The sexuality issue created endless tension. Students did agree to a no sex policy, but not all adhered to it. The proximity of forest, fields, and abandoned cabins made the policy unenforceable anyway. Several students were sent home over the years for promiscuity. There

were several pregnancies and occasionally a young staff member became involved with a student. One student was expelled in 1962 promoting an exchange of angry letters between the staff, Meeting members, and the houseparent who was accused of undermining school policy by expressing too liberal an attitude regarding sexual behaviour among adolescents. In 1963 teachers and houseparents agreed that "visiting would take place somewhere besides in bedrooms, that permission from houseparents would be obtained before short visits to bedrooms, and when mixed groups were in bedrooms the doors would be open."[182] In 1968 the Student-Staff meeting worked on a revision of the sex policy but this resulted in little change. Again in 1970 the school community studied the issue and produced a somewhat more liberal statement:

> Sexual intercourse may stem from a wide variety of feelings, some positive, others negative, and may have a wide range of results. The emphasis should not be on judging an act but on considering the effects of acts on people. Sexual intercourse may result in a fruitful deepening of a person's experience.[183]

The adults acknowledged that it is difficult to generalize about issues of personal morality. However the prohibition remained. The staff did not want to alienate parents or conservative Argenta residents or run the risk of legal problems. The adults continued to worry that sexual activity could become a status symbol and that "a relationship of this intensity is difficult to carry on without drawing the individual away from the group."

After wrestling with this question for over a decade there had been no resolution and in 1973 the staff seriously considered closing the school because of a lack of unity regarding the sex policy. As one former teacher says: "consensus wasn't possible. There was a line past which most staff members were not willing to go."[184] On the other hand "there was real horror expressed at the idea of closing the school because of the sex policy when so many wonderful things are happening here."[185] Meeting members admitted that, though they felt the policy was right, it was not working.

Finally, in 1974 a compromise statement was accepted by the school community which combined the adults' deep reservations about teenage sex with an expression of realism:

> In regard to sexual intercourse, Argenta Friends School cannot give its permission to engage in this: it is not given such authority by parents, society, or our deepest selves. The school cannot permit intense sexual involvement in situations under its control, for example in any school household. However A.F.S. cannot explicitly forbid sexual intercourse and have the prohibition followed. Words that prohibit are often empty shouts, often dare persons to violate them, and cause guilt when they are violated by discerning consciences. And so if A.F.S. cannot say either "yes" or "no," with what does that leave us?[186]

What they were really saying in this statement was "although we don't approve, we don't feel we have the right to prohibit, and we realize we can't stop you anyway." This was, in fact, a recognition of the situation that had always existed.

But despite these many years of attempts to forge a consensus on sex policy, some people were still uneasy with the compromise policy and the subject was reopened in the late 1970s. Even John Stevenson began to doubt whether it was helpful to the students for the adults to officially prohibit sexual relations and then pretend it was not happening. In 1977 he wrote:

> How can early sexual experience be fostered in an atmosphere of acceptance, with opportunities for counselling and emotional support? At present, we in Argenta give signals that we don't want it done in our homes, that we would rather not know what is going on, and that we are ambivalent to the wisdom or positive value of such actions. The result is that each year from one couple up to half of the students in the school are participating in intense sexual relationships without support and counselling from the staff. How can we encourage openness and provide caring supervision so that those venturing into highly charged emotional relationships can get needed support, rather than produce furtiveness and guilt?[187]

The most explosive issue of all was drug use. Drugs were not a problem in the relatively peaceful early years. But by 1968 Argenta had become a haven for counterculture individuals and American draft resisters. It is ironic that the political commitment of the Argenta Quakers indirectly caused many of the school's problems. Quakers all over North America opposed the war in Vietnam. Because opposition to military conscription was basic to Quaker principles, they were particularly active in assisting and harbouring American men escaping the draft. The Argenta Quakers were no exception and one former student recalls that "every week someone from the United States would knock on the door looking for asylum."[188]

By the late 1960s Argenta was full of young, long-haired Americans many of whom used drugs freely. Since the newcomers were only a few years older than Friends School students, the students readily obtained marijuana (or occasionally L.S.D.) from these individuals and sometimes attended dope smoking parties at their homes. One student recalls:

> There was dope smoking going on in the woods or in student homes when the houseparents were away. People in the local community were very upset about this. The dope smoking and rumours of free sex caused problems in community relations."[189]

This issue even caused some dissension on the staff, for although most teachers opposed drug use, a few younger staff members used marijuana privately and were sympathetic to the views of the students. One former staff member who taught at Argenta in 1968 recalls:

> It was a time of great staff/student conflict. Some students were on the sixties path. They would visit certain people in the community to do drugs, play music, and get high. It was tough for the school—in the middle of the acid revolution. I understood the students. I saw both sides. A lot of times the student point of view made more sense to me.[190]

In 1968 John Stevenson felt it necessary to confirm the school's position on drugs and sex in a letter to alumni and parents: "A rumour has been circulating that we really don't care whether our young people in school use drugs, smoke marijuana, or participate in pre-marital sexual intercourse."[191] Three serious cases of the breach of these policies occurred in 1967/68 alone, and several students were asked to leave the school because of drug use from 1967 to 1970. The endless deliberations about sex and drugs were exhausting and almost every year there was an attempt to revise the policy on one or the other. However, not all students resented the prohibitions. For some the school provided "a cooling off from the pressures of dope, sex, and drinking" that they faced in their daily lives back at home.[192]

Sex and drugs continued to cause tension and disagreement between staff and students throughout the later years although not to the extent that these questions divided the school during the late 1960s. John Stevenson wrote in 1976 that "we are still unable to convince students to lay marijuana aside for the school year."[193] Some staff members and school supporters

believed it was unrealistic for the school to flatly prohibit sexual activity and drug use. Even worse was the insistence on making this a "collective" decision. Many students agreed to the policies reluctantly and felt guilty when they did not live up to their agreements. Non-enforcement of the rule led to more confusion. One friend of the school wrote that the school should either prohibit sex and drugs and make enforcement a staff responsiblity, or the staff should agree to leave those areas to the students.[194] Perhaps a more liberal policy would have avoided some problems but given the values of the school and the context of the 1960s, the staff probably did the best they could.

Community Changes

The wave of "hippies" and "draft-dodgers" added a new dimension to the Argenta community. They were disliked by longtime residents who were opposed to their values. The ideology of absolute freedom and permissive ideas about drugs, sex, and public nudity were difficult for the community to absorb. But they also posed a problem for the Quakers because of their disruptive effect on the school. As well, many "oldtimers" blamed the Quakers for encouraging the influx of newcomers. John Stevenson tried to discourage the arrival of young people who intended to flaunt their use of drugs and promiscuous sex: "The Argenta community is dubious of variations from the norms they grew up with. Young people who feel that their independence or integrity would be jeopardized by conforming to a pattern the community set would be happier if they went elsewhere."[195]

Yet even though they opposed the drugs and permissive values the newcomers brought with them, the Quakers still felt a responsibility to shelter draft resisters. While discouraging young Americans to settle permanently in Argenta due to the lack of economic opportunity and the "small conservative community which has been here more than fifty years," the Friends school offered to take in a few men for short periods of time to help them become established in Canada. They would work for room and board and then move on. John Stevenson wrote:

> I personally feel a need to help some of these young men who have been unable to convince their draft boards that they are conscientiously opposed to participating in the Vietnam war. At present the school is in a position to take on one or two for a week or two."[196]

In addition, the Monthly Meeting wrote to the federal government urging the formulation of a "new legal structure" for marijuana and L.S.D. Despite their concern for the welfare of the school, the Argenta Quakers never lost sight of the big issues they cared about.

Argenta also became a centre for the "back to the land" movement in British Columbia. Many young adults arrived between 1967 and 1972 looking for land or cabins to rent where they could cultivate vegetable gardens and raise goats. Some learned a great deal about farming from the local residents. In 1971 an Ontario native, Gordon Yearsley, organized a land co-operative on a large piece of undeveloped property bringing in another wave of settlers.[197] Their laissez-faire lifestyle continued to be a significant source of worry to the school leaders and "old-timers" alike.

Similar to other alternative lifestyle communities during this period, Argenta had its share of amateur therapy or "encounter" groups. In 1969 Chuck Valentine organized a series of all-night "marathon" meetings to help members of the growing Argenta community "get to know each other better." These sessions were attended by some students. Participants reported that "defences began to crumble and a new depth entered the relationships." Some reported "radical growth" while others noticed "both positive and negative results within themselves."[198] Originally enthusiastic about this activity, John Stevenson became convinced by a visiting psychiatrist that self-exposure without a professional present could be hazardous, and from then on students had to have their parents' permission to participate. Encounter groups were not organized by the school itself.

Another significant development of the late 1960s was the rise of non-structured or "free schools" across North America. The Friends School was erroneously included in a list of free schools in *This Magazine Is About Schools*, the radical Canadian educational journal. John Stevenson responded to the many inquiries from prospective students and parents:

> Since *This Magazine is About Schools* placed our school's name at the top of a list of free schools, we've been deluged by letters. I am happy there is so much interest in education in North America. However, we are not a free school. We have more structure, we have regular classes, and there are a number of activities which are expected of students and staff. The students and staff work together on some things, but the staff has responsiblities not shared by students and students have responsibilities not shared by staff. We administer tests and evaluate work. We are, however, experimental in that there are areas in which students and staff do work together. There is an informality here not found in a school of a thousand. There is flexibility within the structure but this comes with group approval, not on the basis of unilateral action.[199]

The demographic and cultural changes in Argenta meant difficult times for the Friends School. In 1967/68 when controversy about drugs and sex was at its height, there was also disagreement about academic requirements. Four students left the school during the year, "one due to a heavy academic programme, one because he feels we are checking up on him too much, and two local students who enrolled just because the school is here."[200] Helen Stevenson wrote to the students and staff:

> Nearly everyone in the school is tired of the pattern of hassling. I'm convinced that each person cares about every other person but we have not been sufficiently unified in purpose nor sensitive enough to get along without rules.[201]

Another year of "struggle and searching" occured in 1971/72. Principal Betty Polster addressed some of the difficulties in her Annual Report:

> We've been searching on the question of openness and trust. Breaking of policies means a separation of one's life into public and private. If that private life is more important to the individual, this directly affects the atmosphere of the school. Part of the problem is that each of us is somewhat dissatisfied with the policies on alcohol, drugs, and sex. They are stated as they are because it's the best formulation we've come up with so far. Are the things we're trying to do here important enough to us to act in agreement with these policies even though we don't fully agree with them?[202]

These difficulties led John and Helen Stevenson to suggest that the school look for young staff members who had "experienced some of the youth culture which present day high school students are growing up in. We hope they can work with the older staff members and the Monthly Meeting in determining what direction we should be moving."[203]

Another period of low school morale in 1973/74 coincided with the five year review of whether the school should continue or close.[204] Although most members of the school and the wider Argenta community (as well as former students and parents) believed the school fulfilled a valuable function, there was a "crisis of energy" among staff members. At a staff workshop teachers considered such options as offering programmes for other age groups, providing more training for younger staff, and involving more members of the wider community. The Monthly Meeting also discussed the future of the school and agreed that "there is sufficient dissatisfaction with things as they are that we feel the need to make changes if the school is to continue."[205] Meeting members blamed everything from the influence of television to the "getting away with everything philosophy. Society is changing rapidly, new students and staff are coming out of quite different experiences. It is difficult to know if what we have to offer is right."[206]

In the end members of the school community believed they still had "the physical, psychological, and spiritual strengths to carry on with this demanding project." The Meeting would keep the school open and continue to seek "people who indicate a willingness to devote the school year to exploring Friends' way of living and Friends' procedures and try to apply them to their lives while they are part of the school." But a major concern of staff and Meeting members was whether the evolving Argenta community with all its competing lifestyles could still provide a stable home for the school:

> Argenta has evolved into an essentially urban community in its social mores and values. Many of the school's patterns are under heavy pressure to change, from the community, some staff, and the students themselves who bring with them urban counterculture values. Can we realistically expect to be an island of stability in a society turbulent with change?[207]

Later Years

By the early 1970s the leadership of John and Helen Stevenson gradually passed to Betty Polster. After more than a dozen years of nurturing the school, the Stevensons were tired. They were of the "old school" and, though they never stopped listening to and respecting the views of their students, they found adapting to the values of the late 1960s and 1970s difficult. John Stevenson gave up the principalship to Mrs. Polster in 1970, and he and Helen were away from Argenta for two years directing a Quaker retreat centre near Toronto from 1971 to 1973. Upon returning they taught for another two years but at a reduced load. Finally, in 1975 their house burned to the ground, and to put the required energy into rebuilding, they retired from the school. After continuing to live in Argenta for over ten years the Stevensons eventually moved to Nelson.

During the mid-1970s the Friends School community struggled to reach a new consensus on the purpose and direction of the school. There was no longer agreement about the relative importance of the major components of the school experience—spiritual exploration, academics, rural life, and community building. The Stevensons had retired from the school and did not seek to influence the new leadership. However, the location of the school on Stevenson property and their role as the school founders made some indirect influence unavoidable. In such a small community people found it difficult to change longstanding relationship patterns. The Monthly Meeting was still dominated by its original members and had been unable to attract many younger members for the long haul. All agreed that the school needed younger staff who possessed the energy to "work in the discipline which has been the essence of the Argenta Friends School."[208]

In an attempt to renew the school's vision, the teachers declared 1975/76 an "interim year" during which they and a group of motivated students would commit themselves to in-depth discussions about changing the school's direction and goals. Full day staff workshops and long sessions with students generated many ideas: finding ways to grow more food to maintain a "low-cash lifestyle," devoting two months per year to physical activity and work projects such as the new school building, giving credit for out-of-classroom work, more intensive academics during

the winter, a simplified schedule, more inter-disciplinary work, better use of "group process skills," better staff orientation, and more attention to building staff/student community.[209]

By the fall of 1976 there was a renewal of commitment. A cohesive group of teachers, Betty Polster, Donna Sassaman, Alaine Hawkins, and Edith Gorman, would provide leadership and direction during the next seven years. They remained committed to core Quaker values of non-violence, consensus building, and strong community orientation. They reaffirmed the spiritual, communal, and academic goals of the school expressed in a "Core Package" which included Meeting for Worship, academic study, physical work, play, and community decision-making. Mrs. Polster described it this way:

> Many students and some staff came to Argenta with only a partial understanding of what we are trying to offer. Some came for academics, some for the beautiful scenery and life in the country, and some for the fellowship offered in a close community. We view the meeting for worship as the basic core of the school with the fellowship of study, work, play, and decision making as interrelated parts. We have Student-staff Meetings which are decision-making occasions for the school. We work together in work crew times; we play together as a group, too. We study Quaker philosophy and practice, ways of building community, ways of functioning well with each other, and what's going on in the outer world. All of this, plus regular academic courses, make a full and integrated whole.[210]

In 1976 Betty Polster suggested the core staff members share the principalship. They formed an administrative team with Donna Sassaman as "Administrative Principal," Alaine Hawkins as "Financial Principal," and Edith Gorman as "Academic Principal." Mrs. Polster held the group together as "Co-ordinating Principal." This group remained intact during the school's last years and made decisions about courses, finances, and day-to-day administration with a minimum of dissension. Assisting the core staff were a large number of part-time teachers, houseparents, and volunteer work co-ordinators. In 1978/79 nineteen adults were associated with the school. The large staff was necessary because the basic courses had to be covered, many teachers worked part-time, and work crews were usually led by non-teachers. Most staff members were still from the United States but there was a significant Canadian influence. In contrast to the earlier years, however, most were professional educators well aware of

contemporary ideas in education. This was consistent with other alternative programmes which by the late 1970s had adopted a more professional outlook.

The school continued to offer a full complement of basic academic courses including English, mathematics, history, geography, biology, physics, earth sciences, economics, French, Spanish, and Western civilization. In 1980/81 the school offered nine academic courses, a long list for a small school. In keeping with a revival in Canadian nationalism in the 1970s, Canadian content was emphasized particularly in the literature and history courses. Mrs. Sassaman and Mrs. Gorman taught English as a team, offering a series of modules from which students could choose. English eleven and English twelve were offered in alternate years so all students could take this course together. Most school graduates placed well on province-wide tests, and many continued on to university but (as with other alternative schools) less than in the early 1960s. Mrs. Hawkins commented in 1976 on the decline of interest in academics:

> The big question is one of motivation. The school offers a great deal for the highly motivated student; however not all students are highly motivated and self-directed in academics. This may be a reflection of the age of television or a general North American trend against the value of higher education.[211]

Although grades eleven and twelve continued to be the school's primary emphasis, the staff decided to experiment with a junior high school programme in 1978. This was mainly to provide for the teachers' own children who otherwise would have had to commute twenty miles each day to Kaslo. The programme enrolled six students in grades six, seven, and eight. Their teacher, Kathy Brunetta, was from Ontario and had completed her teacher training at U.B.C. the previous year. By all accounts the programme was successful and continued for three years until the local need disappeared. Junior high students did not participate in decision making as had the senior students and were required to follow clearly defined rules.

Several important construction projects were undertaken during the 1970s. Students and adult volunteers constructed a new school building begun in 1970 but not completed until 1978. Classes were held in the unfinished building as early as 1973 as one student remembers: "It was freezing. We had small electric heaters and we put plastic on the walls to keep out drafts. Finally

we put in a wood furnace system with a hopper of wood that kept going for twenty-four hours."[212] The completion of the building became even more essential when the school office and library burned to the ground in May, 1975 along with part of the school mailing list, supplies, equipment, and seven thousand books.[213] The school community also built a student home during the early 1970s and acquired several old buildings including the old "Beguin House," built by one of the earliest Argenta residents in 1915. These houses were used to accommodate students and houseparents. Since most of the original Quaker houseparents had retired by 1970, this was the most certain and efficient way to provide student housing. Students and adults took part in a remarkable number of other projects. They constructed a biology laboratory in the school building, built library shelves, installed a fire alarm system in the school building, put in new water lines to the school building and student home, built a new roof and porch on the Beguin House, and installed wood furnaces in both the school building and the student home.[214]

The school owned a printing press and over the years expanded its publishing activities. Originally established by Michael Phillips, "Root Cellar Press" moved into a building renovated by the school in 1975 where it was managed by John Hawkins. The graphics and publishing programme became an important curriculum activity and a vehicle for fund-raising. The school published "The Whittler" (school yearbook), "Stopped Press" (school newspaper), a calendar featuring the work of local artists, and the Argenta Cookbook. The press also supplemented the school's income by accepting contract work from local groups and individuals as well as from Quaker groups across Canada.

The school remained true to its world service mission. In 1980 the Foods class organized a dinner to raise money for "people starving in Cambodia." The menu, to demonstrate how Cambodians eat, consisted of rice and stir-fried vegetables, one cup per person.[215] The school also brought in a speaker on nuclear power, an issue then hotly debated in British Columbia. Students gathered information from anti-nuclear organizations and spoke about the subject on C.B.C. radio. The school sponsored a talk by two Friends who had been on a peace mission to Iran during the hostage crisis, and showed a powerful film about the military dictatorship in El

Salvador.[216] Students discussed how they could contribute to peace in those regions.

Achieving an effective balance between freedom and responsibility was an ongoing struggle as Alaine Hawkins commented on the general tone of the school:

> The staff feels that the students are often unresponsive and unwilling to take leadership, while students feel that the staff is often manipulating them, 'laying heavy trips,' or interfering with their initiative. Fortunately, most students take their work responsibilities in the households seriously. All students are concerned about their relationships with peers and others and spend much time and energy in this direction.[217]

However, in the school's primary goal of community building, Mrs. Hawkins believed the school continued to be a success:

> We have worked especially hard on community-building skills and during the time we were on intersession in Vancouver, it became clear how well we have succeeded. There was a really caring, supportive feeling throughout the group, even when faced with the vicissitudes of adapting to city life.[218]

Public Funding?

After 1975 financing the school became increasingly difficult. Expenses rose from $36,000 in 1974 to a high of $90,000 in 1981.[219] The largest cost was salaries, which increased from $12,000 in 1974 to $36,000 in 1981 while room and board expenses doubled from $12,000 in 1974 to $22,000 in 1981. The only way to keep pace with expenses was to raise tuition fees which increased rapidly during the late 1970s. Total fees increased from $26,000 in 1973/74 to $56,000 in 1980/81. From $2,200 per year in 1974, tuition (with room and board) rose to $3,000 in 1977/78[220] and reached $4,000 by 1981/82.[221] Tuition for 1982 was set at $4,500 but the school closed before the year began.[222] With enrollment at only sixteen students the school was stretched beyond its means.

Because the school was to be accessible to families of all incomes, tuition increases meant that more students had to be subsidized. After 1975 over half of the students received some

financial assistance—60% of the student body by 1978.[223] By 1980 subsidies totalled $16,000.[224] Although the school had a small surplus throughout the 1970s, it would probably not have survived without the donations from its many supporters which amounted to $15,000 in 1980/81.

By 1981 the full-time salary reached $3,200. But teachers were overworked and most doubled as houseparents. In 1978 all teachers taught an extra course for no extra salary to eliminate a budget shortfall. This solved the immediate financial problem but at considerable cost to the teachers who became over-tired by the end of the year.[225] As a result four teachers left the school or reduced their teaching load.

In 1977 the British Columbia government passed Bill 33 which made public funds available to independent schools. It also, for the first time, brought private schools within the jurisdiction of the Education Ministry and provided for minimum standards. This generated a vigorous debate among the Friends School staff and the Argenta Monthly Meeting about whether to apply for the Ministry grant. Government funding provided 30% of the cost of educating a student in the local public school system, about $500 per Friends School student. Accepting government funding would have added close to $5,000 to the budget (for the eight B.C. students). This would have allowed the school to provide a needed salary increase.

Not surprisingly, most of the teachers supported applying for the government grant. However, members of the Friends Meeting had serious reservations believing that "the acceptance of government funds would undermine our independence."[226] They feared the school would become vulnerable to government interference in its practices. Some meeting members also believed that if the school accepted government funding, supporters would feel their donations were no longer needed and the school would not be much farther ahead. Others feared local resentment of a private school receiving tax money, and a few individuals believed the school might be taking funding away from public schools if they accepted the money.

Many local parents and staff members favoured accepting government funding. They believed it was their democratic right to allocate the use of their education tax dollars. Furthermore, requirements contained in the new bill such as Ministry inspection and audited

attendance records would not have posed problems for the school and some staff members believed they could benefit from external evaluation. Even the requirement that all teachers be certified would not be a barrier for, although less than half of the teachers were certified, they had five years to obtain their qualifications. The staff proposed that the government money would only be spent on items outside the basic education budget so the school would not become dependent on the grant. Therefore, if the government put too many conditions on the money, the school could change its decision without serious consequences.[227]

Most important, the parents and teachers thought government funding was essential for practical reasons. The extra money could be used to lower tuition, raise teachers' salaries, and upgrade laboratory equipment, physical education facilities, and library holdings. As one letter stated: "philosophical reservations will not put books on the shelf."[228] Many individuals thought it was unfair for Meeting members to stand in the way of extra funding when teachers were earning so little. As one Argenta resident put it: "It is wrong for people who are not directly involved in the day-to-day operation of the school to veto additional funding for those who are working hard to run a school and support their families on the pittance of $3200 a year."[229]

The school community could not come to a consensus and so did not go ahead with the proposal. However, the issue was reconsidered every year and finally, in 1981/82, the school reached agreement to apply for the grant. Evaluation by a team from the Federation of Independent Schools Association resulted in a positive assessment of the school's academic programme.[230] Ironically though, the Argenta Friends School would close at the end of the year and never did enjoy the benefit of the government grant.

School Closure

During the winter of 1982 a group of teachers and Meeting members held ongoing discussions about the future of the school. The staff was divided about the school's direction for the coming year. As usual the school was having trouble finding houseparents and staff were

extremely tired. Furthermore, it was becoming increasingly difficult to attract students and enrollment in 1981 had dropped to fifteen. But the school had weathered many such crises in the past and in February the teachers remained optimistic about offering a high school programme (possibly just grade twelve) provided enough staff, suitable students, and appropriate houseparents could be found. However, the group believed the school could only continue with "substantial staff unity" and if a "suitable programme can be agreed upon."[231]

Two committees were struck to study possible directions for the school. This was not the first time the school community had sought change. The school almost closed twice during the 1960s, and as early as 1973 other forms of the school were actively considered including an adult study centre, a teacher training school, and a post secondary programme.[232] One committee proposed a continuation of the high school programme with an emphasis on rural living skills and only the winter term devoted to academics. The other group discussed the development of an "outreach programme" outside Argenta, offering adult education in peace studies, Quakerism, and mass media. However, this could not be ready for at least a year.[233] At a pivotal meeting in March the staff regretfully recommended that the school be closed for at least a year so that teachers could regroup, build a unified base, and develop a new programme. The meeting concluded that "there is no enthusiasm for a high school programme."[234] The staff explained the decision in the 1982 Annual Report:

> We felt that a few meetings or even one summer was not enough time to discover the process of our continued outreach; that we need to take a year off to better establish our roots in order to find our goals and directions. The staff will work together to try to build what we want to share. The main difference for next year is that we are not inviting students.[235]

The teachers helped the grade eleven students find suitable placements in another school for September. A small group continued to work together to develop and plan an alternative programme of courses to be offered in 1983/84, possibly outside Argenta. However, this never came to fruition and the school remained permanently closed. The school's small cash surplus reverted to the Argenta Friends Meeting.[236] Betty and Norman Polster as well as Edith Gorman

remained in Argenta. Donna and Bill Sassaman left in 1980 and Alaine and John Hawkins went back to Toronto to become "resident Friends" at a Friends House.

There were many factors contributing to the decision to close the school. The school's leaders were tired. The perpetual problem of finding enough suitable houseparents in such a small community was never solved. Achieving unity among the staff and the Friends Meeting continued to be an ongoing challenge. As a school visitor wrote in 1979:

> The problems of communal living are ever-present and must be ceaselessly struggled with, particularly when a majority of students entering the school each year are new and may know little of the spiritual ethos of the community and its ways of growing. Staff, therefore, are faced yearly with reinterpreting and renewing the meaning and form of the school community. This dedication to the process of community building, while an invaluable experience for youngsters, can continually tax and drain the reserves of the faculty."[237]

The school was also affected by a disagreement within the Argenta Quaker community. When the Friends Meeting had decided in the early 1960s to build a permanent Meeting House and school classroom, the Stevensons agreed to assign a corner of their property for the building. They believed they were not relinquishing their rights to the property. This was a verbal agreement among individuals who trusted each other and no one questioned the wisdom of the arrangement. But in the 1970s when the Stevensons asked one of their sons to return to live on their property, misunderstandings developed and eventually the Friends Meeting gave up their claim to the building. This produced divisions in the community and further lowered school morale.

Another significant factor was the dramatic change in the Argenta community and the makeup of the student body between 1959 and 1975. The community had more than doubled in size, with most of the newcomers young and sympathetic to countercultural values of individual freedom. Students had become more sophisticated, less respectful of adult authority, and more liberal in their values. Students expected to have a good deal of freedom and some staff members were sympathetic to the students' opinions. John and Helen Stevenson wrote:

> When we were planning the Friends School we had certain standards about the use of alcohol, sexual activity, marijuana use, study halls, hours for being home at night, and tobacco use. Some of these standards have changed, others have not. Some changed so slowly that they were not really examined. Changes have taken place among staff members over the years. Within the last few years many staff members have willingly (or grudgingly) enforced the rules for students but for themselves have felt comfortable about pre-marital sex, smoking tobacco and marijuana, using alcohol with students present.[238]

Shared decision making was the genius of Argenta Friends School but also partly its undoing. Although students appreciated having input into school policy and being taken seriously, most did not feel their opinions were considered on certain key issues. The staff always lived with a tension between wanting the students to take responsibility for decision making on the one hand, but wanting definite behavioural standards on the other.

But the most significant factor in the demise of the school was that the times had changed. Ever since the late 1960s the school's leaders had difficulty adjusting to student expectations, conflicting moral standards, a society that emphasized individualism, the waning of the idealism and optimism of that period, and a shift in demographics in Argenta itself. Furthermore, the rise of alternative programmes in mainstream school districts offered parents far more choice in the public school system than had been available in the 1960s. There was therefore less interest in private alternatives. These factors forced the leaders of the Argenta Friends School to question whether their original vision was still appropriate. One staff member expressed this well several years earlier:

> A number of people are wondering if the school can survive the changes pressed upon it by the demands of a changing community. Argenta is very different from what it was. And the problems of society at large are also increasingly felt here, more and more directly as the population grows and gets statistically younger. The whole cultural climate, including the culture that the students bring with them, seems to have changed radically in the last few years.[239]

Conclusion

Most students had an overwhelmingly positive experience at the Argenta Friends School. They cite the close friendships, the warm family life, the natural environment, the acquisition of consensus deliberation skills, and the emphasis on personal responsibility as important elements that helped shape their adult lives. Although few former students believe they received an outstanding academic education at Argenta, most consider it to have been good enough. Betty Polster acknowledges that "there were times when the academics wasn't as challenging as it might have been because so much else was going on. We didn't want to stress academics too much. But Argenta students went to college knowing how to think."[240]

Most graduates went to university or some form of post-secondary education and almost all students who wanted to attend university did so. According to John Stevenson's Co-ordinator's Report in 1963 only one student in two years failed a government exam. He wrote: "There have been no brilliant results academically but those who have gone on to other schools have had no trouble doing comparable or better work." Of the twenty-nine students attending during the first three years, "twenty-three went on to higher education or are planning to do so. All have done as well or better than they did here."[241] According to school figures circulated in 1968, over eighty percent of students in the first nine years went on to post-secondary education and the 1970 Annual Report claimed that "ninety percent of our graduates have gone on to higher education or plan to."[242] One student who graduated in 1965 says: "I was adequately prepared for college at Cal State and got good grades. All six students in our graduating class went to university."[243] Another says "I went to university in California and I was way ahead,"[244] while still another claims she received "a very good education, was well prepared for university, and learned how to study."[245] Some students appreciated the small classes and individual attention while another says she learned "to think, consider, and discuss."[246] John Stevenson wrote that "many students have commented on the growth they experienced in learning to take responsiblity rather than being spoon-fed. This has been most keenly felt by the graduates as they entered college."[247]

But some former students found the academic programme mediocre. One says: "The focus was off to one side just enough that it wasn't a great preparation. But in terms of social and personal life skills it's stood me in good stead."[248] Another student says:

> The Quakers valued academics and the teachers were dedicated, but they had other agendas that were equally important. There wasn't as much pressure to do well academically as I encountered in other schools. I personally needed that pressure. I think if I had gone to a more academically oriented school I probably would have gone to university. At first I regretted not going to university but I'm happy with what I'm doing.[249]

Of 128 known occupations of Friends School graduates nineteen are teachers, eight doctors or lawyers, eight nurses, six social workers or counsellors, nine environmental or wildlife managers, nineteen artists, musicians, or writers, twelve carpenters or mechanics, seven farmers, eight administrators or business persons, fifteen stay-at-home parents, three political activists, four bus or truck drivers, two loggers or tree planters, four other professionals, and six others.[250] These graduates span a wide spectrum of career attainments but several points are evident. The large number of professionals indicates that few students were held back in their academic or professional aspirations as occurred frequently in later alternative schools. Secondly, the high number of farmers, environmental workers, and carpenters is probably a result of the emphasis on rural living at Argenta. Thirdly, the large number of musicians and artists indicates that the school successfully nurtured creative work. Finally, it is tempting to credit the three political activists to the Friends' emphasis on citizenship.

By all accounts the school succeeded in producing conscientious citizens who have felt empowered to shape their own lives. One former student suggests that "some of the Quaker principles have stuck with me and they are valuable elements of my life."[251] Another says the school "taught me how to debate things and see other people's point of view. We were listened to, treated like responsible adults."[252] A third student credits the Friends School with her "self-confidence and belief in myself."[253] Another student credits the school with teaching him self-reliance, trust, responsibility for his actions, how to get along with people, and to "become a

better person."[254] One student says the support, lovingkindness, and acceptance she received allowed her to "be who I was."[255] As one former teacher put it, "we taught students that they make a difference, they knew they mattered."[256] A former student agrees saying: "I felt they esteemed us as people, as young adults. We were looked upon as individuals in our own right. I was trusted, valued as a person."[257] However, one student cautioned that there was "a kind of culture shock" coming out of Argenta:

> When you come into the real world you try to apply the ideals that you've come to value. You think you are going to change the world with revolutionary ideas like pacifism. But you quickly discover that society has its own set of norms many of which you might be uncomfortable with.[258]

During the 1960s American influence on the Friends School was substantial. Students from California brought a liberal, casual attitude and, after 1966, an interest in folk music, drugs, left-wing politics, and countercultural values (sometimes before those ideas reached Vancouver). As one former student observes: "They brought a progressive outlook. Americans are doers."[259] Students and teachers had varying perceptions of their time in Canada. Some students hardly noticed they were in a different country, but most staff members thought of it as a "Canadian experience, leaving many American values behind."[260] Although Quakers are not nationalistic, John and Helen Stevenson took the values of their adopted country seriously and hoped students and teachers would develop a "Canadian sensibility."[261] In her Canadian history class Mrs. Stevenson discussed such key differences between Canada and the United States as development of the west, parliamentary government, and the role of a "superpower." Most staff members have remained in British Columbia along with a significant minority of students.

The Argenta Friends School was successful in fulfilling most of its objectives. It provided an adequate academic education, good enough to send most of its graduates to university. It gave its students a rich rural, wilderness, and (for some) spiritual experience. It provided a large, warm family atmosphere where students learned to solve problems in human relations. It introduced the young people to consensual decision making in which they played a significant part. It fostered a keen sense of citizenship, pacifism, and social activism.

However, the founders never resolved a basic contradiction in their practice. They had a well developed and cohesive life philosophy along with a well defined idea about how the students in their charge ought to structure their studies, their recreation, and their day-to-day interactions. But they wanted the students to reach these conclusions themselves and to take responsibility for decisions which really were not of their choosing. The adults were genuine in their encouragement of student participation but, as one former student suggests, the Stevensons were "strong leaders who wanted to appear not to be leading."[262] On the other hand, the school provided explicit values and standards that allowed it to avoid the excesses of the more extreme laissez-faire schools that developed later in the 1960s.

The 1960s was a mixed blessing for the Argenta Friends School. While the heightened political and social consciousness of the decade fit perfectly with Quaker ideals, the individualistic lifestyle did not. The inability of the Friends Meeting to adjust to the "sixties values" brought by many students during the second half of that decade was not surprising. The original vision did not entail dealing with those issues and John and Helen Stevenson and others in the Friends Meeting had difficulty incorporating the new lifestyles of the times into their system. They were wise enough to realize that they had to make some changes in order to reach their students but were often pushed beyond their "comfort zone." Despite their limitations they were admired by their students as "great teachers" while one former student describes them as "visionaries."[263] Given the school's reliance on the energy of a small group of people, its small financial base, its idealistic governance structure, and the challenging decade in which it began, it is highly unlikely that it would have survived more than a few years had it not been for the dedication and commitment of John and Helen Stevenson. In the words of one former student their contribution was "an incredible piece of work."[264]

The Friends School sought a delicate balance between freedom and responsiblity, between innovation and tradition. It was more traditional than the other alternative schools discussed in this thesis. Some of its values and practices originated in early Quaker schools dating back to the late seventeenth century.[265] Some of these were simplicity, non-violence, silent worship, physical

work, and service. To this base Argenta added social activism, the nurturing of the individual conscience, and a school community where decisions were made by consensus. But the school was also an embodiment of many of the principles of Progressive or "child-centred" education developed by John Dewey and his colleagues in the early twentieth century. These included self-paced and active learning, an emphasis on the "whole person," and education for citizenship. The Friends School was a bold experiment and broke new ground in British Columbia.

The Argenta Friends School remained an independent alternative school for twenty-three years. Compared to many of its contemporaries it was successful in its longevity, its competent academic programme, its commitment to community building, personal growth, learning rural skills, participation in local family life, and Quaker conciliation practices. There were several reasons for this success despite constant financial pressures and the tensions produced by the cultural upheaval of the 1960s. The school had effective leaders. John and Helen Stevenson were a dominating presence with a clear vision throughout the school's first twelve years. They were succeeded by Betty Polster who, although she shared leadership with others, had equally strong goals for the school. The school's rootedness in the Society of Friends provided a large network of financial and moral support as well as a source of students. As the years progressed these alumni themselves became an important part of that support network. Lastly, the foundation of Quaker spiritual heritage provided a solid and consistent set of shared standards and values. As one visitor to the school wrote in 1979: "it avoids to some degree the adverse effects of the dilemmas and perils that have faced more secularly based communal efforts, like those associated with the 1960s." Reflecting on the significance of the Friends School, he continued:

> Quakers have always been outsiders to their society if only because they seek to change it. Contemporary society needs diverse models of living more appropriate to our futures. It needs models of education that are deeply characterological as well as more narrowly academic. The types of changes we face tomorrow require qualities I do not see being developed in many of the schools that I know, certainly public schools. I felt the Friends School was grappling honestly with the future. Argenta is not without its human problems but it is a place where the word and spirit are more closely one.[266]

NOTES

1. The best known pioneer families were the Beguins and the Sawczuks.
2. John Gray, "How seven families really got away from it all," in *Macleans*, October 7, 1961, p. 97.
3. Families received $30 for each adult and $5 for each child.
4. For background on Quaker beliefs and practice see Howard Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years* (New York: Harper, 1952); Michael Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule* (Philadelphia: Yearly Meeting, 1983); Margaret Bacon, *The Quiet Rebels* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1985); John Punshon, *Portrait in Grey* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1984); Howard Brinton, *Quaker Education* (Philadelphia, Pendle Hill, 1950); W.A.C. Stewart, *Quakers and Education* (London: Epworth, 1953).
5. "Discipline for Argenta," 1964. Unless otherwise noted, all school documents are located in the Argenta Friends School archive in the home of John and Helen Stevenson of Nelson, British Columbia. I wish to express my gratitude to the Stevensons for their hospitality and for the generous access they provided me to this rich collection.
6. Quakers prefer the terms "unity" and "the sense of the Meeting." As they see it, consensus is a secular process in which decisions are made through reason. In seeking the Sense of the Meeting, members search together for the truth and open themselves up to the voice of God. Quaker pamphlet by Barry Morley (Wallingford: Pendle Hill, 1993).
7. John and Helen Stevenson, personal interview, September 11, 1996.
8. "For the Study of Argenta Friends School," August, 1958.
9. Argenta Friends School, 1963 Prospectus, p. 5.
10. Shady Hill School was founded in 1915 by a group of parents, mostly Harvard professors, and was considered one of the best American Progressive schools. See Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York, Knopf, 1961), p. 278.
11. Helen Stevenson, personal interview, September 11, 1996.
12. Argenta Friends School, 1963 Prospectus, p. 6. The attempt to construct a total environment was not unlike traditional British Public Schools but the goals were different.
13. "Main Experiences of Argenta Friends School," May 6, 1971.
14. John Stevenson, Co-ordinator's Report, January, 1963.
15. John Stevenson, 1961.
16. Report to the Monthly Meeting on School Structure, May, 1963.
17. Annual Report, 1970/71.
18. John Stevenson, History of Argenta Friends School, 1964.
19. The title of Helen Stevenson's unpublished memoir written in 1993.
20. Argenta Friends School, 1963 Prospectus, p. 3-5.
21. Argenta Friends School, 1969 Prospectus, p. 2, 4.
22. "Discipline for Argenta," 1964. A "Discipline" is similar to a constitution, outlining the basic agreements governing a Quaker community.
23. John Stevenson, Co-ordinator's Report, January, 1963.
24. Although it was not the intention of the founders, this method of socialization was similar to that of British Public schools.
25. Enrollment data from student publication, "The Whittler," December, 1959 and Fall, 1960. One student's mother heard about the school through Mary Thomson (see Chapters 1, 4).

26. Annual Report, 1970/71.
27. Enrollment data from enrollment and alumni lists, 1959-1973.
28. Annual Report, 1980/81.
29. Jack Wells, personal interview, February 28, 1997.
30. John Stevenson, Co-ordinator's Report, January, 1963.
31. Ed Washington, personal interview, February 10, 1997.
32. Pat Lawson, personal interview, January 29, 1997.
33. Mary Holland, personal interview, November 10, 1996.
34. David Stevenson, personal interview, February 12, 1997.
35. Mary Winder, personal interview, March 14, 1997.
36. David Herbison, personal interview, March 10, 1997.
37. Dan Phelps, personal interview, Novemeber 26, 1996.
38. Michael Phillips, personal interview, March 15, 1997.
39. Staff Handbook, undated but probably 1973.
40. Brenda Berck, personal interview, October 14, 1996.
41. Michael Phillips, personal interview, March 16, 1997.
42. Helen Stevenson, "Some Considerations for the Interim Year," 1975.
43. Biographic material from personal interviews and school brochures.
44. Jonathan Aldrich, personal interview, November 16, 1996.
45. Mary Holland, David Stevenson, personal interviews.
46. Betty Polster, personal interview, December 28, 1994.
47. Pendle Hill was a Quaker study centre and publishing house which provided useful resources to the Friends School.
48. See Richard Allen, *The Social Passion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973) and Paul Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class* (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994), Chapter 6.
49. Brenda Berck, personal interview, October 14, 1996.
50. Dan and Jan Phelps, personal interview, November 26, 1996.
51. Arnold Porter, personal interview, February 10, 1997.
52. Michael Phillips, personal interview, March 15, 1997.
53. Hugh Herbison, personal interview, January 22, 1998.
54. See George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968). Some Doukhobor families refused to enroll their children in public school, but according to Mr. Herbison, many had begun quietly sending their children to school when the newly elected Social Credit government escalated the conflict.
55. Donna Sassaman, personal interview, May 15, 1997.
56. The Putney Graduate School was a training centre for Progressive teachers in the United States. See Susan Lloyd, *The Putney School* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987).
57. Other teachers were Tad Melbin, George Strong, Elmo Wolfe, Doug Greene, Lup and Jean Brown, Tom and Ruth Delackner, Margaret Montague, Hugh Ector, Larry Lees, John Rush, Bob Boyd, Don and Georgia Murray, Mitch Bronough, Phil Wells, Marc Hamilton, Phyllis Margolin, Maydelle Quiring, David Taibleson, Michael and Alison Pirot, Peter Renner, Chuck Valentine, Kathryn and Stan Toprorowski, Bill Gray and Jeanne Shaw, Gary Schell and Corol Wight, Pierre and Vicki Picard.
58. John Stevenson, School Newsletter, September, 1971.

59. Mary Holland, personal interview, November 10, 1996.
60. John Stevenson, Co-ordinator's Report, January, 1963.
61. Staff Handbook, early 1970s.
62. Student Handbook, 1974/75.
63. John Stevenson, personal interview, September 11, 1996.
64. Betty Polster, School Newsletter, February, 1977.
65. John Rush, personal interview, February 25, 1997.
66. Charles Dyson, personal interview, November 5, 1996.
67. Curriculum Meeting minutes, spring, 1962.
68. Charles Dysen, personal interview, October 21, 1996.
69. Mary Winder, February 24, 1997.
70. World Problems, course outline, 1964.
71. Jonathan Aldrich, personal interview, November 5, 1996.
72. Ed Washington, personal interview, February 10, 1997.
73. Social Ecology course outlines 1967/68, 1970/71. For Watson Thomson see Chapter 5.
74. Gandhi's system of non-violence and spiritual practice.
75. Prospectus, 1964, 1969; Annual Reports, 1971-1982; Stopped Press, 1977-1979.
76. Stopped Press, Fall, 1977.
77. Pat Lawson, personal interview, January 31, 1997.
78. Marilyn Armstrong (grade ten), "A Hike to Open School," in "The Whittler (student newspaper), Volume 1, Number 1, December, 1959.
79. Monty Yaswen, Debbie Borsos, "Beginning of School Hike," in "Stopped Press" (News from Argenta Friends School), Fall, 1978.
80. Cathy Munn, Stopped Press, "Another Autumn in Argenta," Fall, 1978.
81. Student Handbook, 1969, p. 2.
82. Charles Dyson, personal interview, November 6, 1996.
83. One former student emphasizes the importance to Quakers of social activism. He remembers picketting the Oakland Induction Centre as a school project at John Woolman Friends School in California.
84. Annual Report, 1981/82.
85. Intersession activities described in Annual Reports 1976-1982.
86. Jack Wells, personal interview, February 28, 1997.
87. Annual Reports, 1971-1982.
88. The founder of this programme, Peter Scheiber, lived in Argenta in the 1950s.
89. Argenta Friends School, Prospectus, 1963, p. 6.
90. Pat Lawson, personal interview, January 30, 1997.
91. Student Handbook, 1964/65.
92. Discipline for Argenta, 1964.
93. Discipline for Argenta, 1964.
94. Betty Polster, Annual Report, Spring, 1970.
95. John Stevenson, school newsletter, October, 1968.
96. Anonymous students, Student Handbook, 1970/71.
97. Jack Wells, personal interview, February 28, 1997.
98. John Stevenson, Report on Housing, mid-1960s.
99. John Stevenson, letter to Jean Wagner, April 26, 1965.

100. John Stevenson, Report on Housing, mid-1960s.
101. Cumulative list of students, staff, houseparents, January, 1973.
102. Anneke and Rob Rensing, "Some observations on our role as a houseparent," undated.
103. John Stevenson, personal interview, September, 1996; and Helen Stevenson, "We're In This Together," unpublished memoir, 1993.
104. John Rush, personal interview, February 25, 1997, and Helen Stevenson, "We're In This Together," unpublished memoir, 1993.
105. Helen Stevenson, personal interview, September 11, 1996.
106. W.A.C. Stewart suggests that early Quakers assumed spiritual and educational equality between men and women. *Quakers in Education* (London: Epworth, 1953), p.31.
107. Pat Lawson, personal interview, January 30, 1997.
108. Brenda Berck, personal interview, October 15, 1996.
109. Mary Winder, personal interview, March 15, 1997.
110. Betty Polster, personal interview, December 28, 1995.
111. Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: 1970). This was one of the most influential feminist books of the 1970s.
112. School Newsletter, April, 1976.
113. Jack Wells, personal interview, February 28, 1997.
114. Arnold Porter, personal interview, February 7, 1997.
115. Jack Wells, personal interview, February 28, 1997.
116. John Stevenson, Report on School Structure, May, 1963.
117. John Stevenson, "A History of the Relationship between Argenta Friends School and Argenta Monthly Meeting," 1969.
118. Annual Report, 1970/71.
119. "Vision of Argenta School" recorded in Minutes, Fall, 1965.
120. Report to Monthly Meeting on school structure, May, 1963.
121. Staff Handbook, probably 1973.
122. Argenta Friends School, Prospectus, 1963.
123. Discipline for Argenta, 1964.
124. John and Helen Stevenson, Letter to the Monthly Meeting, 1973.
125. School brochure insert, 1969.
126. Student Handbook, 1968/69.
127. For an account of Quaker decision making see Michael Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends* (Philadelphia: Yearly Meeting, 1983). Argenta Friends adapted methods form Howard Brinton, *Guide to Quaker Practice* (Wallingford, Pennsylvania: Pendle Hill, 1946).
128. Prospectus, 1964, and "Discipline for Argenta," 1964.
129. Argenta Friends School, 1969 Prospectus, p. 3-4.
130. Staff Handbook, 1973.
131. The project had been suggested by a Company of Young Canadians staff worker.
132. Helen Stevenson, "We're In This Together," p. 12.
133. Student Handbook, 1974/75.
134. Mary Winder, personal interview, February 24, 1997.
135. Jack Wells, personal interview, February 28, 1997.
136. Annual Report, 1971/72.

137. Mary Winder, Student Handbook, 1968/69.
138. Student Handbook, 1964/65.
139. Discipline for Argenta, 1964.
140. Annual Report, Spring, 1970.
141. Student declaration form, August, 1966.
142. Student Handbook, 1966.
143. Wendy Mitchell, Student Handbook, 1964/65.
144. Jonathan Aldrich, personal interview, November 16, 1996.
145. Student Handbook, 1970/71.
146. Student members were: student clerk, recording clerk, girls counsellor, boys counsellor.
147. Student Handbook, 1968/69.
148. From "Discipline for Argenta," 1964.
149. David Stevenson, Mary Winder, personal interviews.
150. "Personnel Practices in A.F.S.," probably early 1970s.
151. Erica Pfister, personal interview, April 16, 1997.
152. Ed Washington, personal interview, January 8, 1997.
153. David Herbison, personal interview, March 31, 1997.
154. Pat Lawson, personal interview, January 30, 1997.
155. Polly Wilson, personal interview, October 24, 1996.
156. Charles Dyson, personal interview, November 5, 1997.
157. Beth Martin, personal interview, April 17, 1997.
158. Hugh Herbison, personal interview, January 22, 1998.
159. Michael Phillips, personal interview, February 10, 1997.
160. Arnold Porter, personal interview, February 10, 1997.
161. David Stevenson, personal interview, March 13, 1997.
162. Staff Handbook, 1973.
163. Pat Lawson, personal interview, January 30, 1997.
164. Monthly Meeting School Committee, Memorandum, October, 1967.
165. Argenta Monthly Meeting, Minutes, January 12, 1969.
166. John Stevenson, Co-ordinator's Report, January, 1963.
167. School Newsletter, August, 1971.
168. John Stevenson, School Newsletter, August, 1971.
169. Michael Phillips, School Newsletter, October 21, 1971.
170. John Stevenson, School Newsletter, January, 1965.
171. Finance Committee Report, May, 1974.
172. John and Helen Stevenson, interview, September 11, 1996.
173. Monthly Meeting for School Business, minutes, Sept. 28, 1969.
174. Argenta Friends School, Student Handbook, 1964/65.
175. School Handbook, 1964/65.
176. Memorandum on Smoking, 1962.
177. John Stevenson, Letter to Alumni, July, 1971.
178. Statement on Sex Policy, May 30, 1974.
179. Monthly Meeting for School Business, minutes, March 31, 1973.
180. Ed Washington, Letter to Bob and Ruth Boyd, probably 1973.
181. Chuck Valentine, Letter to the Staff, March 1973.

182. John Stevenson, Memorandum to Houseparents, probably 1964.
183. Student Handbook, 1974/75.
184. Arnold Porter, personal interview, February 10, 1997.
185. Monthly Meeting for School Business, minutes, March 31, 1973.
186. Statement on Sex Policy, May 30, 1974.
187. John, Helen Stevenson, Letter to Monthly Meeting, May 4, 1977.
188. Mary Winder, personal interview, February 28, 1997.
189. Pat Lawson, personal interview, January 30, 1997.
190. Arnold Porter, personal interview, February 10, 1997.
191. John Stevenson, Letter to Alumni, June, 1968.
192. John Stevenson, Letter to Alumni, July, 1971.
193. John Stevenson, letter, January 26, 1976.
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CHAPTER 3: CRAIGDARROCH SCHOOL

Founding

As the New School and the Argenta Friends School continued to thrive in the mid-1960s, a third British Columbia Progressive school was conceived in Victoria in 1966. Unlike the New School, whose founders spent two years planning their organizational structure and debating educational theory, the new Victoria school was established in less than two months. In further contrast to the New School, a group project from the outset, this Victoria school was inspired by one individual. It did not harken back to Deweyan Progressivism, English Romanticism, or Canadian socialism but rather drew its ideas from that individual's predilections and intuition. The school's leadership and original clientele were drawn largely from Victoria's established class, many of whom attended traditional private schools themselves.

Craigdarroch School was the creation of David Hummel, a successful lawyer and businessman. He and his wife, Patricia, had grown up in Victoria and both had extensive private school backgrounds. Mr. Hummel attended St. Christopher's in Victoria, St. George's in Vancouver, and Upper Canada College in Ontario, all traditional independent boys' schools based on the British Public School model. Mrs. Hummel had been schooled at St. Margaret's in Victoria. The Hummels were conservative in family background and political views, and believed that private schools were inherently superior to public schools.

Mr. Hummel has been characterized as an unconventional person who "loves to try things that are different." A "self-starter," he has made and lost several fortunes during his career, and the daunting task of starting a school from scratch did not deter him. Mr. Hummel describes his moment of decision in June, 1966 in his own words:

> My elder son was reaching the age when he needed to go to school and I ruled out the public school system as being totally inadequate. I considered St. Christopher's but I knew some of the people there and that didn't seem a good solution. I had been giving it some thought and had looked at a little school on Joan Crescent. One day as I was driving down the street, I noticed our gardener in my rear view mirror. So I stopped him and I said: "We're going to start a school on Monday!" So we painted the place up and we started.[1]

Mr. Hummel's educational theory, although eclectic and incoherent, did not prevent his having definite ideas about the education he wanted for his children. In an attempt to interest others in his project he outlined his views about schooling in a paper titled "Ideas Concerning A New School" which he circulated among his friends and business colleagues. Consistent with his individualism, Mr. Hummel believed that a gifted teacher was more important than a sound educational theory. He states that he "would prefer my children to be taught by an excellent, natural, gifted teacher with no clearly defined philosophy of education and somewhat antiquated methods to having my children taught by a teacher without a gift for teaching."[2] Although this emphasis on good teaching seems unnecessarily obvious, it is consistent with Mr. Hummel's belief that there were few excellent teachers in Victoria's public or private schools. But the absence of a solid theoretical base would weaken Craigdarroch School in its later years.

Mr. Hummel's ideal school would seek to develop personal values similar to the British Public School model, but in a gentler and less regimented environment. Such a school would encourage students to enjoy life—it would "awaken the minds and souls of the students so that each would leave the school capable of living life to the fullest with an aliveness, awareness, thinking and reasoning power, and judgment" to provide the best possible opportunity for an effective life. The development of graceful, co-ordinated, and healthy bodies through sports and daily exercise was also important. The school must provide a "minimum basic education" (presumably the three R's) but this would be no more important than aspects of character.

True to his entrepreneurial background, Mr. Hummel stressed the importance of encouraging each child to develop his or her individual skills and talents. It is here that he comes

closest to Deweyan progressivism. Mr. Hummel's school would be ungraded with flexible groups of children progressing at their own rate. Without being "permissive," it would provide maximum encouragement without pushing, and a relaxed form of discipline built upon a "high respect for the individuality and rights of other persons." A practical person, Mr. Hummel also wanted a school that would offer instruction in the useful skills of speed reading, shorthand, and typing. As well, he valued non-traditional school subjects such as philosophy, economics, comparative religion, and politics. These would help students develop "a deep sense of community responsibility" to contribute to the well being of their society.[3] This is consistent with Mr. Hummel's active role in community life and service organizations.

Mr. Hummel enlisted the collaboration of Dr. Charles Gregory, an influential child psychiatrist, whom he had met when he was on the Board of Directors of the Family and Children's Service in Victoria. Born and educated in Liverpool, England, Dr. Gregory immigrated to Canada after the Second World War. He did research in neuro-psychology at the University of Toronto before moving to Victoria in the mid-1950s where he headed a government agency for child mental health. Several years later he founded and financed the Pacific Centre for Human Development which operated centres for the treatment of emotionally disturbed, autistic, and brain-damaged children. He also lectured at the University of Victoria, served on the university Board of Governors and Senate, and was active in many organizations. Dr. Gregory had been a Marxist in his Liverpool years, but gave that up long before arriving in Victoria. Like Mr. Hummel he was not a person to be bound by any overarching theories of life or society.

Dr. Gregory also had a son about to enter school and was "appalled with the rigidity and general level of the school system" as well as what he considered to be poorly trained teachers. He held the school system responsible for many of the problem children that showed up at his treatment centres. But like most Craigdarroch parents, Dr. Gregory had few specific complaints about the public education system other than a general feeling that the schools were poor.[4]

Mr. Hummel typically wasted no time putting his plan into action. By late July he had

rented an empty Kindergarten building with two small classrooms located on Joan Crescent at the foot of Craigdarroch Castle. Mr. Hummel took out a personal bank loan to cover the purchase of furniture, rent, and other initial expenses. Together with two of his business partners and Dr. Gregory he incorporated the Craigdarroch School Society on August 5, 1966. These four became directors of the society and adopted a constitution a month later.

Andy Mikita, a clinical child psychologist who was co-director of Dr. Gregory's Pacific Centre, joined the planning group in mid-August. Born in Hungary and raised in Ontario, Mr. Mikita moved to British Columbia in the early 1960s and became a public health psychologist in North Vancouver where he initiated and directed the school mental health programme. He met Charles Gregory at a national conference on child health and joined the Pacific Centre shortly afterwards. Mr. Mikita believed most learning and behaviour problems arose from forcing children "to do what they can't do." He favoured emphasizing student strengths and integrating "the things kids need to know" with their play activities.[5] Mr. Mikita enjoyed new ventures and was enthusiastic about the Craigdarroch project, supervising much of the detailed day-to-day planning due to his prior experience in schools. David Hummel, Charles Gregory, and Andy Mikita became the organizational leaders of Craigdarroch School during its first year.

The directors prepared a detailed Prospectus and issued a press release in early August to announce the opening of Craigdarroch School on September 6, 1966. Mr. Hummel was a capable and effective organizer experienced in community and political work. He enlisted influential community leaders to provide political support for his project and Mayor Alfred Toone was listed as "Honourary Chairman of the Board of Directors." His impressive Board of Advisors included three doctors, one psychologist, three University of Victoria professors (one a former principal of Saskatchewan Teachers' College, another head of the psychology department), the chair of the Victoria Board of School Trustees (John Porteous), and a Social Credit member of the legislature for Victoria (Waldo Skillings).

The press release discussed two innovative features of the school. First, Craigdarroch

School was to be bilingual. The directors noted that it would be the "first fully bilingual school that we know of west of Winnipeg. French and English will be used interchangeably throughout the school day and we will make every effort to make sure the children become fully bilingual as quickly as possible."[6] To highlight the importance of this aspect, the Prospectus cover featured a subtitle in large bold letters:

A Bilingual School
Conducted in both French and English

Secondly, the school would be co-educational since "it is natural for both boys and girls to grow up and be educated together in mutual respect and understanding. Craigdarroch School therefore will be the first independent co-educational school we know of on Vancouver Island."[7]

The directors made it clear, however, that Craigdarroch would not be an "experimental school or a school devoted to weird or speculative theories" but would be based upon the "soundest possible principles of education now known and understood and accepted by a wide number of thoroughly responsible educators."[8] Although "free schools" were rare in 1966, this statement was clearly intended to reassure prospective parents who may have feared that Craigdarroch would be too permissive.

On the other hand, the document describes a school that would emphasize individual learning "in which forced teaching on a group basis from above will give way to the individual stimulation to learn applied to each child." The school would have few formal "lectures" and students would work on individual tasks in almost all subjects. This individual approach would be made possible by class sizes of not more than twenty children. The directors were confident "the creative method is known to produce happy, well adjusted, self-reliant, self-confident, and self-disciplined individuals who have a burning desire to continue to develop their thought processes and their education through their whole lifetimes." The term "creative method" means little in this context and the directors appear to have used it simply because they thought it would appeal to parents. What they describe is essentially a Progressive emphasis on individualized

learning arising out of the interests and capacity of the students.

The school prospectus, based largely on David Hummel's ideas, opens with a lofty statement:

> The purpose of Craigdarroch School will be to provide the best possible teaching staff, environment, facilities and programmes for both boys and girls to the end that each individual child may have optimum opportunity coupled with gentle but steady encouragement to develop to the highest degree possible all of his abilities and talents.[9]

The school promised to provide a "minimum basic education," individual progress at each child's optimum rate, the encouragement of varied interests, and instruction in both English and French. Although there would be no set curriculum, the prospectus states that the traditional subjects would be covered along with such skills as shorthand, typing, and speed reading. Teachers would aim to "awaken a deep thirst for knowledge so as to infect the children with enthusiasm for learning, thinking, and personal development." Students would be exposed to comparative religion and philosophy including the examination of such concepts as "truth, honesty, freedom, and tolerance." The directors hoped these subjects would "develop in each child a strong and sure personal and social conscience" and produce individuals ready to shoulder social responsibilities and thus alleviate the apathy they saw as a serious problem in Canada.[10] Lastly, similar to British Public Schools, Craigdarroch would nurture personal qualities including leadership, social conscience, and an "acceptable standard of morals, manners, and techniques for dealing with other people."[11] Like the earlier documents, the prospectus combines ideas from a variety of sources, most notably the British private school tradition and American progressivism. What the prospectus does not address is the pedagogical foundation upon which these objectives would rest.

For the first year of operation, the directors decided to restrict enrollment to twenty students aged five and six. Their intention was to add one grade per year right up to high school graduation. They sought "normal or superior" students and hoped to attract children from a

variety of family backgrounds. In order to achieve this variety they intended to keep the tuition moderate and to offer a few scholarships for families who were unable to afford it.[12]

Mr. Hummel created a simple system of governance whereby the school would be administered by the four person Board of Directors. But since his two business partners were simply on the Board for convenience and fund-raising and and would take no active part in the school's affairs, the effective governance was left to David Hummel and Charles Gregory. The Board was to appoint an Educational Policies Committee which would work closely with the teaching staff to develop specific educational policies. Andy Mikita became the key member of this group. General membership in the society itself was limited to the directors and their wives, an issue that would later become contentious among the parent body. The administration was efficient and worked well during the first year, but eventually parents wanted more of a say in the running of the school than this essentially business model provided.

Mr. Hummel provided most of the school's initial financing. In addition to the bank loan he had arranged, he and his business partners pledged a total of $8,000 to match donations they hoped would come from other sources. He actively sought donations from service organizations like the Lions Club and from among his network of business associates in Victoria. Tuition fees were $240 per year, but the enrollment of each child had to be accompanied by an annual (tax deductible) donation of $500 paid to the school by the family, or another individual or firm.[13] Although the fees were low by private school standards they were still beyond the means of families who were not professional or middle class families. Salaries were extremely low, and like all Canadian alternative schools at that time, Craigdarroch was run on a shoestring and finances were a constant problem.

Teachers

Mr. Hummel organized a public recruitment meeting during the second week of August, 1966 at the Red Lion Motor Hotel in Victoria, which he owned. Over sixty interested parents attended this event. They were addressed by Mr. Hummel, Dr. Gregory, Mr. Mikita, the school's newly hired head teacher, and a University of Victoria education professor serving on the school's Board of Advisors.[14] This successful meeting was followed by an open house held at the school a week later.

One interested parent at both events was Joan Schwartz. She had moved to Victoria from California with her family during the summer of 1965. Mrs. Schwartz had grown up in New York and Oakland and had earned a degree in Spanish from the University of Mexico and another degree in English and history from the University of California at Berkeley. Finally, she obtained a teaching certificate from the University of California at Davis and taught high school in California for seven years. She had a variety of other teaching experiences and worked with pre-school, elementary, and emotionally disturbed children. During her California teaching years Mrs. Schwartz became "restless about the public schools" and felt that administrators did not respect students. In her search for more humane ways of teaching children, she was influenced by the free school ideas of A.S. Neill's Summerhill, as well as by the teaching methods expressed in Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *Teacher*.[15]

Mrs. Schwartz grew up in a left-wing family, her father having been a Wobblie and a member of the American Communist Party until 1938. She was concerned about American political developments, particularly the McCarthy hearings of the early 1950s and the escalation of the Vietnam war during the mid-1960s. She was "not enthusiastic about what was happening in the United States" so when her husband was offered a teaching position at the University of Victoria they decided to move to Canada. It was too late in the season to apply for a teaching job so she took a modest position in the university library.[16]

During their first year in Victoria Mrs. Schwartz grew increasingly disappointed in the Victoria public schools which she experienced as very backward and excessively rigid. Her children were unhappy and she was appalled by the strict and sometimes cruel disciplinary methods used by many teachers. So when in August 1966 she saw a notice about a group of parents opening a new independent school with a "free and liberal atmosphere," she was immediately interested. She attended the informational meeting as well as the open house during which she spoke with David Hummel, Charles Gregory, and Andy Mikita. However, she was disappointed in her discussion with the head teacher and decided not to enroll her children. She describes the sequence of events.

> I read an advertisement in the paper about a group of parents who were forming a school in Victoria. I went to a meeting at the Red Lion Inn and they announced that they had a building, they had hired a head teacher, and that they were going to be accepting applications the following week at an open house. So I went with my two younger children but after talking with the head teacher for some length I decided this was not the school I wanted to put my children in. She spoke condescendingly to the children, there was no creativity, and she didn't seem to have any idea of what a free school was all about. There was little difference between her and any other public school teacher I had ever met. So I just went home. But I got a call that evening from Andy Mikita and he said "I noticed you didn't enroll your children" and he asked me why. I said I don't feel the goals your head teacher described to me and the goals that I have are on the same track. He asked me if I would come in the next day and talk with him about that. So I did and we spent three or four hours discussing education and what schools are all about. Then I left and didn't think too much more about it. About a week later I got a call offering me the job of head teacher at Craigdarroch School. I said, "But you have a head teacher," and he said, "Well, no we don't; we sat down and discussed the goals with her and we decided that her goals really weren't our goals." And that's how I got to be the head teacher of Craigdarroch School.[17]

Craigdarroch School opened on schedule in September 1966 with sixteen students, aged five to eight years old. The hiring of Joan Schwartz proved to be a most fortunate turn of events, for she was admired by everyone connected with the school community. Craigdarroch quickly became her school, informed by her philosophy and her manner of dealing with children. Ironically, she spoke Spanish but little French so the English/French bilingual nature of the school

was more fiction than reality. But nobody cared and the school quickly developed a happy environment and a close community—all this less than three months after David Hummel's original inspiration.

Mrs. Schwartz managed as the only full time teacher during the school's first year. She was assisted by two part-time teachers, Mary Jamieson who taught beginning reading and math, and Bett Bugslag who helped out with a variety of activities. Both were certified and experienced teachers who had taught in the public school system. Parents (mostly mothers) often came in to help with individualized reading or student supervision as well as regular tasks such as cleaning the school building.

With the growth of the school to over thirty students in the second year, Mrs. Schwartz hired two full-time teachers. They were from California and had come to Canada for political reasons and to avoid being drafted for the war in Vietnam. Both had university degrees in psychology but neither had a teaching certificate or experience. One teacher suggests that Mrs. Schwartz actually considered his lack of experience to be an asset since he would not be constrained by conventional public school values.

Rod Hyder, originally born in Canada, was hired in September, 1967 after arriving in Victoria from outside of Los Angeles. In addition to his immediate concern about the Vietnam war, he believed neighbourhoods and communities in southern California were deteriorating. He was "politically progressive, a supporter of counter-cultural ideas, and looking for change in society."[18] Mr. Hyder taught at Craigdarroch for over two years and is remembered fondly by many students. John Andrews arrived in early 1968 and soon became friendly with several members of Victoria's academic and literary community. He remembers, for example, Thursday evening readings at the home of well-known poet Robin Skelton. He met Mrs. Schwartz through these connections and was hired to teach at Craigdarroch later in the second year. He remembers being received warmly by the school community.[19]

The school attracted a well-to-do and professional parent body, "the Oak Bay crowd,"

during its first two years. Well over half were doctors, lawyers, and university teachers. Of the twenty or so families involved in the school there were six doctors, four lawyers, and three university professors. Craigdarroch differed from other alternative schools during this period in its primarily upper middle class clientele. This may be due to the British and private school character of Victoria during that time and to the moderately stated philosophy of the school. Few of the original parents were overtly influenced by the new lifestyles of the 1960s.[20]

However, the socio-economic makeup of Craigdarroch was not entirely homogeneous. Three families lived a mainly subsistance lifestyle in rural Metchosin, a sharp contrast to the professional majority. One of these families, originally from Ontario, had been early C.C.F. supporters and had been farming organically for many years, long before it became popular. A second family, their neighbours, were pacifists (conscientious objector originally from Germany) and had been active in the Unitarian Church and the Voice of Women. In all, four families in modest circumstances paid less than the full tuition fees. The school's leaders were also proud of the fact that they provided a full scholarship for an aboriginal student, a member of the well known Hunt family of Vancouver Island carvers and artists. Although these families did not socialize with the wealthier parents and did not participate in the running of the school, by all accounts everyone got along well. Parents participated keenly in the life of the school but most were not involved in day-to-day operations, policy decisions, or school finances.

Parents described Craigdarroch as a progressive, liberal, or creative school (although Mrs. Schwartz based her teaching methods partially on Summerhillian free school principles). Most parents were conservative in outlook but with enough liberal and individualistic ideas to want for their children more freedom than in the public school system or in more traditional private schools. The individuality of the children was highly valued so that they could (in the jargon of the day) "be free to become themselves." Craigdarroch parents were looking for a school with small classes, individualized learning, and an emphasis on the creative arts, without the rigid discipline or authoritarian outlook encountered in other schools whether public or private. But

other than a general notion that the public schools were inadequate, most parents were vague about their specific objections.

The school building was an old house that had been converted to a kindergarten some years earlier. It had two medium sized rooms that made effective classrooms as well as a large kitchen and good sized playground. The school was informal—students wore whatever they wanted and called teachers by their first names, both unusual practices in those days. One parent wrote: "The tyranny of clothing is unknown at Craigdarroch; our daughter comes home smeared with paint and dirt, in her play clothes."[21]

Curriculum

The organizational structure of the school was "free flowing." Mr. Hyder and other teachers remember that a typical day began at 9:00 with free play and a discussion of the day's events. By about 9:15 the teachers started organizing group activities. This was often spontaneous; "I'm going to do a group in math; who's going to join me?" or "Over here we can do some singing, and over there you can read."[22] There were usually three groups of five to ten students. The activity typically began with a twenty minute instructional lesson followed by individualized work and would last up to an hour depending on the students' interest.[23] As one teacher recalls "if we were on a roll we would stay with it; if they were restless we would stop."[24] As Mrs. Schwartz put it, "There are no set periods, the children work at their own pace, and no lesson ever stops until the students want to stop."[25] After a period of play and unstructured work new groups would form later in the morning, and if the school was not going on a field trip there was usually a third group activity in the afternoon.

Students had the right to decide whether or not to participate in any activity. The teachers encouraged the children to attend lessons regularly and most did. But, as one student recalls, "they would try to convince us (to do academics) but they would never force us; if we didn't want

to they would leave us to what we were doing." Students would fade out of classes they weren't enjoying and a group of ten and eleven year old boys did little academic work. One of these recalls that "we were left to our own devices to ask for tutoring in any subject. I did very little academic work except for math. I loved math."[26] Another student who didn't learn to read until she attended public school in grade four says: "Academics weren't the focus of the school. They weren't ignored but they weren't pushed either. If you wanted to learn something you sought out a teacher—you had to go and tug on somebody's sleeve."[27] Dr. Gregory commented in the *Victoria Colonist* in June, 1968 as the school was completing its second year:

> I think the school is doing what it set out to do in 1966. We've sought a free atmosphere in which kids can learn to like learning. I make no extravagant claims about academic achievement at Craigdarroch. We're not after that.[28]

Nevertheless, the teaching staff issued written reports to parents on academic progress several times per year. These were anecdotal reports with no letter grades in which the teachers commented on each child's progress and activities in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, art, music, drama, dance, and foreign languages. The reports were detailed and encouraging but were relatively ordinary by today's standards.[29] Although progress according to traditional grade levels was not a major school objective and there was little or no testing, parents believed their children were doing well. Mr. Hummel boasted to a Lions Club meeting in May, 1967 that six Grade One pupils were already working at the upper Grade Two level. Eight others were working at the upper Grade One level, and two students, though behind academically, were doing well in creative and artistic activities.[30] The school's primary academic aim was summed up in the 1967 Prospectus:

> Not all children are expected to do the same things at the same time, but rather the development of their individual skills and talents is encouraged. Each child progresses in small ungraded classes with no competitive examinations. No rigid curriculum is used since the school provides a flexible vehicle for each child's education. The primary aim of Craigdarroch is to create an environment where children can teach themselves how to learn.[31]

Mrs. Schwartz developed two major foundations for her programme. The first was nature study. She and the students took two to three field trips every week to the beach, the forest, and local parks to identify plants and to explore and investigate the world of nature. Sometimes she would bring in science professors from the university to act as resource people whereas at other times she would teach the concepts herself. Mrs. Schwartz recalls doing a great deal of reading about science during her evenings at home. Students examined life in tide pools and observed salmon in streams and several students recall how the study of marine life at the beach "made it come to life."[32] The nature study usually led to other interdisciplinary learning and the students often engaged in reading, math, and measuring activities right there in the woods. They were encouraged to work on ongoing projects and one student remembers "studying the preying mantis for weeks."[33] The school had numerous pets which children would take turns caring for. There was also a school garden as one student recalls:

> Everyone had their own little plot in the big garden. We tended the garden every day, weeded it and watered it. We could choose what we wanted to grow, vegetables or flowers. Carmen and I grew roses. It was a real source of pride.[34]

A second important theme was food and culture. Mrs. Schwartz used food and cooking as a window into learning about other cultures. The school had a large kitchen and students made bread, tortillas, refried beans, wonton soup, and Indian curries. During an extended study of India a local Indian woman came in and taught the children to make saris and samosas. The unit culminated with a student dramatization of the Ramayana. Students studied a variety of world cultures including Indian, African, Japanese, and Inuit and one student remembers how he enjoyed being free to spend extensive periods of time on a single subject.

As a former high school teacher Mrs. Schwartz had no training in the teaching of beginning reading. Although she read widely on the subject, she admits she sometimes exhibited more "hutzpah" than sense. She tried different techniques with different students. She approached the First Nations child with Sylvia Ashton-Warner's methods and that child was

successful in learning to read that year. Another bright boy only had to be taught the fundamentals of phonics and he was "off and running." Although times were sometimes set aside for math and individual reading, Mrs. Schwartz tried to incorporate reading and math into "everything we did" according to her belief that knowledge is interrelated. Students read on their own or aloud with teachers and teachers often read to small groups of students sitting in a circle. Teachers sought to stimulate writing activies. These sometimes approximated the "whole language" approach of thirty years later; a child would dictate a story, which would be written down by a teacher. The story was then read aloud and illustrated by the student. Some students recall many writing activities while others did less. Some students were taught to "spell' with the Initial Teaching Alphabet (I.T.A.) though spelling and grammar were not high priorities.

Most students worked through the regular mathematics curriculum for their level at their own pace. One student, now an accountant, recalls the use of cuisenaire rods and how "they made so much sense to me; they made the math click."[35] Several students were "math whizzes" and spent most of their time on that subject progressing far beyond their grade level.[36] French never did become a regular part of the programme but French and Spanish lessons were offered to interested students by two part-time teachers.

Creative and artistic activities were emphasized. Many students have vivid memories of classes in dance and creative movement taught by Judith Koltai, a school parent. She would put on music and darken the room to create a meditative mood and then suggest an image, such as a flower blooming, to encourage the students to move in imaginative ways. "She had all thirty rowdy kids working on their own at the same time."[37] One student credits her lifelong interest in dance to Mrs. Koltai's movement classes.[38] One of the teachers played guitar and students enjoyed singing together on a regular basis. Students learned folk dances, used rhythm instruments, and made drums, tambourines, and fiddles. Local musicians played regularly at the school. Students spent a good deal of time painting, drawing, making clay sculpture, learning to sew, and working with other art materials. Students also spent considerable time writing,

rehearsing, and performing plays,[39] and one former student says that without her experience at Craigdarroch she would not be a performing actress today.[40]

Like other alternative schools Craigdarroch made extensive use of community resources and students visited museums, art galleries, the Parliament buildings, a Greek freighter, a bakery, farms, factories, the observatory, and the firehall. They also enjoyed picnics, visiting parks, and hiking up local mountains such as Mount Douglas and Mount Tolmie. A favourite student activity was watching National Film Board films as one student recalls: "We would choose them from the N.F.B. catalogue. We would watch them forwards and then we would watch them backwards. It was a tradition. So films would take twice as long!"[41]

Students spent a considerable portion of the day playing. They dressed up in costumes, listened to music, and played an assortment of indoor games, but most of their time was spent outside building forts, digging in the sand, and generally hanging out having a good time. The school had a tree-filled playground in the back garden and students spent a great deal of time climbing trees. The tree climbing became a joke among teachers and students, for the adults knew that when the children were in the trees there was no point trying to entice them to come down. Most former students remember their Craigdarroch school days as a happy time.

Students also remember getting along well together and disputes were usually resolved through discussion with the help of the teachers. On the other hand, there was some bullying and the occasional fight, and one former student suggests this behaviour was too often unchecked by the teachers. The staff attempted to teach the children to settle their problems without fighting and Mrs. Schwartz claimed that "kids who used to settle everything by fighting now often settle matters by communication. We want them to join the world with this attitude."[42] Social interaction was considered to be an important aspect of student growth. One former student recalls: "You couldn't be a loner. We were always encouraged to participate in a group; we were taken by the hand to become involved in the group dynamic."[43] However, the older boys pretty much had their run of the school and are described by one parent as being a "wild bunch" while

a former student admits that "we were a rowdy group." Despite this there were few serious incidents and students were not restrained as long as they did not harm anyone else.

For the most part, Craigdarroch avoided one of the most serious problems encountered by many alternative schools—a significant influx of students with behaviour or emotional problems. This was partly due to an explicit decision of the board not to take disturbed children, and to the fact their enrollment was large enough that they were not compelled to take in such cases. Nevertheless, a few kids with behaviour problems did end up at the school and some former students found them disruptive. However, the problem kids usually did not stay longer than a few months.

Student and teacher meetings were held roughly once a week and most decisions were made democratically by the entire group. Students felt they had genuine input into school decisions and on one occasion even influenced a staffing issue. There was frequent interaction between children and teachers; Craigdarroch students learned at an early age to hold their own verbally with adults. There were "rap sessions" and occasional mock court sessions initiated by the students to deal with misbehaviour as, for example, when a group of older kids threw stones at the guinea pigs.

Craigdarroch grew to thirty-three students aged five to twelve for its second year of operation. Accounts in the Victoria newspapers note that the school was full by mid-August and had already begun to compile a waiting list for 1968/69.[44] The increase was due to word of mouth, a successfully completed first year, and positive articles in the two Victoria daily newspapers. Curiously, the 1967 school prospectus continued to portray Craigdarroch as a school "conducted in both French and English" but this description was now secondary to "A Progressive and Creative School."[45] The school optimistically began its second year with a doubled enrollment, an enlarged and enthusiastic teaching staff, and a supportive parent community. The curriculum became somewhat freer during the second year, partly due to the influence of the younger teachers, but Craigdarroch was much the same as it had been during its

successful first year.

The school also moved to a more spacious location on a large piece of property near Fort Street owned by Mrs. Hummel's parents. The school had outgrown the building on Joan Crescent and the new site provided plenty of room for classroom activities and play. There were two small flat-roofed buildings each with two small classroom sized rooms. The teachers organized the four rooms as activity centres for different school subjects, one room for art and music, one room for math and science activities, one as a reading centre that would also house the school library, and one room for general purposes. The buildings were situated on a secluded lot almost an acre in size providing a huge natural playground, and the children spent long periods of time outside. According to one teacher, the site and natural setting helped the school to flourish.

Despite differences of opinion and economic background, the school community was close. Some families and students became good friends, students spent time at each other's houses, and some relationships continued for many years. This togetherness was enhanced by school camping trips; Mr. Hyder particularly remembers trips to such locations as Ladysmith Park, Ivy Green Park, and Goldstream. He, his wife, and a few students would set up an advance camp while the others would follow later in the day. These trips would often last three to four days with up to forty people in attendance. In general, students remember their Craigdarroch years as a happy and secure time. It is tempting to dismiss this sentiment as romantic childhood reminiscences but former students of all backgrounds and ages hold similar memories. One student remembers the school as an upbeat place where he always felt good.[46] Another student recalls: "We were like a family; we felt safe. These people were our community. We knew they would look after us."[47] One parent describes the school as a "pleasant, easygoing, happy place full of noise, activity, confusion, and mess."[48]

Crises and Change

Two pivotal changes occurred during the second year that would alter the direction of the school. First, there was a campaign by some parents for a more democratic decision making structure. This group was led by Leah Brown who, though far from a political radical, was nevertheless influenced by current liberal ideas about participatory democracy. Mrs. Brown believed that David Hummel, through his appointed Board of Directors, was too autocratic in his relations with parents. She argued that since the school was primarily supported by parents' fees, the parent body should make the decisions.[49] Mr. Hummel maintained that since he had initially financed the school mainly with his own money, and since the school was running smoothly anyway, they should retain the status quo.

Things came to a head at a contentious general meeting in January 1968. The parent body decided to change the constitution to allow all parents to become members of the governing Craigdarroch School Society, and the appointed Board of Directors was replaced by an elected board of seven members. In elections to fill the new board Leah Brown was elected President, Charles Gregory was elected Vice-President, and founder David Hummel was ousted from the board entirely.[50] This was a sad end to his involvement in the school for without his energy, practical organizational experience, and willingness to try something new, Craigdarroch School would not have gotten off the ground. His son transferred to a traditional private school at the end of the year.

With a gradual change in the school's general direction, and the fact that Mr. Hummel's business interests were demanding more of his attention, the family may not have remained for the long term anyway. As it happens, Mr. Hummel relocated to the United States several years later and has lived there ever since. Mr. Mikita left the school at the end of the first year, leaving Dr. Gregory and Mrs. Brown as the dominant members of the governing group.[51]

This change in leadership did not occur in a vacuum. By 1968/69 the parent body and the

school's philosophy were undergoing a subtle shift more in keeping with the free school ideas of the time. Some new parents were more overtly idealistic in their political and educational thinking. Exemplary of this group was Vance Peavy, a professor of psychology, counselling, and education at the University of Victoria. He had recently left the United States, disillusioned by the Vietnam war and political assassinations. Dr. Peavy was a liberal democrat and sympathized with the experimental values prevalent in the late 1960s. A few parents inclined to counterculture lifestyles joined the school community. Others, exposed to the educational and cultural ideas of the 1960s, had become more liberal in their thinking and were more accepting of a laissez-faire attitude in the school.

The second event that would effect the future of Craigdarroch School was the resignation of Joan Schwartz in June 1968. This was not due to any dissatisfaction, but because the family had decided to leave Victoria. Her husband had been one of three professors fired the previous year under contentious circumstances and he had been offered a job elsewhere. This came as a shock to the school community, but the Board of Directors reluctantly accepted her resignation. The Board then asked Barbara Williams, an original Craigdarroch parent, to take over as head teacher. Ironically, the Schwartz family plans changed at the last minute, but it was too late. Mrs. Schwartz eventually went back to the United States. She subsequently pursued successful careers in library science and as a writer but she never returned to teaching.

Joan Schwartz's impact on Craigdarroch School cannot be overstated. She turned a collection of haphazard ideas into a unified vision. She is described by former parents and teachers as "inspired," "a natural," "prodigious," and "a born leader." One former student describes her as "the brains and the spirit" of the school while another says simply "she got us involved." She combined a creative and child-centred view of teaching with the practical experience and skill necessary to make it a reality. According to one parent "she could handle thirty-five kids at all different age levels—she made Craigdarroch an exciting place."[52] According to another "she was the genius behind the school; she had a way of knowing where all the children

were at."[53] Although she gave the students genuine freedom she made the academic work so interesting as to inspire most of them to take part.[54] She loved the children and had great faith in their judgement and abilities. By all accounts they responded accordingly. As one former student puts it "Joan left a big hole; we all wanted her to come back."[55]

One consequence of Mr. Hummel's departure was that the school could not remain on his family's property and would once again have to move. Finding another appropriate location was a problem that would never be solved. The school moved to the Browns' house for the summer and then reopened in a large house with a huge yard owned by Dr. Gregory in the university area. This was followed by several months at the Boy Scout hall in Cadboro Bay. But none of these locations satisfied the health and fire department licensing codes and the school had to continue moving. For several months the school split into three separate groups each meeting with one teacher in a private house (the Williams, the Goughs, and the Morrisons). This had some positive consequences in providing the teachers an opportunity to work effectively with smaller groups, but it was a big responsibility for the three home owners and overall it was disruptive to the spirit of the school. As one student puts it "the fabric of the community was damaged." The school finally found a semi-permanent home when head teacher Mrs. Williams arranged through her membership in the Unitarian Church for the school to meet in the church hall in James Bay. The physical space was well suited to the school's activities but, as is often the case when a school is housed in someone else's building, the teachers felt constrained by their concern about protecting the hall.

Despite the change of leadership at both board and staff levels as well as the physical dislocation, Craigdarroch's enrollment increased again to forty-two students from five to twelve. The teaching staff grew to four full-time members as Sam Le Barron joined Mrs. Williams, Mr. Hyder, and Mr. Andrews. The school's tuition structure was simplified with a basic fee of $600 for the first child in each family, $500 for the second, and $300 for the third. The school community looked forward to its third year of operation with cautious optimism.

One problem with Mrs. Schwartz's leadership was that the school became too dependent on her personal skill. Parents didn't much care what her theory of learning was because her system worked with the children. During her tenure the parent group did not have to come to terms with the wide range of opinion that existed about how structured the school should be. This was similar to the trust that New School parents placed in Lloyd Arntzen. But after Mrs. Schwartz's departure the factions and disagreements came to the forefront and would trouble the school for the remainder of its existence. This created a very difficult situation for her successor.

Barbara Williams was British and had come to Victoria from Kenya with her family. She was an experienced teacher who had trained in Progressive methods. She objected to the large classes in the public school system and to what she saw as controlling and unimaginative teachers. Mrs. Williams was influenced by John Dewey's writings and believed in the importance of individualized learning and the creative arts. Perhaps the most significant aspect of her background was her formal training in the kindergarten and nature-study methods of Freidrich Froebel. Although she supported an informal classroom, she believed in more teacher-directed activities and less student freedom than did Mrs. Schwartz. She recalls that her interpretation of freedom was different from the other staff members and a significant number of parents: "I wanted regulated freedom—freedom to learn."[56]

Craigdarroch entered a troubled and difficult year in September, 1968. Mrs. Williams recalls that the "three young men" on staff all had different interpretations of freedom—for the most part, they "didn't want to lay a trip on the children."[57] Neither could the parent body agree on how much structure they wanted. Some parents desired a great deal of freedom for their children and, according to Mrs. Williams, asked her to discontinue keeping records on the children. But another group of parents was becoming increasingly restless because they believed their children were not learning anything even though Mrs. Williams implemented more formal learning activities than had Mrs. Schwartz. By this time the school was split right down the middle. Discussions became rancorous and one parent remembers a serious debate about whether

a child should be forced to wear a life jacket in a boat while another recalls being laughed at "by the hippies" for arguing that individualized learning and academic rigour were not incompatible.[58] Neither Mrs. Williams nor the other teachers were wholeheartedly supported by the parent community.

The problem came to a head on November 20, 1968 when over a dozen parents came to a meeting of the Educational Policies Committee. The parents were particularly dissatisfied with what they saw as a lack of academic standards and maintained that their children were bored at school. Several parents expressed concern about the "hippy element" and the "slovenly, sloppy situation" in the school, and one of the doctors objected to students addressing him by his first name. Several others believed there was a misunderstanding of the meaning of "freedom" and two parents cited instances where their children had come home during the school day without the teachers knowing. The general feeling among these parents was that their children were not learning anything and were no longer happy at school.[59]

The crux of the issue was a basic disagreement about how much freedom students should be given and how much emphasis should be placed on academic work. One parent described his position:

> One terrific thing regarding the children is that they are starting to have a capacity to love and a sense of genuineness. But they are ignorant. My eight year old cannot write the alphabet and cannot add 8 plus 3. My ten year old has forgotten everything he learned at Glenlyon School two years ago. I thought this kind of school would provide an intellectual stimulus. For me it is not satisfactory to have a child who goes through five or six years of being turned on and being really happy without learning anything.[60]

Another parent objected that "there is very little reading, writing, or projects of interest. The children are reverting to playing only because of lack of interest. It is up to the teachers to interest the children and teach them." Another put it this way: "My feeling is around the word freedom. I am worried because of the lack of academic work. I am realistic enough to feel I have to do a few things I don't like in order to survive. Children have to have a basic minimum of

knowledge to go ahead." And still another parent said:

> Freedom of choice between various activities is a good thing. But if a kid continues to opt out there is a problem that should be looked into carefully. A healthy involved child will explore and choose, but freedom of choice is a sham if there is nothing going on to catch his interest.[61]

But some parents were content with the amount of freedom offered in the school and criticized the others for hypocrisy. As one such parent put it: "What these parents really want is for their children to learn to read and write. They put their children into a free school hoping they would learn. I want my child to be happy and to learn those things that he wants to."[62]

In response to the parental criticism Mr. Andrews admitted candidly: "The complaint about lack of alternatives is valid. I had no teaching experience and it has been a continuing learning process. I am still learning." Mrs. Williams suggested the problems were partly caused by the restrictive physical space at the Scout Hall. More importantly, she acknowledged that she "has been bringing in more structure which has bothered the boys. The tightening of authority has caused some upset." She also admitted to some disagreement over this issue with Mr. Andrews but in response to being called a weak teacher she explained: "It was a very permissive school at the end of last year. To suddenly change would not have worked and therefore I held back."[63]

The meeting concluded with a philosophical discussion of freedom, responsibility, and curriculum. President Leah Brown suggested that parents consider once again whether Craigdarroch "is a free school or a progressive school." Another parent raised the question: "Are learning and being happy somehow incompatible? I do not think they are. This is probably the basic issue." A constructive discussion centred on how to interest the students in academic work to ensure that they learn the basic subjects. Board member and long-term parent Dr. Derek French summed up the meeting:

> What are we going to do about the curriculum? How is the academic ability of the child going to be evaluated? Children are bound to move in and out for various reasons. If a child reaches the end of the school year and is behind his options are limited. We cannot, therefore, just dismiss this. Some parents would be content with a happy hobo. Most parents have reacted against the forcing of skills, but surely there is some happy medium.[64]

Although no resolution was reached at this meeting or for the remainder of the school year, the central questions at issue were clarified, and the most dissatisfied parents withdrew their children from the school. Mrs. Williams was in a difficult position. She realized that imposing a more formal academic programme on students who were not used to it would best be done gradually. But she was unable to motivate students sufficiently in a non-coercive environment and was criticized by parents for not providing enough structure. Furthermore, she was hampered by a lack of staff unanimity in support of her views. Without broad-based community support Mrs. Williams could not have succeeded and she did not return as head teacher in September 1969. Disagreement about her programme had produced a serious deterioration in the community's ability to work together. For Mrs. Williams, the constant pressure to do things differently undermined her ability to do an effective job.

The school could not win. If Mrs. Williams had stayed a number of families would have left the school. But with her departure, the school lost those parents who had supported her and enrollment dropped from forty-two to twenty-five. Similar to many alternative schools, the parents who left were those who had been most able to support the school financially. As if this was not enough, the Unitarian Hall which had been provided to the school because of the connection with Mrs. Williams was no longer available.

Craigdarroch School was left with a drastically reduced enrollment, no location, and in financial crisis. A number of parents began to fear that their children's educational future was at risk and one former student believes the school had lost its sense of purpose. Eventually the school reopened in a rented house near Esquimalt with Mr. Hyder as acting head teacher. The school continued to move in the direction of more freedom and one student who had been there

from the beginning describes the atmosphere as "pretty anarchistic." With the community spirit deteriorating, the teachers disillusioned, and no prospect of the financial situation improving, Craigdarroch School could not continue. It closed for good in December, 1969.[65] Most of the students returned to the public school system after the teachers had given them a crash course in the procedures of traditional schools. The school's only assets, the furniture, were sold. And perhaps not surprisingly, the outstanding bills were sent to Mr. Hummel.

Conclusion

The accounts of the school's closure in the Victoria newspapers cite the "split among parents over educational philosophy" as the key factor in contributing to the school's downfall. Clem Chapple, writing in the *Victoria Colonist*, correctly describes Craigdarroch's beginnings as a "liberalized private school stressing the humanities." He then describes the school's shift in direction to a school modelled after "the famous Summerhill":

> Children were allowed to progress at their own speeds and to select subjects of study at will. There were no tests, no report cards, no schedules. Most of the few rules were formulated by students.[66]

Part of the problem was that the founders of Craigdarroch did not have a clear idea of what kind of school they wanted. Some desired a liberal version of the standard British private school without the traditionalist emphasis on rote learning and harsh discipline. Others were looking for a more consumer friendly school than what was being offered by the public schools. But as the 1960s unfolded, innovative educational ideas were everywhere in the air and the school attracted moderate and radical individuals of all stripes. Most of the newcomers wanted far more freedom for their children than did the founding group. These contending ideologies of moderate progressivism and radical romanticism eventually brought the school to a standstill.

In relying more heavily on the "gifted teacher" than on a coherent educational plan, Mr.

Hummel and his colleagues remained fuzzy about what their school stood for. For example, although they claimed to be a Progressive school almost nowhere in their literature were the ideas of John Dewey or other Progressive thinkers mentioned. Furthermore, it was not clear that they knew how to recognize a gifted teacher and the parents' failure to agree on a consistent pedagogy was nowhere more evident than in their personnel decisions. They hired one head teacher because she was bilingual but was unfamiliar with innovative methods, another who was sympathetic to Summerhill even though the parents did not want a free school, and a third who was much more structured in her approach than most parents wanted. Only in a period of crisis were pedagogical issues seriously debated.

Craigdarroch School and the New School make a useful comparison in this regard. Like other parent-run alternative schools, both had problems with ideology and staffing issues. Both schools were split, some parents favouring a Progressive school, others wanting a school like Summerhill. Neither had a comprehensive system for evaluating teachers. But the differences between the two were at least as significant. The New School was a more participatory and politically aware group more intensely involved in day-to-day operation, policy decisions, and school financing than were the Craigdarroch parents. Disagreements about educational goals were more evident and disputes more contentious at the New School than they were at Craigdarroch. New School parents often discussed the ideas of major educational thinkers but this occurred far less frequently at Craigdarroch.[67]

Whether Craigdarroch offered a "basic minimum education" is open to question. Similar to the New School, the absence of a compulsory curriculum resulted in a number of gaps. Some students report missing fundamentals in mathematics such as times tables, while others lacked basics in spelling and grammar. One student never learned to read at Craigdarroch although she began reading almost immediately when she entered public school in grade four. Two students report being years ahead in math and science but way behind in grammar and "didn't know what a noun was." Another was behind in math but far ahead in everything else. One student, although

she enjoyed her year at the school, recalls that she "knew she wasn't learning anything and felt nervous about it." She found herself quite far behind when she returned to public school and "felt I more or less missed a year of school; only missing one year was a kind of grace."[68] One former student says she did not develop study habits while another reports that his return to public school was a good thing because "I was a kid who needed more discipline."

However, most former students report that the school succeeded in teaching them how to learn, and they received enough of the basics to facilitate their further education. Most also indicate their academic progress did not suffer when they returned to traditional schools and students have pursued a wide variety of careers. Whether this would have been the case if Craigdarroch had been longer lived is debatable.

Many students found public school culture a shock when they left Craigdarroch. One former student, now a successful actress, found it "oppressive." "I thought I was in the army; I refused to wear a dress and finally the principal gave in." Another, now a lawyer, found public school "traumatic." "I felt trapped, claustrophobic. The discipline was ridiculous and I was incredibly bored." Still another says: "I hated it—the strap, wearing dresses, lining up, the Lord's Prayer." This type of reaction was common among students from all types of alternative schools. But in the case of Craigdarroch students it did not profoundly affect their academic futures.

Although Mr. Hummel and the other founders did not achieve much of their original vision, Craigdarroch School did provide an environment where individual interests and personal values were nurtured. Former students believe they learned many things that benefitted their personal and professional lives. Some of these were creativity and an interest in the arts, an ability to question, developing a sense of self, a strong sense of community, and exposure to 1960s ideals. One student says: "We grew up learning how to set our own boundaries and think for ourselves. I grieved when I had to leave there."[69] Another says: "I was lucky to have gone there. My eyes were opened. I grew up not being afraid of people. Nothing fazed me. I knew I could do whatever I wanted to do."[70]

Several female students believe the school provided an opportunity for their growth as women. One remembers an equality of expectations; no one was discouraged from a particular activity because they were a girl or a boy.[71] Another was impressed at an early age by the fact that Craigdarroch was essentially female run in contrast to the traditionally patriarchal society that existed in Victoria.[72]

Almost all former students evaluate their experience at the school as positive and some were deeply affected by their exposure to the Craigdarroch community. One student remembers that time as a "two year period when what I did was different from what most people did."[73] Another says "I can't imagine three or four years being more profound. It was an intense experience, a strong part of my life, both the people and the situation. We knew the school was different."[74] Another was "devastated to be taken out of the school. I remember to this day the day I left."[75] Still another says simply: "It broke my heart to leave Craigdarroch."[76]

Craigdarroch School was clearly influenced by the prevalent ideas and experimental lifestyles of the 1960s even though a relatively small minority of parents were political radicals or "hippies." One student describes how her mother was influenced by the 1960s, "not the trends but the ideas and the ideals"[77] while another suggests that:

> We were taught by Berkeley radicals. Our parents were sympathetic even though they may have lived in the Uplands. They didn't look the part but they were influenced by the ideas.[78]

Former parent Vance Peavy sees an obvious relationship between the school and the ambiance of the 1960s: "there wouldn't have been Craigdarroch School if not for the 1960s—it was a unique period of time."

Former participants also see a clear relationship between private alternative schools like Craigdarroch and the later publicly supported alternative schools. Dr. Peavy says: "These schools of the sixties laid the foundation for alternative schools. The school created an environment that supported kids and brought hope into the lives of people that were

discouraged."[79] A former student believes the idea that parents have a right to be actively involved in their children's education came directly from alternative schools.[80] William Stavdal, education writer for the *Victoria Colonist* during the 1960s and a parent at Craigdarroch, reflects on the factors that would lead the Victoria School District to create Sundance School in 1973:

> It was beyond question a response to pressure from all sides for a more innovative kind of education. Everything was in ferment, everything was being questioned. It was in the air. I'm sure the genealogy of much that is occurring in today's education system can be traced to the challenges thrown up by the alternative schools of the sixties. Even when they appeared to fail they won a moral victory in their enduring influence.[81]

Whether or not Craigdarroch School had any lasting influence on education in Victoria, it certainly affected those who went there. It offered an alternative for parents who believed traditional schools were inhumane, rigid, and uninspiring. For most students Craigdarroch provided an interlude to their traditional schooling—an interesting educational environment and a supportive community despite its lack of a solid pedagogical foundation. The school changed a great deal during its three and a half years as it was difficult to escape the influence of the 1960s counterculture. Craigdarroch School and the other two moderate Progressive schools (Argenta Friends School and the New School) had to change with the times and all developed at least some characteristics of a free school by 1967. Inspired by Summerhillian Romanticism and the North American counterculture, the free school period was about to begin in British Columbia.

NOTES

1. David Hummel, personal interview, January 7, 1997.
2. David Hummel, "Ideas Concerning A New School," unpublished paper, June 22, 1966, archive of William Stavdal, Victoria.
3. David Hummel, "Ideas Concerning A New School," unpublished paper, June 22, 1966, archive of William Stavdal.
4. Charles Gregory, personal interview, February 21, 1997.
5. Andy Mikita, personal interview, June 9, 1997.
6. David Hummel, "Notes for the Press on Announcing Craigdarroch School," August 5, 1966, archive of William Stavdal, Victoria.
7. David Hummel, "Notes for the Press on Announcing Craigdarroch School," August 5, 1966, archive of William Stavdal.
8. *Victoria Colonist*, "Independent School Will Teach By New Methods," August 6, 1966.
9. Craigdarroch School, Prospectus, 1966, archive of William Stavdal.
10. David Hummel, "Notes for the Press on Announcing Craigdarroch School," August 5, 1966, archive of William Stavdal.
11. Craigdarroch School, Prospectus, 1966, archive of William Stavdal.
12. Craigdarroch School, Prospectus, 1966, archive of William Stavdal.
13. Craigdarroch School, Prospectus, 1966, archive of William Stavdal.
14. Bill Stavdal, "School Seeks Atmosphere of Freedom" in *Victoria Colonist*, August 10, 1966; and David Hummel, "Notes for the Press on Announcing Craigdarroch School," page 5.
15. Elizabeth Bennett, "Progressive System Used in New School," in *Victoria Times*, January 19, 1968, page 19.
16. Joan Ormondroyd, personal interview, February 26, 1997.
17. Joan Ormondroyd, personal interview, February 26, 1997.
18. Jesse Hyder, personal interview, February 6, 1997.
19. John Andrews, personal interview, February 18, 1997.
20. Major participating families were the Hummels, Gregorys, Browns, Williams, Grahams, Clarks, Frenches, Graffs, Stavdals, Dickmans, Peavys, Schmidts, Carrosfelds, Goughs, and Morrisons.
21. Bill Stavdal, "She Thrives on Freedom," *Victoria Colonist*, June 9, 1968, p. 5,
22. Claire Schwartz, personal interview, April 15, 1997.
23. Jesse Hyder, personal interview, February 6, 1997.
24. Mary Jamieson, personal interview, January 15, 1997.
25. Joan Schwartz quoted by Guy Stanley, "School Experiment in Freedom" *Victoria Times*, June 1, 1967, page 31.
26. Tom Koltai, personal interview, February 17, 1997.

27. Diane Brown, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
28. Charles Gregory quoted by Bill Stavdal in the *Victoria Colonist*, "Self-Disciplined Pupils or Ill-Mannered Brats?" June 9, 1968, 23.
29. Teacher reports on Lori-Jean Williams, February, 1967 to June, 1969, in the possession of the author.
30. *Victoria Times*, "New School Accents Joy of Learning," May 2, 1967, p. 23.
31. Craigdarroch School, Prospectus, 1967, Archive of William Stavdal.
32. Jonathan Gregory, personal interview, February 27, 1997.
33. Claire Schwartz, personal interview, April 15, 1997.
34. Diane Brown, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
35. Carmen Stavdal, personal interview, March 26, 1997.
36. Jonathan Gregory, personal interview, February 27, 1997.
37. Diane Brown, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
38. Kate McIntosh, personal interview, February 23, 1997.
39. Craigdarroch School, Prospectus, 1968, archive of William Stavdal.
40. Diane Brown, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
41. Diane Brown, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
42. Joan Schwartz quoted by Bill Stavdal in the *Victoria Colonist*, "Self-Disciplined Pupils or Ill-Mannered Brats?" June 9, 1968, p. 23.
43. Jonathan Gregory, personal interview, February 27, 1997.
44. *Victoria Times*, "Craigdarroch Booked Solid For Second Term," August 25, 1967, p. 17; and *Victoria Colonist*, "Progressive School Classes Full," August 25, 1967.
45. Craigdarroch School, Prospectus, 1967, Archive of William Stavdal.
46. Jonathan Gregory, personal interview, February 27, 1997.
47. Diane Brown, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
48. Bill Stavdal, personal interview, March 18, 1997.
49. Leah Muhleman, personal interview, March 12, 1997.
50. *Victoria Times*, "Private School Expands Society," January 31, 1968, p. 35.
51. Several parents speculate that Andy Mikita may have left the school due to a professional disagreement with Charles Gregory.
52. Charles Gregory, personal interview, February 21, 1997.
53. Ann Gregory, personal interview, February 28, 1997.
54. Andy Mikita, personal interview, June 9, 1997.
55. Diane Brown, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
56. Barbara Williams, personal interview, February 20, 1997.
57. Barbara Williams, personal interview, February 20, 1997.
58. Bill Stavdal, personal interview, March 18, 1997.
59. Craigdarroch School, Educational Policies Committee minutes, November 20, 1968, archive of William Stavdal, Victoria.

60. Educational Policies Committee minutes, November 20, 1968, comments attributed to Mr. Warren; archive of William Stavdal.
61. Educational Policies Committee minutes, November 20, 1968, comments attributed to Mr. Graff; archive of William Stavdal.
62. Educational Policies Committee minutes, November 20, 1968, archive of William Stavdal.
63. Educational Policies Committee minutes, November 20, 1968, comments of Barbara Williams and John Andrews; archive of William Stavdal.
64. Educational Policies Committee minutes, November 20, 1968, comments attributed to Dr. French; archive of William Stavdal.
65. Mr. Andrews eventually returned to California but Mr. Hyder remained in Victoria and is now a community school co-ordinator.
66. Clement Chapple, "'Free' Education Brought to End by Money Woes," *Victoria Colonist*, December 18, 1969, p. 15.
67. The only educator mentioned in any Craigdarroch literature was Jerome Bruner who was quoted in the 1967 Prospectus.
68. Ursula Peavy, personal interview, February 15, 1997.
69. Claire Schwartz, personal interview, April 16, 1997.
70. Carmen Stavdal, personal interview, march 26, 1997.
71. Carmen Stavdal, personal interview, March 26, 1997.
72. Diane Brown, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
73. Tom Koltai, personal interview, February 17, 1997.
74. Kate McIntosh, personal interview, February 23, 1997.
75. Carmen Stavdal, personal interview, March 26, 1997.
76. Diane Brown, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
77. Diane Brown, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
78. Kate McIntosh, personal interview, February 23, 1997.
79. Vance Peavy, personal interview, February 17, 1997.
80. Carmen Stavdal, personal interview, March 26, 1997.
81. William Stavdal, Letter to the author, March 29, 1997. Mr. Stavdal became executive assistant to Deputy Education Minister Jim Carter during the 1980s where he served for over ten years.

CHAPTER 4: THE BARKER FREE SCHOOL

Beginnings

Alternative schools in British Columbia remained in the Progressive tradition of John Dewey throughout the early to mid-1960s. But in the years after 1965 a new educational theory rooted in English Romanticism and inspired by A.S. Neill's Summerhill School began to appear in North America. This development co-incided with the arrival of Bob Barker in British Columbia from New York in the summer of 1965. Mr. Barker hoped to establish a "free school" in Vancouver, modelled after Summerhill. His school would differ from Progressive schools in its emphasis on more freedom for the children.

Although he had spent many years in the United States, Bob Barker was born in Saskatchewan in 1913 into a prominent manufacturing and banking family. His grandfather was a successful Liberal politician who served in the House of Commons and in the Manitoba cabinet during the 1880s and 1890s before being appointed to the Senate in 1900.[1] Mr. Barker's parents moved to the United States in 1921 but he spent his summers back in Canada and later attended Ridley College, an old "establishment" school in St. Catharines, Ontario. He graduated with a B.A. in English from Cornell University in 1935 and went to work in his father's furniture manufacturing business in Chicago.[2] He worked in sales and as production manager but left the firm after six years. Mr. Barker worked at many occupations during the next two decades including furniture design, carpentry, sales, and temporary odd jobs.[3] He also travelled extensively but never established himself in a long-term professional or business career.

Mr. Barker developed a social conscience in early adulthood and described himself years ago as someone who has "been fighting totalitarianism at home and abroad in my own way all my life" with "a deep sympathy for the oppressed and the vanquished."[4] This may have been a result of his experiences as a young adult during the depression and the Second World War. He became

a pacifist and was sent to prison for conscientious objection during the war, but was eventually allowed to join the ambulance corps in Italy in 1944.[5] After the war he spent a year in Paris with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association supervising the shipment of war surplus equipment to third world countries.[6]

Mr. Barker describes his interest in education as dating back to his university days being "entranced by the sounds of the little kids playing outside" in the Cornell Faculty of Education nursery school.[7] His particular interest in alternative education was not surprising given his political views, but may also have been sparked by his search for a suitable environment for his daughter who had a mild mental disability. He was a Romantic and cites Jean Jacques Rousseau, A.S. Neill, and Homer Lane as his chief sources of inspiration.[8]

Bob Barker's friendship with A.S. Neill, founder of Summerhill, was an important development in his life. They met in 1948 during Neill's first visit to the United States.[9] Mr. Barker had been impressed by an article about Summerhill in *Time* and attended Neill's successful lecture at the New School for Social Research in New York. They corresponded regularly and met several times during the next ten years. In 1958 Mr. Barker taught for a year at Summerhill under Neill's mentorship and enrolled his two children at the school.[10] Upon returning to New York the following year he studied education at Bank Street College, a teachers' college founded by the Progressive educator Lucy Sprague Mitchell.[11] While at Bank Street he did his student teaching at City and Country School, a well-known Progressive school in New York.[12] During this period from the late 1950s through the early 1960s Bob Barker was connected with several of the most significant Progressive and Romantic educators of the day.

By 1961, Mr. Barker was ready to fulfill the dream of starting his own school. He established the Barker Free School in Stony Point, upstate New York, in a building loaned to him by the public school board.[13] The school opened with thirty students and by the third year of operation enrolled fifty-five children aged four to fifteen. Mr. Barker believed that the Barker School was the first "free school" in North America.[14] He modelled his school after two

fundamental principles Neill had adopted at Summerhill: student attendance at classes would be voluntary, and school decisions (except on matters relating to health and safety) would be made at "community government" meetings where staff and students would all have equal voice. Although the students spent some time studying the "three R's," play was an essential part of school activity. Most staff members were experienced educators and one teacher, Mabel Chrystie, had attended Columbia Teachers College, the foremost training centre for Progressive teachers in the United States. She later founded the First Street School in 1964, a well-known free school in a poor neighbourhood of New York.[15]

By the end of the second year, however, some parents began to fear that their children were falling behind in academic skills. Several of these parents had been instrumental in raising the money to purchase a permanent building on thirteen wooded acres. Having won a majority of Board positions they decided to modify several school policies. Although the school continued to offer a Progressive education, two of Mr. Barker's basic practices, non-compulsory classes and community government, were eliminated. Mr. Barker stayed on for a few months but in December 1963 he resigned.[16]

Despite this setback Mr. Barker continued his educational pursuits. He taught for a term at Lewis-Wadhams School in upstate New York, a free school founded in 1963 by Herb Snitzer, another follower of A.S. Neill.[17] Mr. Barker also continued as a director of the Summerhill Society, an organization founded in 1961 less than six months after the publication of *Summerhill*.[18] The society hoped to popularize Neill's ideas in North America by publishing a regular newsletter and by supporting groups intending to establish schools based on Summerhill principles. The preamble to the society's constitution provides a useful synopsis of Neill's views on education:

> We hold that when children are given a responsible freedom, in a climate of understanding and non-possessive love, they choose with wisdom, learn with alacrity, develop genuinely social attitudes, and grow to be non-fearful, warm, and loving human beings.[19]

Several well-known educational critics were among the society's founders, including Paul Goodman who also sponsored the Barker School at Stony Point.[20]

In the spring of 1965, Mr. Barker saw an advertisement in the Summerhill Society newsletter for a teacher/director of the New School in Vancouver and decided to apply. Two New School parents interviewed him in New York and were impressed by his honesty, personal warmth, knowledge of Progressive methods, and openness to collaborating with parents. They noted his initiative: "At a time when the Summerhill Society in the U.S.A. was just talking about a Summerhill School, Bob Barker started his school by himself. He did everything: teaching, directing, fund-raising, purchasing, financing, and registering."[21] But most New School parents were committed to a Progressive school based on Dewey's philosophy and Mr. Barker didn't get the job. They found his ideas too laissez-faire, particularly the Summerhillian practice of not requiring students to attend classes.

However, some New School parents supported Bob Barker and, with their encouragement, he decided to move to British Columbia and try to establish a school based on Summerhill principles.[22] He spoke at a public meeting in downtown Vancouver in June 1965, and was featured in a full page article in the *Vancouver Times* entitled "This is School?"[23] But it was too late to organize a school in Vancouver by September, so Mr. Barker opened a small school in a house at Roberts Creek on the Sechelt Peninsula, where several families had expressed interest. However, enrollment in the fledgling school never exceeded six students and he decided to move to North Vancouver the following year.[24]

North Vancouver

This time, Mr. Barker found more enthusiasm for his educational ideas. He spoke on the radio several times, including an appearance on Jack Webster's popular programme, and gave several well attended public lectures at locations such as the downtown Y.W.C.A. and the

Unitarian Church in West Vancouver. By the summer of 1966 *Summerhill* was being read widely and the early manifestations of the counterculture were in full swing. There was a small but significant interest in a different kind of schooling from that offered by the public school system. Mr. Barker rented a store front on First Avenue one block east of Lonsdale in North Vancouver and the Barker Free School opened in September 1966 with twenty-three students ranging in age from four to thirteen.[25]

Prospective parents heard about the Barker School through friends or through Mr. Barker's radio appearances, but the majority of future "clients" were those who turned up at his lectures. Most listeners were impressed by Mr. Barker's gentle and warm personality, his love for children, and his staunch belief in student freedom. Three parents were English and had experienced "integrated" education in the U.K. and found Vancouver schools rigid and old-fashioned. Another believed the authoritarian school system would be damaging to her children. And another liked the fact that the kids would be able to "move around without being stuck in their seats all day." As one parent put it: "I was just plain anti-school. We all had our own personal reasons."[26]

Parental objections to the public schools were not primarily concerned with formal curriculum. They were seeking a more humane education for their children that would emphasize social harmony, creative expression, and natural growth. These parents were not particularly concerned about academic learning which they thought would happen naturally at its own pace, an idea becoming popular in some quarters by the mid-1960s.

There was a strong unconventional, anti-authoritarian, and individualistic streak among the parents. Two were artists, another practised alternative medicine, and another whose father had moved to the North Vancouver bush describes herself as an environmentalist from a "long line of English mavericks."[27] One parent is described by her children as a "free spirit" and another as "unorthodox." But while some parents were clearly influenced by early manifestations of the counterculture and were actively questioning traditional notions of authority, most would not

have considered themselves "hippies" in 1966.

In contrast to the New School where many fathers were involved in administration and day-to-day activities, almost all active parents in the Barker School were women. Many were questioning cultural values but their interest in alternative education and alternative lifestyles was not shared by their husbands. These women could be considered forerunners of the feminist movement although they were not yet consciously challenging traditional female roles. Within the next few years many marriages would be strained among Barker School parents.

Mr. Barker set out his educational philosophy in his school brochure: "education of the whole child in an atmosphere of freedom and responsibility; the welcome of all creeds and colours; freedom of worship or non-worship; foundation upon the principles of A.S. Neill's free school, Summerhill." Mr. Barker goes on to describe exactly what he meant by a free school:

> Where children can develop voluntarily as free, loving, thinking, acting human beings in an atmosphere of discovery and delight; where the only pressure comes from within the child; where creativity is kept to a maximum, competition to the minimum; where there is mutual respect between teachers and students; where the heart of the school is in community government, each child and each adult having one vote."[28]

Mr. Barker believed that academic pursuits and basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic should be an important component of any school, and he was confident that "free children are eager to learn." But this would always be secondary to the development of the child as a person. He staunchly defended the child's right to choose whether or not to engage in academic work even if that meant some students did not learn to read at six years old. It was up to the teachers to make those activities engaging enough to interest the children. Students were encouraged to approach the staff if they wanted to learn something. The experience at Summerhill suggested that even if students rejected academics initially, they would eventually feel the urge to take part. Mr. Barker was confident that when this did happen, learning would proceed speedily. His commitment to voluntary classes never wavered even when it became clear later on that little learning was taking place at the Barker School.

Mr. Barker was joined by Chuck and Helen Valentine. The Valentines were originally from New York and had come to British Columbia in 1956 to escape McCarthyism in the United States and to seek a more rural lifestyle. They were looking for a small and meaningful community and their Quaker background led them to Argenta in the West Kootenays.[29] Chuck Valentine was an engineer by profession, had a wide range of interests, and was considered to be an eccentric and legendary figure in Argenta. His interest in Progressive education dated from 1958 when he discovered Peninsula School during a year in San Francisco, and several years later he obtained a Master's degree from the Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education, a Progressive institution in rural Vermont.[30] The Valentines were not connected with the Argenta Friends School but for several years during the 1960s they operated a small home-based school called "Valentine View Point," for children whose parents wanted them to have a live-in rural experience. Their brochure describes "a place where children may broaden their interests and try their capacities in relative freedom from the restricted thinking of our culture."[31] The View Point children did little academic work and spent most of their time engaged in outdoor activities and working on the homestead.

Mr. Valentine believed that parents should have more control over their children's education and that there should be more connection between school and community. For example, students should study local community problems, they should visit places of work, and parents and other community members should be brought into the school to present valuable experiences from their own lives.[32] Mr. Valentine also believed education should be less subject based and more concerned with developing "flexibility, creativity, self-direction, self-reliance, and self-confidence."[33] Students should be given more choice of what to learn, children should be more physically active, observation and "first-hand" sources of information should replace textbooks whenever possible, and more time should be spent in play. Mr. Valentine also believed schools should promote individuality rather than conformity, replace competition with co-operation, abolish the grading system, and allow each child to experience success through learning

at his or her own rate. Mr. Valentine believed strongly that schools should teach "human relations" and prepare children to participate in a democratic society. Instead, he observed that:

> We set the school apart from society and rather than give training and practice in democratic self-government, expect children silently and unquestioningly to follow the directions of an authoritarian teacher at all times."[34]

He suggested students should experience democracy in the classroom through greater use of group planning, problem-solving, and decision making.[35]

Chuck Valentine's emphasis on "learning by doing," the "interest of the child," and "education for democracy" place him in the Deweyan Progressive Education tradition. Yet, although he cites numerous educators, he does not mention Dewey once. This is perhaps because he held Romantic notions as well, particularly the educational value of a rural lifestyle and the belief that "the choice of whether to learn at school should be left up to the students, that attendance should be voluntary."[36] Like many alternative teachers of the time Mr. Valentine subscribed to a combination of Progressive and Romantic ideals. He attached a greater importance to skill-based learning than did Bob Barker but the two men agreed on the principle of voluntary attendance.

Since the Valentines were looking for an alternative school for their own children, they accepted Mr. Barker's invitation to come to Vancouver and become staff members at his school while enrolling their children there. Another parent, Jan McDougall, became a regular volunteer, and several other adults helped supervise the children on an occasional basis, but Bob Barker and Chuck and Helen Valentine were the core of the school staff during 1966/67.

The Barker Free School spent almost a year and a half in its North Vancouver location. Staff as well as parents and students pitched in to renovate the building. Parents were enthusiastic and took part in cleaning, fundraising, supervising field trips, and attending monthly meetings. One parent describes the feeling of participating in something new:

> Bob was guiding us through something we hadn't done before. A lot of it was learning as you went along. The staff really believed in the kids—in their potential. They asked the kids what they wanted to do—a six year old can have a good idea. They really listened. They taught me to do that as a parent.[37]

The store-front consisted mainly of one large room which became the play area, meeting space, and generally an all purpose room for school activities. Since this room was too noisy for most learning activities several small rooms served for small-group lessons and for Mr. Barker's office. The school community was informal and relaxed. One parent remembers dressing her daughter in an attractive dress for the first day of school only to find that all the children were wearing "raggy jeans."

From the outset Mr. Barker hoped the kids would develop basic literacy and mathematics skills. Students did a little writing, some children read books on their own, staff members read to small groups, and some students learned to read with the Initial Teaching Alphabet.[38] Most of the teaching was on a one-to-one basis with students proceeding at their own pace. One former student remembers using a few math workbooks, another recalls being tutored in math by Mr. Barker, and several remember working with Cuisinaire rods.

But for the most part, former students remember little in the way of academics. and by far the dominant activity was play. The building had no playground so students had to spend most of their time inside. Older students were allowed to leave the school and one student recalls playing in a vacant lot while another remembers "a big gang of us roaming the streets of North Vancouver" looking for such treasures as copper wire.[39]

The school developed an extensive field trip programme. Students visited museums, the art gallery, and the library. They went swimming and skating, visited parks, skied on Mount Seymour, and hiked around the North Shore. They visited a bakery and a cabinet-making shop. A trip to the Burrard Shipyard was so memorable that one student credits his life-long interest in electrical systems to that visit.[40] Some students and their parents spent a week experiencing rural life on the Valentine's farm in Argenta. On another occasion they camped at Long Beach

for a week after students had travelled part way by bicycle. There was at least one field trip per week and this programme was consistent with the common alternative school practice of using the outside community as a major educational resource thereby reducing the separation between school and community.[41]

Creative expression was a large part of the school programme and students participated in many artistic projects. Painting, claywork, linoprints, crafts, and weaving, were frequent activities. So were visits to the studios of artists, potters, and candle-makers. During 1966/67 the students studied art with artist Gordon Yearsley. Mr. Yearsley, who lived in Argenta but worked in Vancouver, founded the Bhavana Studio Workshop, a small art school based on providing an "immediate and human" relationship between teachers and students.[42] Sometimes he would come to the school, while on other occasions the Barker students would visit his downtown studio. One parent, artist Shirley MacLean, offered regular arts and crafts sessions and another parent, a professional musician, came in to teach music. Students did a great deal of impromptu drama. They also enjoyed weekly National Film Board films arranged by Mr. Valentine.

Staff Changes

Chuck and Helen Valentine decided to return to Argenta after one year because they missed their life there but also because Bob Barker and Chuck Valentine disagreed about how much freedom students ought to be given. This was a common source of tension and stress among teachers in alternative schools and one of the reasons staff turnover was usually high. After their departure Mr. Barker began to attract a different kind of staff—a group of young adults in their early to mid-twenties. Only one had any formal background in education, but all had read A.S. Neill, and saw freedom for children as an important component of the cultural and political turmoil taking place during those years. These staff members were deeply affected by

the overall movement for social and cultural change that was sweeping North America.. Like many young Canadian adults in 1967, they empathized with disadvantaged minorities, opposed the Vietnam war, favoured a simple life with few material possessions, and valued personal freedom.

Jan MacDougall was a single parent living in Kitsilano in 1966 when she read an announcement about one of Bob Barker's lectures. That evening was "like a revelation for me." After attending a subsequent meeting at Mr. Barker's home, she enrolled her daughter in the Barker Free School which had just opened in North Vancouver. She was little influenced by educational theory although she read *Summerhill* after hearing Mr. Barker's lecture. She formed her views about schooling primarily by listening to her own children—"my children kept opening doors for me"—and by observing what she regarded as their "narrow and deadening public school experience; I knew I wanted something different for them."[43] Ms. MacDougall began by volunteering at the school before becoming a dedicated staff member for two years.

Dave Manning grew up in mid-Western United States and attended Illinois State University taking a degree in elementary education. Although he had a traditional Protestant background and took Christian teachings seriously, many aspects of American Christian practice in the mid-1960s seemed sadly hypocritical. Mr. Manning was opposed to the Vietnam war and decided to immigrate to Canada, like so many other young Americans in the summer of 1967. He was particularly drawn to British Columbia because of his love of wilderness and nature. Mr. Manning was attracted to free school beliefs after having read about A.S. Neill's work. He had seen a reference to the Barker School in a well publicized article about free schools in *Look* magazine. When he arrived in Vancouver he looked up Bob Barker right away and by September, 1967 he had joined the staff of the Barker Free School.[44]

Sharon Mundwiler was also from the midwest and attended a small college in Illinois. She had been active in the civil rights movement and worked in a camp for kids from Harlem. She and her husband were very opposed to the Vietnam war and finally renounced their citizenship

and left for Canada. They settled in Winnipeg but were scared off by the hard winters and moved to Vancouver. Ms. Mundwiler had read *Summerhill* and had taken several years of education in college. She had met Dave Manning in Illinois and contacted him upon arriving in Vancouver. She fit right in with the atmosphere at the Barker School and joined the staff in the fall of 1967.[45] Her sister, Marilyn, came to Vancouver in 1968 and joined the staff for one year.

Kate Barlow applied to teach at the Barker Free School at the same time as Sharon Mundwiler. Although Bob Barker had only been looking for one staff member, he liked them both and, in typical inclusive fashion, asked the two of them to join the staff. Ms. Barlow was from rural Ontario and had been affected by the American civil rights movement as well as by the plight of aboriginal people in Canada. She spent six months working at a nursery school on a Manitoba reserve as a volunteer with the Company of Young Canadians, an organization which would play a significant role in Canadian alternative schools. Upon moving to Vancouver Ms. Barlow was inspired by reading A.S. Neill as well as by her meeting with Bob Barker and joined the staff at the Barker Free School in the fall of 1967.[46]

Dan Jason grew up in Montreal and attended McGill University. He participated in many aspects of political and cultural student life including protests against the Vietnam war, "political discussions into the night," and poetry and theatre events. He had also read *Summerhill* and reflected upon "how deadening traditional education was on people like myself." He moved to British Columbia in 1967 and a year later was living on the beach at Long Beach on the west side of Vancouver Island. "One day Bob Barker came down with a bunch of kids from the Barker Free School. He and I connected immediately and he invited me to come out and teach at his school. And just like that I went!"[47]

These five individuals became the backbone of the Barker Free School from 1967 until its closing in 1969. They shared many values, interests, and lifestyle preferences. They formed a close community, often living as well as working together, and much of their social life revolved around the school. Although they were unanimous in their admiration for Bob Barker, they

differed with him on some issues. In particular, they were even more laissez-faire in their educational beliefs than was Mr. Barker and were unconcerned if no formal academic activities took place at the school. Their views placed the school firmly in the centre of the 1960s North American counterculture.

In the meantime, Mr. Barker had made extensive connections by 1967 with other radical educators across Canada as well as with a number of political activists within the Company of Young Canadians. One visitor to the Barker Free School was Bob Davis, a founder of Everdale Place north of Toronto, Canada's best known free school.[48] Mr. Davis was also a founder of the important alternative education journal *This Magazine is About Schools* (now *This Magazine*) which was read widely across North America from 1966 onward. Mr. Barker also knew George Martell, a co-founder of the magazine, who would later create Point Blank School, a storefront school for street kids in Toronto.[49] Mr. Martell, a leading political and educational activist in Ontario for three decades, was a C.Y.C. staff worker.

Encouraged by Bob Davis, Mr. Barker made a formal application in May 1967 to the Company of Young Canadians, an organization created by the Pearson government in 1965 to send young idealistic volunteers to help local people address social problems in their communities. The application to have his school accepted as a C.Y.C. project[50] was supported by a local C.Y.C. staff worker who had been volunteering at the school once a week.[51] This was not like typical C.Y.C. projects that sent volunteer activists to poor neighbourhoods or aboriginal communities, and much of the leadership in eastern Canada did not believe free school programmes were political enough. However, the Company did support two Ontario free schools, Everdale and Superschool, by providing salaries for several teachers.

George Martell was asked by the C.Y.C. directors to draft a report on the types of educational projects that would be appropriate for the Company, and to make a recommendation regarding the Barker Free School in particular. Mr. Martell's report recommended that the Company support the Barker School on the same basis as Everdale.[52] In the end the C.Y.C. did

accept the project and it was administered as part of a programme called the Vancouver Youth Project which included several other free schools and youth agencies. The Company provided the Barker Free School with salaries for four volunteer teachers for two years. Although C.Y.C. volunteer salaries were extremely low (from $150 to $200 a month) this allowed the school, which was already having a tough time making ends meet, to continue. The Barker School maintained a low profile within the C.Y.C. but the Vancouver Youth Project as a whole would soon create a public relations embarrassment for the Company (see Chapter 5).

Aldergrove

By the Fall of 1967 the staff at the Barker Free School was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the North Vancouver location. The relatively cramped indoor space was not conducive to the free and spontaneous atmosphere of a free school. Since play was the most frequent activity of the school day, the lack of an outside space for the children to play in was seriously inhibiting. The young staff members, influenced by the nascent "back to the land" movement, yearned for a more rural environment for themselves and the children. Early in 1968 Mr. Barker rented an old farmhouse in Cloverdale. The main floor served as new quarters for the school while several staff members lived in the rooms upstairs. Although the property wasn't large, there was enough space for the children to play outside and a barn provided an enjoyable place for games and exploring.

In the spring of 1968, Bob Barker found his ideal location—a farm in Aldergrove with a modern house on thirty-eight acres of property. The house had a long hallway with half a dozen bedrooms scattered along its length, perfect for small group activities to occur simultaneously. The rooms were fitted out with art and craft materials, science equipment, and the school library. The property had wooded areas and large fields with a stream running through them. Mr. Barker bought the property for $40,000 (a $20,000 down payment and a $20,000 mortgage) which

seriously stretched him financially.[53] Two staff members continued to live in the house on an intermittent basis and Mr. Barker occasionally slept in his office after particularly long days, but for the most part the building was home only to the school.

In 1967/68 the school enrolled twenty-six students aged six to sixteen.[54] Since most lived in Vancouver there was a long commute each morning. Mr. Barker drove out from West Vancouver and would meet the Vancouver students at the corner of Hastings Street and Cassiar. Some students travelled to the meeting place by carpool while others rode the bus. They piled into Mr. Barker's large station wagon and everyone arrived at the farm by 9:30.

The students spent a great deal of time outside. Much of this was unsupervised play as the children horsed around in small groups, played on a homemade swing, dug holes and built tunnels, played in the fields, and organized games such as hide and seek or kick the can. Time was unstructured and fluid, the aim being just to enjoy the day.[55] As one student said: "We played all day and basically did whatever we wanted. We didn't hurt anybody or do anything dangerous. We just had fun."[56]

But there were some adult-initiated activities. These apparently arose spontaneously as a staff member might say "anyone want to learn to develop photographs?" or "anyone want to go on a nature walk?"[57] Students learned photography, took regular French lessons, watched N.F.B. films, and participated in frequent drama activities.[58] The children did a lot of cooking and baking and everyone had a "nice noisy time" preparing large communal lunches together. Mr. Manning and Mr. Jason had a keen interest in literature and poetry and read stories and poems to groups or individuals.

Most students have vivid memories of the long nature walks led by Dave Manning and Dan Jason. Both had an impressive knowledge of the natural world and taught students to identify varieties of plant life, fish, bugs under logs, and other creatures. They also pointed out various edible plants.[59] Science projects such as collecting leaves, observing fish in the stream, or looking at organisms under a microscope were usually short-term and spontaneous. But one

student remembers more substantial projects such as assembling bird skeletons and setting up a terrarium and a fish tank. Mr. Barker taught some children to work at carpentry, and students had an opportunity to experiment with mechanical devices since there were abandoned cars and old machinery on the property. One student "built a mini-bike from scratch at ten years old. I scrounged the parts and Bob would take me down to the hardware store when I needed something. I was left to my own devices but if I needed a hand there was someone there to help me."[60]

Although students could always go to the adults for help, they were encouraged to be self-reliant—"we were expected to organize our own activities, to use our own heads."[61] The older students ran their own store out of a small building on the Aldergrove property. They sold candy, chocolate bars, potato chips, and toys and the students organized everything from work schedules to inventory. But the store closed when a few kids started stealing products and money.

Academic activities were almost non-existent once the school moved to its rural setting. A few students who were keen on learning worked individually with staff members for several months, but the majority did not. Most students had already learned to read at public school whereas others learned at home or from the older children. But several students between the ages of eight and eleven had not learned to read by the time they left the Barker School and many others had fallen behind in computational skills. Not that Mr. Barker didn't regularly try to initiate academics on an individual basis. "He spent a lot of time going around asking people if they would like to do some math or other things. Usually we said no."[62] A former student describes one such occasion:

> I remember being brought into a room with Bob and a female teacher and asked if I would like to do math. And the first time I said yes. So I was sitting there trying to do math and looking out the window and everybody else was outside playing. I looked at them and I looked at the math and I said I don't think I want to do the math anymore. I was told, okay, fine. So the next time they asked me I said no! And I don't remember doing any other math the whole time I was there.[63]

Most students remember everybody getting along well. One student recalls a "family atmosphere" and big communal meals. One former student says: "We cared about each other." There were always enough children at each age level so that nobody got left out. There was little bullying and conflicts were dealt with by talking them out with the help of the staff. Students were told "okay, you are having a conflict, let's sit down and talk about it." The only significant rule was you can do anything you want as long as you don't hurt anyone else and "teachers were good about intervening if kids didn't get along."[64] However, a few students experienced a hierarchy of big kids and little kids and believe there should have been more adult intervention. As one of the "little kids" one student recalls that "we were pretty terrorized by the big kids—nobody was looking out for anybody."[65]

Mr. Barker convened weekly school meetings where everybody would sit around talking, discussing current events, or organizing future activities. Anyone could call a meeting to address a specific problem and everyone, adults and children alike, had one vote. Meetings were frequent and two students recall that "anything to do with the school we all decided together."[66] Students were encouraged to express themselves when they "had the floor" and anybody with something to say was heard. This was a valuable experience and the children "developed confidence to express how they felt about things." However, most participants acknowledge that, "Bob was the leader, the focal point" and could usually sway a meeting.

Staff members report that although Mr. Barker valued everyone's opinion, he called the shots on the big decisions. As one staff member puts it: "Bob was clearly in charge—we challenged him all the time, but he was in charge."[67] Another suggests that: "Bob was never really a team player. He had put lots of energy and money into the school. We had the meetings but we didn't have a feeling that he was open to input."[68] Although staff dynamics were amiable and staff participated fully in decisions on such matters as admissions, curriculum, and how to manage individual students, an effective procedure for reaching consensus never developed.

During the school's last year the younger staff began to challenge Mr. Barker's views on

discipline and academics more frequently and staff meetings became more contentious. "It was always a struggle—the staff constantly trying to push Bob in the direction of more freedom, while he was trying to get the kids more interested in learning."[69] As one staff member put it: "We were in a rebellious frame of mind. I wanted the kids to be creative, to love nature. Most already knew how to read. We weren't worried about the basics."[70]

The adult community of parents and teachers was very close. The school was too far out of town for parents to drop in on a regular basis, but they formed a cohesive social group. Many parents and staff lived in Vancouver's Kitsilano district, spent time together outside of school, and became friends. Staff from another free school, Knowplace, became part of the group and many participants describe the community atmosphere as similar to that of a large extended family. There was little distinction between teachers and parents, and staff members were like a second set of parents for some of the students.[71] One former staff member recalls the good rapport enjoyed by the adults while another describes it as "one of the most loving and unified groups that I've come in contact with."[72] Some families have maintained life-long connections and several subsequently moved to the country together forming informal communities in Grand Forks and the Slocan Valley. Two marriages later took place among the children in their adulthood.

By the late 1960s the school had acquired a countercultural look and feel. Parents were exploring new lifestyles and values in their appearance, careers, and communal living arrangements. One student recalls how the 1960s influenced his Dad: "He got tired of the rat race and wanted to do something different—he was alive and doing new things." During this period two families moved to the country, another travelled for six months in Morocco, and another left the city to take a job operating a lighthouse in northern Vancouver Island. Some parents developed new creative careers as artists or writers. Others caught up in the times adopted a "hippie" lifestyle complete with rock music and marijuana. There was some drug use among the adults and the teenage kids but it never became a serious problem as it would in other alternative schools. There was also occasional skinny dipping but little sexual precociousness.

Some of the boys had long hair and the old formalities separating the world of adults from that of children disappeared. Lifestyle changes put additional stress on marriages and several divorces took place among the parent group.

During the latter days of the school, some students with emotional or behavioural problems joined the school community. Two boys from Arizona heard about the school and boarded there for several months.[73] This was a time of frequent north-south travel along the west coast and ideas spread quickly. One teacher reports that there were some "wild kids" while another recalls that children who arrived "fresh out of public school went hog wild" with their new-found freedom.[74] But unlike many later alternative schools, the Barker School avoided taking large numbers of "problem kids." Most parents chose the school because they genuinely believed in its educational theory and practice, rather than seeing it as a refuge for children in trouble.

Financing the school was always a struggle. Mr. Barker wanted the school to be accessible to everyone and he bent over backwards to accommodate several low income families.[75] Tuition was based on the ability to pay, an idea he borrowed from the New School. Fees were reasonable, ranging from a minimum of $165 per year to a maximum of $850 with most families paying about $300 per child.[76] Staff salaries were next to nothing. Mr. Barker was able to manage without drawing a salary due to a small trust fund income. The 1966/67 operating report states that "four full-time teachers work for expenses, one part-time teacher for $5.00 per hour plus expenses, one part-time teacher for a scholarship for his daughter, and one works for nothing."[77] Still, the school had a deficit that year of over $3,000 which Mr. Barker made up himself. He also contributed $5,000 towards alterations on the facility.[78] The deficit disappeared the following year when the Company of Young Canadians provided four salaries. But finances became a problem again in 1968/69 when a hoped-for grant from the Vancouver Foundation did not materialize. By this time Mr. Barker had become seriously overextended by the ongoing payments on the property.

Financial matters deteriorated in the spring of 1969 when the school suffered a break-in and a good deal of equipment was lost. Still worse, several families decided to move to the West Kootenays and would not be coming back the following year. Another family decided to send their children back to public school and only four students were planning to return to the Barker School. The school had never grown from its original enrollment of twenty to twenty-five students, and depended on the participation of several large families—the Macleans, the Ridgways, the Bertelsens, and the Carsons. When these families left, the school population was decimated.

Furthermore, by 1969 most staff members had decided to go on to other pursuits. For many the school had been a pleasant interlude in their lives before moving on to careers or other permanent commitments. Bob Barker was left with few students, no staff, and no money. He had little choice but to sell the farm and close the school. All the time, energy, and money that he had committed to the Barker Free School left him feeling "awfully tired." Although Mr. Barker has remained in the Vancouver area for over thirty years, he never again became involved in an educational venture.

Bob Barker is remembered warmly and affectionately by the vast majority of children and adults connected with the school. He treated everyone with respect. One former student says: "Bob never talked down to us, he didn't treat us like kids. I don't remember him getting mad, or being angry with me...ever. Bob treated us with respect."[79] Another student remembers him as "warm, open, compassionate, loving, and heart-connected."[80] Still another describes him as: "easygoing and agreeable; I never remember him raising his voice or not smiling."[81] A former staff member says: "Bob was a loving, generous, and kind man. He loved children and wanted the best for them. He had a deep respect for children. The basic premise of the school was mutual respect."[82] And one staff member and parent who was inspired by Mr. Barker says simply, "Bob held the whole thing together."[83]

But those who knew him during those years believe Mr. Barker was disappointed that his

students did not show more interest in academic learning. He wanted to create an "exciting, progressive, academic environment,"[84] but he was aware of the dilemma he faced in attempting to combine academic learning with freedom. In a letter to parents in 1967 he wrote candidly about his own doubts:

> I have always felt it was our duty to offer the curriculum and set aside time for it, and that the public would not support a school which did not do so. I have always felt it was our duty to point out to a child and his parents the consequences of his not following it; that while he might be a much more creative person when he left school, he might be month or years behind those of his age in schools where classes were compulsory, and that it might take months or years to catch up if he wanted one of most jobs or to go to college. Are you willing to have your child leave us at eighteen unable to read, write, spell, or do mathematics, as long as he is happy? Or do you want time set aside so he can learn these things while the rest of the time is made as rich as possible?[85]

Despite the doubts communicated in this letter, Mr. Barker did not modify his position on voluntary classes. He stuck to his belief that the overall freedom of the child was more important than the academic risks. He thought it was the responsibility of the staff to discover what a child was interested in.[86] He also believed if the teacher was patient enough, children would eventually ask for, or at least take part in, scholastic activities. As one staff member puts it: "His idea was that the kids would come around and ask to do academic work. But I don't remember that happening."[87] Why Mr. Barker continued to believe this when his own experience indicated otherwise can only be explained by his deeply Romantic world-view and his commitment to A.S. Neill's theories. Neill believed that children would eventually learn if left to their own devices, and Bob Barker would not contradict him.

Effects on Students

Former students today believe they were profoundly affected by the Barker Free School and cite many ways in which their experience at the school has been a benefit in their lives:

"I learned to be more independent and self-sufficient."
"It made me be responsible for myself."
"The attention and encouragement gave me confidence."
"I learned about people being different."
"I was taught to be a capable person."
"I learned about dealing with problems and conflict."
"The right to my opinion, I can talk and be listened to."
"I learned to be more outgoing."
"I had lots of experience and learned about the world."
"Self respect, self esteem, belonging."
"Learning about nature."
"The spiritual aspect was nurtured."
"I learned to be myself."[88]

One student says: "I deal with life and people better. That was part of what the school was. We were able to do what we wanted as long as we didn't infringe on anyone else."[89] The students' family situations and the general ambiance of the times certainly played a part in shaping their personalities. But former students see the school as instrumental in nurturing such personal qualities as independence, self-confidence, responsibility, and the ability to solve problems.

A few students achieved academic success. One former student comments on her accomplishments despite her lack of formal education:

> I had no formal education beyond grade one. It didn't affect me until I tried to work. I felt out of touch with society as a whole. What I learned about the world I got through reading, travelling, and personal experience. I still know almost nothing about history. I got jobs by exaggerating my education. Finally, I went to Canada Manpower to get my Adult Basic Education. They asked me how much formal education I had had and I said "grade one." They didn't believe me at first. I tested at a grade nine level for English and at a grade two level for math! At the end of ten months I had my grade twelve graduation. I enrolled at U.B.C. and graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce degree in 1989.[90]

This individual is now a successful accountant. Another former student tells a moving story of how she overcame a learning disability, a series of severe family crises, and a debilitating workplace injury in order to pursue a university education. She is now a counsellor and therapist and has learned above all that "anything is possible."[91] Another student finished her high school education at Ideal School, a secondary alternative school (see Chapter 11), became a self-taught

bookkeeper and worked as an accountant, and later earned a college diploma in music.

However, these stories are not typical and many former students regret that their schooling did not provide them with more academic opportunity. Most former students did not return to formal education; few former Barker School students have university degrees, and many did not finish high school. A large majority believe their educational and professional opportunities were limited by their lack of formal schooling and acquisition of basic skills. One says "I would have liked to have been pushed a bit in my education."[92] Another believes "a little stricter system would have been good for me."[93] Some students regret the lack of connection to a normal school life. One girl who had attended the Barker School as a five-year-old wanted to go to public school so much that, at age six, she walked to the local school on the first day in September and registered herself. Another says: "I would have liked more schooling. I had huge gaps. It left me feeling I missed out. I didn't have the same experience other children did."[94]

Many students were delayed in their language and mathematics development and four students aged eight to eleven left the Barker School without knowing how to read. Two of these students eventually learned to read on their own, one learned at the New School, and one student was taught to read by his grade seven public school teacher in six weeks. One of these students describes his writing as "rough around the edges" while another says "I wanted to learn but it was hard because it was left so late. I never did get the grammar, my math was terrible, and I still can't spell. It's a bit embarrassing sometimes. I would like to go back and get my high school."[95]

Most Barker School students never returned to formal education. Their lack of basic skills and familiarity with an organized learning structure made public school daunting. One former student talks about how her lack of skills made it difficult to go back to public school after being in an alternative environment for several years:

> I stayed at home after the Barker School closed. I was too shy to go back to public school. I felt I was too far behind. I tried adult education but found it too hard. I did a lot of reading and writing on my own but math was a big problem. I missed the social group at school. I devoted my life to my horses.[96]

Another recalls how difficult it was to fit in to an alien system:

> They [Barker staff] should have made us do some reading and math, just a little structure for an hour a day. It would have made a big difference in the transition to public school. You have to learn to fit into society. We didn't fit in to public school. Everything frightened us. My sister could read but they put her back to grade one. They wouldn't let her come unless she wore a dress. I quit school after two weeks of grade eight and left home. I eventually got my high school but we definitely felt different from the public school kids.[97]

Although this says as much about the public school system as it does about free schools, the fact remains that it was difficult for free school students to acquire further education. Another student who left public school in grade three and never returned to formal education believes that she was not well prepared in the free school environment where "you had to make your own structure."

> I don't think anyone took the education of the kids into consideration. The kids got left behind and finally got left out. The adults were following their ideals and their passions but I don't think anybody considered that the kids were going to grow up and have to get a job.[98]

One student who was successful in public school is nevertheless critical of the lack of structure at the Barker School:

> I wanted to learn to read at eight years old. I transferred from the Barker School to the New School for part of the year and learned to read in two weeks. I read everything I could get my hands on. Later in public school I liked the academics and caught up fairly easily. For me it was okay because I'm very self-motivated. For some of the others it hasn't worked out so well. My mother struggled because she didn't want us to be part of the status quo. Her intention was to find something better but our schools weren't structured enough. There were not enough boundaries or daily rhythms. I would have liked a little more consistency in my life. We had to make decisions at too young an age.[99]

Another student sums up her opinion this way: "I don't think Bob should have given us as much freedom as he did."[100]

However, a few students found the lack of structure suited them well. One student who was completely uninterested in traditional school subjects explored his own interests at the Barker School without feeling any pressure:

> Being able to learn on my own, that's what I got out of it. This attitude towards learning has helped me through my life. It's the only way I would have learned. I may have had serious problems otherwise. For me it was a good thing, for others it might not have been.[101]

Another student values his Barker School experience despite subsequent academic difficulties saying, "I wouldn't change anything. I think the things I learned there were more important than academics. They made me the person I am."[102] For these young people the school provided a safe, interesting, and supportive place in contrast to the alienating environment of public school. Most Barker School parents were people who valued their independence and raised their children to question authority. Many of these kids would have been unhappy in the public system and may very well have dropped out.[103]

The majority of former Barker School students are tradespeople or operators of small rural businesses. Despite the absence of professional careers, these individuals are successful in their occupations, lead productive lives, and are raising normal families. Most consider themselves happy and many believe the personal qualities nurtured by their schooling and their families have contributed to their happiness.

Conclusion

Although Bob Barker acknowledged the importance of academic learning, he was unable to create an effective academic programme at the Barker Free School. An obvious explanation is that the Summerhill "philosophy" just doesn't work in most situations—that given complete freedom, children will rarely choose to do academics. But if under ideal circumstances an effective learning programme is possible at a free school, why did this not happen at the Barker School?

Although he had studied with many respected Progressive educators, and, by all accounts, established a warm rapport with his students, Bob Barker never developed the teaching expertise

to inspire children to learn in such an unstructured setting. One former staff member suggests: "Bob wasn't able to convey to us how to provide a different sort of teaching."[104] In fact, Mr. Barker's pedagogical ideas were traditional. In a 1967 report to parents he wrote: "I do not believe there is anything basically wrong with the standard curriculum except that its acquisition is required, and required at a certain time."[105] He didn't understand that teachers have to find ways to interest and excite their students, particularly in a non-coercive environment. This would have been easier had he been able to replace traditional teaching practices with innovative methods.

Secondly, the school was significantly influenced by the young staff, who were not committed to systematic academic learning and were more interested in exploring their own newly discovered personal freedom. One former student says flatly: "the adults didn't encourage academic activities."[106] One teacher, who later taught for a year at the New School where the teaching staff was more experienced, candidly recalls: "I felt out of my league [at the New School]. They were older, wiser. I didn't know as much as I thought I did."[107] Even some parents were unconcerned about academic learning as one parent recalls: "I didn't worry about the academics. I knew the kids were bright enough to pick it up. I wanted them to be more skilled with people."[108]

Thirdly, and perhaps most important, the Barker School was established at a time when all cultural norms and values were being challenged. One parent describes how the school changed over the four years of its existence: "Bob started out with an ideal based on Summerhill but it quickly turned into the revolution of the sixties."[109] Most of the staff and at least half the parents were deeply influenced by the counterculture. As one staff member puts it "we were riding a cultural wave" while another says "the sixties culture was the backdrop to everything."[110] If his students had experienced more stability in other aspects of their lives, or if the school had been established during a less volatile period, there may have been more possibility of educational success.

How does one evaluate this experimental enterprise that was more than a school? Indeed, many adherents of the free school movement viewed alternative schools as one component of a wider attempt to transform an unhealthy society. Barker School parents saw their involvement in the school as part of their quest for new values and a new type of society that would be less competitive, more humane, and more in tune with the natural world. An evaluation based on such a sweeping criterion is difficult unless one is willing to take a long-term view and to refrain from judging according to conventional standards. One regular observer made this comment about the Barker School in 1967:

> The school is difficult and incomplete. The problems that arise from attempting models of self-determination are endless. But, for a change, they are real problems, tasks worth getting bothered about, conflicts that are productive and fun. The result is pretty clear: not one of those children has failed to become just a little bit more sane and balanced and outgoing and responsible and happy. What any of them has learned that can be fed back is questionable, but that all of them have acquired considerable health is beyond doubt.[111]

Some observers believed that the Barker Free School was beginning to exert an effect on the public school system. Bob Hunter wrote a column about Bob Barker in the *Vancouver Sun* in September 1969 in which he argued that the school system was showing signs of becoming more flexible and innovative.

> Bob Barkers's ideas have obviously had considerable influence. Something is happening in the public schools—a heightened awareness, a greater sensitivity, perhaps simply a more other-directed consciousness on the part of the teachers. There appears to be considerably less repression and somewhat less authoritarianism than there used to be.[112]

Mr. Hunter goes on to suggest that the success of the Barker School may have come at the cost of its own extinction if it lost students to a revitalized public school system. This certainly overstates the case, but the claim that alternative schools influenced the school system has some validity. Dave Berner, a staff person with the Company of Young Canadians who spent several hours a week at the Barker Free School, also believed the school had a wider influence. He wrote to his programme director in May 1967:

> Communications between the school and the general community are constant and growing. More and more teachers in the public system are aware of and sympathetic to the basic and operative assumptions of Summerhillian education. The result is that the forms are beginning to alter in the public schools as well. I think Bob's school gives considerable impetus to this kind of formal change and movement.[113]

Many observers would agree that the public school system has changed since 1965. Bob Barker's experiment, as the most authentic replica of Summerhill in British Columbia, contributed in a small way to making the public schools more humane, flexible, and child-centred.

Epilogue

Several adults associated with the Barker Free School continued to experiment with alternative education after the school closed. Dave Manning became a staff member at The Experimental Education Foundation or "The Floating School," initiated in the fall of 1968 by Simon Fraser University professors David Berg and Brian Carpendale for their own children. The school's purpose was to offer educational experiences to teenagers who were dissatisfied with the public school system. It also provided university credits for some S.F.U. student volunteers "who had theories and feelings about teaching which they would be unable to try out in an ordinary classroom situation."[114] S.F.U. graduate student Dan Davis, the school's first director, co-ordinated the volunteers. One of these was Margaret Sinclair, soon to become the wife of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. The school began in a North Vancouver home, later moving to a storefront on Hastings Street in Burnaby. As many as a dozen teenagers attended, mostly children of S.F.U. professors. They organized their own activities in the wider community and communicated through a chain telephone system.[115] Students spent considerable time at Simon Fraser attending lectures, film workshops, and drama classes, one offered by well-known local director John Juliani. Students also received an experiential political education taking part in the student occupation of S.F.U. administration offices in October 1968. Students also spent much

of their time just "hanging around." The school folded after eighteen months, some students moving on to other alternative schools. One student who returned to the public system says of the Floating School: "I really enjoyed the experience. I met a lot of interesting people and had experiences I wouldn't ordinarily have had. It made me a more self-motivated person. I didn't miss anything but I wouldn't have wanted to do it for six or seven years."[116]

Jan McDougall started "The People," a school for young children, in the basement of her house in Vancouver's Kitsilano district in the fall of 1969. Up to ten children, including some former Barker students, attended for two years. "The People" was conceived as a community of families or a "tribal, street school."[117] Parents and children spent much time in the wider community. However, the children did some academic work, learning to read with the International Teaching Alphabet and studying mathematics with Cuisinaire rods.[118] Ms. McDougall's C.Y.C. salary continued for a period of time and, as the school incurred few other costs, parents only paid $10 per month per child. The school continued for two years. Dan Jason and Jezrah Hearne started Sunshine School on the ground floor of their four-storey house near Trout Lake in East Vancouver in 1971.[119] This school centred around a community of families who believed they could do a better job of educating their children than could the public schools. Sunshine School enrolled twenty students and lasted for two years.

Several former Barker School students earned their high school diplomas some years later at the Hardy Mountain School near Grand Forks. Students spent two days per week (including overnight) at the remote mountain location and worked hard on the basics.[120] Finally, several staff members and parents from the Barker School moved to the Slocan Valley in 1970 and became part of a community of people who would eventually found the Vallican Whole School, the only alternative school that has remained independent of the public school system and is still in operation today.

NOTES

1. Robert Watson was born in Ontario in 1853. He founded a milling and machine shop business in Manitoba in the 1870s. He served as an M.P. (1882-1892) and in the Manitoba cabinet (1892-1900) and was appointed to the Senate in 1900. He died in 1929. Henry Morgan, *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto: Briggs, 1912); Ross Hamilton, *Prominent Men of Canada* (Montreal: National, 1931).
2. Robert Barker, "Biographical Material and Educational Statement," submitted to the New School, April 9, 1965, archive of P.J. Thomas.
3. Robert Barker, UNRRA Application, November 7, 1945. National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. Documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
4. Robert Barker, UNNRA Application, November 7, 1945. National Archives of Canada.
5. Robert Barker, "Biographical Materials and Educational Statement," submitted to the New School, April 9, 1965, archive of P.J. Thomas.
6. Robert Barker, personal resume, April 9, 1965, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
7. Bob Barker, personal interview, October 23, 1996.
8. Robert Barker, "Biographical Materials and Educational Statement," April 9, 1965. Homer Lane was A.S. Neill's mentor. See his *Talks to Parents and Teachers* (New York: 1928).
9. Neill's trips to the United States are described in Jonathan Croall, *Neill of Summerhill* (New York: Pantheon, 1983) 345-349.
10. Mr. Barker describes his Summerhill experience in "Biographical Material and Educational Statement," April 9, 1965.
11. See Joyce Antler's excellent biography, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The Making of a Modern Woman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). Mrs. Mitchell was an important figure in the Progressive movement.
12. City and Country School (originally The Play School) was founded by Caroline Pratt in 1914. See Joyce Antler, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell* (New Haven, 1987) 236-246; Caroline Pratt, *Experimental Practice in the City and Country School* (New York: Dutton, 1924); and John and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow* (New York: Dutton, 1915).
13. Barbara Unger, "The Barker School" in *The County Citizen*, New City, N.Y., January 10, 1963, p. 5.
14. George Dennison writes that the Barker School (later renamed the Collaberg School) "represents, as far as I know, the first full-fledged use of Neill's methods in this country." *The Lives of Children* (New York: Random House, 1969): 299.
15. See George Dennison's best selling *The Lives of Children* (New York: Random House, 1969) for a full account of the First Street School.
16. Robert Barker, "Biographical Material and Educational Statement," April 9, 1965.
17. See Herb Snitzer, *Today Is For Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).
18. A.S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach To Child Rearing* (New York: Hart, 1960).
19. "Statement of Policy," adopted by the Summerhill Society, March 19, 1961. National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
20. See Jonathan Croall, *Neill of Summerhill* (New York: Pantheon, 1983) pp. 350-363.

21. Rita and Werner Cohn, "Robert Barker: Impressions Gained in an Interview," New York, April 11, 1965. Archive of Norman Levi.
22. Bob Barker, personal interview, October 23, 1996.
23. *Vancouver Times*, June 7, 1965, p. 13.
24. Bob Barker, personal interview, October 23, 1996.
25. Hugh Dickson, "Students at Free School Just Don't Want to Quit" in *The Citizen*, North Vancouver, January 12, 1967, p. 1.
26. Shirley MacLean, personal interview, November 14, 1996.
27. Mona Bertelsen, personal interview, December 9, 1996.
28. Barbara Unger, "The Barker School" in *The County Citizen*, New City, N.Y., January 10, 1963, p. 5.
29. Rick Valentine, personal interview, November 26, 1996.
30. The Graduate School, associated with The Putney School, a Progressive high school founded in 1935, became part of Antioch College in 1963. See Susan Lloyd, *The Putney School: A Progressive Experiment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).
31. "Viewpoint," brochure, 1965. In possession of the author.
32. C.P. Valentine, "A Request for a New Look at Our Schools," Argenta, B.C., 1966, pp. 16-17. Unpublished paper, New School archive.
33. C.P. Valentine, "A Request for a New Look at Our Schools," Argenta, B.C., 1966, p. 2.
34. C.P. Valentine, "A Request for a New Look at Our Schools," Argenta, B.C., 1966, p. 2.
35. C.P. Valentine, "A Request for a New Look at Our Schools," Argenta, B.C., 1966, p. 15.
36. C.P. Valentine, "A Request for a New Look at Our Schools," Argenta, B.C., 1966, p. 8.
37. Kita Ridgway, personal interview, November 13, 1996.
38. Hugh Dickson, "Students at Free School Just Don't Want to Quit" in *The Citizen*, North Vancouver, January 12, 1967, p. 1.
39. Galen Bellman, personal interview, November 20, 1996.
40. Ray Valentine, personal interview, December 10, 1996.
41. See John Bremer and Michael von Moschzisker, *The School Without Walls* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971).
42. Bhavana Studio Workshop, Prospectus, 1968, National Archives, C.Y.C. Documents. Like Chuck Valentine, Gordon Yearsley lived in Argenta. He was a close friend of Watson Thomson (see Chapter 5) and founded a rural co-operative in Argenta in 1971.
43. Jan Fraser, personal interview, October 29, 1996.
44. Dave Manning, personal inteview, November 14, 1996.
45. Sharon Wiseman, personal interview, March 16, 1997.
46. Kate Barlow, personal interview, October 16, 1996.
47. Dan Jason, personal interview, October 30, 1996.
48. See Bob Davis, *What Our High Schools Could Be* (Toronto: Our Schools/Our Selves, 1990) 41-98. Mr. Barker's son attended Everdale for a brief period.
49. See George Martell, "What Can I Do Right Now?" in Satu Repo, ed., *This Book Is About Schools* (New York: Random House, 1970) 286-307.
50. Company of Young Canadians Project Application, Barker Free School, May 12, 1967, National Archives of Canada, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.

51. Letter from Dave Berner to Campbell Mackie in the C.Y.C. Ottawa office, May, 1967. National Archives of Canada, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
52. Letters to George Martell and to Bob Barker from Campbell Mackie, C.Y.C. Director of Domestic Programmes, May 29, 1967, and to Bob Barker from Dave Berner, C.Y.C. staff in British Columbia, July 21, 1967. National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents.
53. Bob Barker, personal interview, October 23, 1996.
54. Olive Johnson, "Free schools: tomorrow's education or passing fad?" in *Vancouver Life* (April, 1968) p. 17.
55. Sharon Wiseman, personal interview, March 16, 1997.
56. Jason Ridgway, personal interview, September 24, 1997.
57. Galen Bellman, personal interview, November 20, 1996.
58. Olive Johnson, "Free schools: tomorrow's education or passing fad?" in *Vancouver Life* (April, 1968) p. 16.
59. They later became the authors of a popular practical book on plants, *Some Useful Wild Plants*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1972).
60. Tony Bertelsen, personal interview, April 17, 1997.
61. Galen Bellman, personal interview, November 20, 1996.
62. Susan and Cathleen Bertelsen, personal interview, December 9, 1996.
63. Galen Bellman, personal interview, November 20, 1996.
64. Monica Yard, personal interview, May 1, 1997.
65. Kim MacLean, personal interview, November 6, 1996. Not that bullying never took place in public schools, but free school teachers were somewhat less likely to intervene.
66. Cathy and Susan Bertelsen, personal interview, December 9, 1996.
67. Jan Fraser, personal interview, October 29, 1996.
68. Sharon Wiseman, personal interview, March 16, 1997.
69. Jan Fraser, personal interview, October 29, 1996.
70. Sharon Wiseman, personal interview, March 16, 1997.
71. Marilyn Carson, personal interview, March 9, 1997.
72. Dave Manning, personal interview, November 14, 1996.
73. Olive Johnson, "Free schools: tomorrow's education or passing fad?" in *Vancouver Life* (April, 1968) p. 17.
74. Dan Jason and Dave Manning, personal interviews, October 30 and November 14, 1996.
75. Marilyn Carson, personal interview, March 9, 1997.
76. Barker Free School, Prospectus, 1968/69; and Financial Reports 1965/66, 1966/67, and 1967/68, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents.
77. Operating Report, 1966/67. National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
78. Operating Report, 1966/67. National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents.
79. Galen Bellman, personal interview, November 20, 1996.
80. Monica Yard, personal interview, May 1, 1997.
81. Susan and Cathleen Bertelsen, personal interview, December 9, 1996.
82. Dave Manning, personal interview, November 20, 1996.
83. Jan Fraser, personal interview, October 29, 1996.

84. Bob Barker, personal interview, October 23, 1996.
85. Bob Barker, Report to Parents, February 28, 1967, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. Documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142.
86. Dave Manning, personal interview, November 14, 1996.
87. Sharon Wiseman, personal interview, March 16, 1997.
88. Michael Carson, Monica Yard, Wendy MacLean, Ray Valentine, Susan Bertelsen, Cathleen Bertelsen, Laura Landsberg, Galen Bellman, personal inteviews.
89. Tony Bertelsen, personal interview, April 17, 1997.
90. Galen Bellman, personal interview, November 20, 1996.
91. Monica Yard, personal interview, May 1, 1997.
92. Robin MacLean, personal interview, November 5, 1996.
93. Ray Valentine, personal interview, December 10, 1996.
94. Monica Yard, personal interview, May 1, 1997.
95. Mark McDougall, Jason Ridgeway, interviews, February 18 and September 24, 1997.
96. Wendy MacLean, personal interview, December 2, 1996.
97. Susan and Cathleen Bertelsen, personal interview, December 9, 1996.
98. Kim MacLean, personal interview, November 6, 1996.
99. Laura Landsberg, personal interview, December 3, 1996.
100. Galen Bellman, personal interview, November 20, 1996.
101. Tony Bertelsen, personal interview, April 17, 1997.
102. Jason Ridgway, personal interview, September 24, 1997.
103. Sharon Wiseman, personal interview, March 16, 1997.
104. Sharon Wiseman, personal interview, March 16, 1997.
105. Bob Barker, Report to Parents, February 28, 1967, National Archives of Canada.
106. Michael Carson, personal interview, March 10, 1997.
107. Kate Barlow, personal interview, October 16, 1996.
108. Kita Ridgway, personal interview, November 13, 1996.
109. Shirley MacLean, personal interview, November 14, 1996.
110. Dan Jason, personal interview, October, 30, 1996.
111. Dave Berner, letter to P. Campbell Mackie, May 12, 1967. National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. Documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
112. Bob Hunter, *Vancouver Sun*, September 5, 1969, p. 19.
113. Dave Berner, letter to P. Campbell Mackie, May 12, 1967. National Archives of Canada.
114. Brian Carpendale, "Some Thoughts on Free Schools," in *Free School: the journal of change in education* (Free School Press, Saturna Island) Issue 1, June, 1970.
115. Jeremy Carpendale, personal interview, November 13, 1996.
116. Garth Babcock, personal interview, February 21, 1997.
117. "The People," in *Focos*, Spring, 1969, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents.
118. "The People," Volunteer Report by Barbara Hughes to Director of the Company of Young Canadians, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents.
119. Dan Jason later taught in an alternative school on Salt Spring Island and now owns a seed company there.
120. This school was operated by Waldo and Anne Dahl.

CHAPTER 5: KNOWPLACE

Beginnings

The Barker Free School remained the only free school in British Columbia for two years. Although some people who heard about the school wondered if it was pedagogically sound, few paid much attention to Bob Barker's quiet experiment with young children in North Vancouver. But by 1967 countercultural youth was becoming big news in B.C., and it seemed a whole generation had begun to reject mainstream culture and its traditional dress and music, drug and sex taboos, and social values of competition, materialism, capitalism, and intellectualism. Out of this context several free schools even more "laissez-faire" than the Barker School emerged. The first of these was Knowplace, born in Vancouver during the famous "summer of love."[1] Unlike the Barker School, the teenage community at Knowplace was susceptible to excesses in which counterculture activities would overshadow its weak educational programme.

Karen Tallman had attended the New School from its founding in 1962 until her completion of Grade Seven in June, 1966. She began high school the next September at Point Grey Secondary in Vancouver but found almost immediately that she didn't fit in. Her clothing targeted her as a hippie, her English teacher was critical of her poor spelling and her unconventional poetry, and she was "hassled" by classmates. By late 1966 school administrators had become concerned about drug use and unusual lifestyles at some Vancouver high schools and were anxious to stamp out any nonconformity before it became a serious problem. By the end of the 1966/67 school year Ms. Tallman resolved not to go back.[2]

In the meantime a group of students at Lord Byng High School had developed similar feelings about their secondary school experience. Sonya Makaroff, a Grade Twelve student, found the strictly controlled public school structure oppressive and envisioned something better: "It was all so repressive. One of us was always in trouble for the way we dressed or wore our

hair, or for asking questions instead of just parroting back what the teacher said."[3] Another student, Bruce Russell, had spent his elementary years at a "small non-authoritarian" Catholic school and found the "military environment" of Lord Byng a shock. By the middle of his Grade Nine year he was threatened with expulsion and spent most of his time at U.B.C. or "stoned on the beach."[4] Still another, Lloyd Griffiths, became alienated by the "cruelty, snobbery, and competitiveness" of high school by Grade Ten and was usually found "hanging out in a big house near Lord Byng with the students who smoked dope."[5] Michael Thomas found Lord Byng "rigid and repressive;" he was sent home for inappropriate clothing and was "constantly getting into trouble despite testing high on standardized tests." Like Karen Tallman, he had attended the New School during his elementary years.[6] And Lowell Orcutt, at Kitsilano High, found school just plain "boring."[7] One student summed up his dissatisfaction with the public school system this way:

> You're put in a desk and told what to learn, how fast to learn it, when to speak, when to be silent. You're told how to have your hair cut, what clothes to wear, what ideas are acceptable. Nobody asks you what you're interested in, how you feel about things, whether you agree or disagree.[8]

By the spring of 1967 these disaffected students were spending a great deal of time together at the Makaroff house and several other homes in Vancouver's Point Grey neighbourhood complaining about high school and determined to do something about it. Vancouver had a well developed counterculture community by this time and these teenagers were strongly attracted to it. In most cases they had been exposed to radical and unconventional ideas through their parents.

Although the parents of these students had varied backgrounds there were several significant common factors. Most were politically progressive with C.C.F., anarchist, or pacifist backgrounds, had individualistic and unconventional lifestyles, and were highly critical of the public school system. Several had connections to the Unitarian Church and some of their children had been involved in a progressive Christian organization called Liberal Religious Youth.

Watson and Mary Thomson lived in the neighbourhood and played a significant role in the founding of Knowplace. They were "communitarian socialists" with a long history of initiating projects of educational reform and co-operative living. Watson Thomson had created workers' education organizations in Alberta and was director of the Adult Education Office at the University of Manitoba.[9] In 1944 he was appointed director of adult education by the new Tommy Douglas government in Saskatchewan. He developed projects in populist and socialist education in communities across that province, but his orientation was too radical even for the C.C.F. government and he was fired less than two years later.[10] The Thomsons also created several co-operative communities including a single-house group in Winnipeg during the 1940s and a rural community in Surrey, B.C. in the 1950s. After settling in Vancouver both Mr. and Mrs. Thomson taught in U.B.C.'s education faculty. Watson lectured in philosophy of education while Mary was a faculty member for over twenty years specializing in early childhood education. As director of the Child Study Centre she pioneered methods and ideas of Progressive education including parent participation and "teaching the child rather than the subject." She became a consultant to over fifty co-operative pre-schools in Vancouver and in that capacity met several future New School and Knowplace parents.[11] The Thomsons did not have children among the dissatisfied students but were well known to the young people and respected by their parents.

Several parents became role models for the students. Bob Makaroff, a well-known Vancouver physician, was raised in Saskatchewan of Doukhobor background. His father had been a pacifist and lawyer who defended labour activists during the 1930s. The senior Makaroff had attended the founding convention of the C.C.F. at Regina in 1933 and party leaders were frequent visitors in the household. Like his father, Bob Makaroff became politically active in peace and social movements and was a vocal critic of the education system.

Another parent was David Orcutt, an immigrant to British Columbia from the midwestern United States during the 1950s due to his pacifist beliefs and his opposition to the Korean War. He was an artist, a student of unconventional theories of learning and the brain, and well-known

in Vancouver's countercultural community. Phil and Hilda Thomas were educators with strong progressive beliefs. Mrs. Thomas was an English instructor at U.B.C., had been an active member of the Christian Socialist Movement in her youth, and would later be an N.D.P. candidate for the provincial legislature. Mr. Thomas had taught for a year at the New School.

Warren and Ellen Tallman, both U.B.C. faculty members in the English department, were admired by the growing community of countercultural students at U.B.C. during the 1960s. Warren Tallman, originally from the United States, was an authority on contemporary American poetry and organized the "legendary" Vancouver Poetry Festival in the summer of 1963.[12] The Tallmans frequently hosted such well-known poets as Allen Ginsberg for readings of their work in Vancouver. Ellen Tallman had been active in left wing and anarchist politics in Berkeley, California, before coming to Vancouver.

These were parents associated with left-wing political activities and unconventional lifestyles. They became models for their children and their children's friends. They supported the young people in their criticism of the public school system and their desire to experiment with alternative lifestyles. Yet these parents remained committed to the value of education and academic pursuits.

Mrs. Thomas, fearing that her children would not return to school, met with several other parents to investigate alternatives. During her search for possible locations for a school she found space available at the Unitarian Church. However, the Thomases were exhausted by their difficult years at the New School, and the parents could not agree on how permissive a school they wanted in any case. The parents concluded that they "didn't have the wherewithal" to take on such a project and decided "their kids should go back to public school."[13]

Meanwhile, the young people themselves began to discuss seriously starting their own school. This was an unexpected turn of events and the parents, though supportive of an alternative school in principle, had serious fears about the teenagers running their own show. The students were inspired by several informal discussions with Watson Thomson in his basement.

As one of the founding students puts it:

> Watson and Mary were an inspiration in the early stages. Most of our parents idealized Watson and he was able to override their objections. He would corner us kids and want to know what we were reading, what we were thinking about, what our concerns were...and what he could learn from us.[14]

Another supportive individual was Jim Harding, a graduate student at Simon Fraser University. He grew up in a Saskatchewan socialist family and was a leader in the Canadian student movement and the Student Union for Peace Action.[15] Young radicals like Jim Harding and older socialists like Watson Thomson thought authoritarian schools were antithetical to democracy. They were excited by the possibility of a student-run school because they saw the realization of student rights as an important step toward self-determination.[16] Mr. Harding was particularly helpful in advising the students how to approach their parents. He suggested they be assertive and Karen Tallman remembers a seminal moment in their discussions when Mr. Harding said: "Don't tell your parents you want to start a school, tell them you <u>are</u> a school."[17]

The students began planning and several came up with the memorable name, Knowplace, a pun on the Greek word for Utopia.[18] But the project may have been short lived if it hadn't been for another development. Colin Thomson, son of Watson and Mary, had just returned from a Company of Young Canadians training session for staff members in Ottawa during the summer of 1967. The younger Thomson had recently graduated from U.B.C. and was interested in working as a social activist like his father. He arrived back in Vancouver with the rather vague assignment of C.Y.C. "recruitment officer" and was looking for projects. But what he really wanted to do was work with Vancouver's disaffected youth.

There seemed to be a natural fit and the students asked the younger Thomson to work with them in establishing their school. The C.Y.C. Council had recently approved funding for the Barker Free School in July 1967, so Mr. Thomson hurriedly put together an application and began planning the implementation of the project with the students. The involvement of Mr. Thomson and the C.Y.C. immediately gave the project the legitimacy of being run by adults as

well as access to funding. However, it tied the project to the Company's goals and its complex internal political and personal relationships. It also ensured that education would not be the central occupation of the Knowplace community, since the C.Y.C. staff members and volunteers working with Knowplace were social activists rather than educators.

More students joined the project late that summer. They included Frances Long, whose mother was a well known artist; John Doheny, the son of a U.B.C. English professor and friend of the Tallmans; Gary Cramer, son of a B.C.T.V. producer who became associate editor of the *Georgia Straight*; Monica Carpendale, whose father was an influential professor in the S.F.U. communications department; Eda Landauer, daughter of a U.B.C. sociology professor; and several siblings and friends. In addition, two teenagers formerly associated with the Barker Free School joined the group—Bobby Barker, Bob Barker's son, and Rick Valentine, son of Chuck and Helen Valentine. The Knowplace student body was not just a random group of young people. Almost without exception they were the sons and daughters of people in intellectual or artistic careers, left-wing political activities, and experimental or unconventional lifestyles. The students themselves were, by all accounts, bright and curious teenagers.

The parents feared their children would cut themselves off from further educational opportunities and most opposed the project. Students and parents remember a large meeting in the Thomsons' basement that August. Staff members assured the worried parents that appropriate resource people from the two universities and elsewhere in the community would be brought in to offer an exciting educational programme. The young people's enthusiasm and determination ultimately won over the majority of parents and plans went full speed ahead for the school opening in September.

Many parents, in retrospect, believe they had little choice. In some cases their children had already dropped out of school and had no intention of going back. Others may have remained nominally enrolled in public school but were alienated. Furthermore, most parents knew their children were immersed in the Vancouver counterculture. Parents hoped that if the students

were attached to a group of responsible young adults in a somewhat legitimate educational setting, their children would at least be safe from the dangers of drugs and street life. As one parent reflects, "we felt lucky that there was any place off the streets where our kids could be."[19]

The parents faced a difficult dilemma. As intellectually and politically progressive individuals, they raised their children to be independent thinkers and to act on their own initiative. That these young people would develop their own school was a natural development. After all, they had watched their parents create alternatives when traditional institutions did not suit them. Most parents realized it would have been intellectually dishonest and probably ineffective to stand in the way of their children's plans once the idea of their own school had become firmly established. But the students, not surprisingly, created a far less structured school than their parents would have liked. One parent suggests "the fact that I was progressive wasn't a help to my kids because to rebel they had to go even farther out."[20]

There was a lot to do in a short time. To earn legitimacy as an independent school, the group gave itself an official name, the Voluntary Community School, and rented classroom space in the Unitarian Church. But the classrooms were rarely used and the school headquarters became a rented four storey house at 2426 York Avenue in Kitsilano, a few blocks from Fourth Avenue, the heart of Vancouver's youth culture. A fee structure of $25 per month for each student was set and arrangements were also made to acquire Ministry of Education textbooks. Relatives and friends of Knowplace students donated books to a school library which eventually numbered over one thousand volumes. As writer Olive Johnson noted in a December 1967 article about Knowplace in *Maclean's*, "their collection leans more heavily on John Lennon and Henry Miller than it does on Shakespeare."[21]

Staffing

The most pressing and significant task was the hiring of the school staff. The Company of Young Canadians Council initially approved funding for five "volunteer" teachers at $185 per month in addition to Colin Thomson who, as a C.Y.C. staff member, received a substantial salary as co-ordinator of the project.[22] The original teaching staff consisted of Rob Wood, Greg Sorbara, Rob Watt, and Lynn Burrows, most in their early twenties. When Ms. Burrows returned to her former C.Y.C. position Mr. Wood, Mr. Sorbara, Mr. Watt and Colin Thomson emerged as the major full-time staff at Knowplace. In contrast to many B.C. alternative schools, all Knowplace staff were Canadians. None of the principal staff members had any expertise or experience in teaching and this would be a serious obstacle to the project's success.

The new staff members had all been involved in other C.Y.C. projects before joining the school. Rob Wood was from Ontario and had been active in the American civil rights movement as well as the Student Union for Peace Action (S.U.P.A.), the most important radical student organization in Canada during the 1960s.[23] He worked with the Metis in Northern Saskatchewan to help develop local industry and by 1966 was in charge of training C.Y.C. staff members for English Canada. Developing training sessions fuelled his interest in education and he met Colin Thomson at such a session in 1967.[24] Greg Sorbara, also from Ontario, studied theology at the University of Toronto. He signed up with the C.Y.C. after graduation and was sent to a housing project in Vancouver. He met Colin Thomson late in the summer just before Knowplace opened.[25] Both Mr. Wood and Mr. Sorbara joined the staff in late August.

Rob Watt was raised in the interior of British Columbia and was a student activist at Simon Fraser University. He was influenced by S.F.U. professors David Berg, Brian Carpendale, and most notably Fred Brown. As a teaching assistant for Professor Brown's philosophy of education course, Mr. Watt came to believe that the most powerful antidote to problems of contemporary society is to create intentional communities. These rural or urban "communes"

would emulate extended families, would experiment in co-operative living, and emphasize the importance of education. With this new interest Mr. Watt joined the C.Y.C. and was trained to become a co-operative housing co-ordinator. He founded S.F.U. co-operative housing and two co-operatives in New Westminster. But Mr. Watt was drawn to the educational component of co-operative theory and had read about Summerhill and Ontario's Everdale Place. When he heard about Knowplace it seemed that everything was falling into place and he soon joined the staff.[26]

Other staff members included Heather-Jon Maroney, a former S.U.P.A. activist from Ottawa, Elli Gomber, and Shelagh Day, a former U.B.C. English instructor who was to become a feminist and political activist. Nevertheless, the staff was heavily male-dominated. The opinions of female staff were marginalized and there was little feminist presence at Knowplace.[27] It was common during the 1960s for women activists to encounter as much inequality within radical political organizations as existed in the mainstream culture.[28]

Company of Young Canadians

When the federal government formed the Company of Young Canadians in 1965, it had envisioned an organization similar to the Peace Corps in the United States. The intention was to facilitate young idealists to work on worthwhile social projects although critics characterized it as an attempt to co-opt and channel politically disaffected youth into acceptable activities.[29] From the outset the Company was rife with political schisms. The early debate between "radicals" and "moderates" was won by the radicals and the C.Y.C. became an organization primarily concerned with social activism and social change.[30] As Doug Owram puts it:

> Instead of taming youth, the government ended up funding criticism. Instead of clean-cut Peace Corps workers they got 'dirty bearded hippies' and 'promiscuous women.' Instead of social service, they got social activism.[31]

The C.Y.C. was also split across regional lines; the Company was dominated by Ontario, but

some of its most notable successes occurred in western Canada. Ian Hamilton, author of a book about the C.Y.C., suggests that the farther away a project was from Ottawa the more autonomy it had.[32]

The other major political conflict was organizational as the C.Y.C. rapidly developed an unwieldy bureaucracy. Company policy was made by a government-appointed Council, and administered by national, regional, and local supervisory staff workers. But the real work of programme delivery was carried out by field "volunteers" involved in individual projects. Council members, staff, and volunteers all distrusted one another. One of the contradictions within the Company was that the "volunteers," who did most of the work on the front lines, received tiny salaries of approximately $200 per month, and were on finite two-year contracts. Staff, on the other hand, received substantial salaries and had reasonably secure jobs.[33] The government had initially promised that the volunteers would eventually run the organization, but volunteers had minimal influence until 1969/70 when the Company was in its last days. The result was substantial resentment among volunteers of C.Y.C. staff.

The internal structure of the C.Y.C. had a significant impact on the development of Knowplace. Although the project's progressive nature suited the general orientation of the organization, Knowplace turned out to be even too controversial for the C.Y.C. This was particularly true during 1967/68 when the Company came under attack from the mainstream press for being excessively influenced by political activists and "hippies."[34] C.Y.C. leaders were unhappy about bad press resulting from projects like Knowplace.

On the other hand, the Company's leadership in Ontario was more overtly political than in B.C. and for many senior staff the British Columbia school projects were not political enough. Ontario leaders would not have thought it a high priority to fund free schools attended by rebellious middle-class youth. Although Ontario staff members Bob Davis and George Martell were teaching at two free schools receiving Company support (Everdale and Superschool), they were more consciously interested in fundamental political and social change than were Knowplace

staff.[35] On the other hand, alternative schools in British Columbia were more influenced by the counterculture. In July 1967 George Martell was asked to prepare a proposal for C.Y.C. policy on educational projects. It was only after his report recommended support for the free school projects that Knowplace and the Barker Free School received approval for funding.[36] Some C.Y.C. leaders never felt completely at ease with Knowplace.[37] This was due not only to the lack of an explicitly "social change" dimension to the Knowplace programme, but also because the Ontario leaders saw Knowplace as representing an extreme countercultural position with which they did not agree and which was potentially embarrassing to the Company. Nevertheless, the project continued to develop on the west coast away from the close scrutiny of Ottawa.

For administrative efficiency the C.Y.C. directors combined Knowplace, the Barker Free School, and other educational and youth oriented organizations under the name "Vancouver Youth Project" with Colin Thomson in charge. One of the affiliated groups was "Kool Aid," an alternative welfare agency formed to help Vancouver street kids. This was the famous "summer of love," 1967, when thousands of free-spirited teenagers descended upon Vancouver, and these youth agencies were a response to the growing countercultural movement.[38] The Vancouver Youth Project later added several other alternative school ventures including the Bhavana experimental art school, the Experimental Education Foundation ("Floating Free School"), and "The People" free school. (See Chapter 4) Two other components were a newly formed high school student union and the "Free University," a loose collection of individuals offering and taking alternative courses. All these projects were oriented toward education or alienated youth and had overlapping personnel. Gordon Yearsley of the art school, Dave Manning of the Floating School, and Jan McDougall of "The People" had all taught at the Barker School. As well, Knowplace and Barker staff members were all friends and some shared households. However, the combined organization meant Mr. Thomson was drawn heavily into administration, and as the months wore on staff members became less involved with day-to-day activities at Knowplace, leaving the leadership to the students themselves.

Student Activities

The school opened in September, 1967 with twenty-two students. From the beginning it was difficult to be sure who was an officially enrolled student and who was not. Defined school hours were virtually non-existent, groups of students were often away on field trips, and a number of young people whose parents insisted they go to public school would hang around Knowplace after 3:00. Early in September, the entire school held a weekend retreat at Jim Harding's farm at Whonnock in the Fraser Valley (headquarters of an experimental free university). The discussions that took place there set the tone for the whole year, as one adult participant wrote:

> During this weekend the concept of community was discussed in great detail. It was felt by all that learning to relate to one another on a meaningful level was more important than learning a subject such as algebra. It was this communication and sense of community, important in terms of personal development, that the students felt they had been lacking in the educational system.[39]

The staff thought it had an educational plan. The formal application to the Company of Young Canadians stated that "the aim of the school is to allow each student to develop his individual human capacities in a framework of a community in which the inter-relationships are of equal concern and value." The statement goes on to emphasize the principle that "the student must do the work of learning and that his activity is most satisfying and productive when it stems from his own interests."[40] This statement draws on several educational theories. There is a hint of Watson Thomson in the emphasis on relationships and community, as well as John Dewey in the importance of student interests and A.S. Neill in the emphasis on student autonomy. Regarding curriculum the document has this to say:

> The student should actively experience his education rather than passively accept it. The curriculum is not regarded as a pre-digested body of knowledge which must be fed by degrees to the recipients. It is looked upon as a body of educational activities which must develop gradually from an interplay between teachers and students who are encouraged to bring their individuality to bear on the selection of and approach to various subjects.[41]

Finally the document asserts that "the standard B.C. curriculum will be offered for those who request it" and one student told a reporter that she planned to finish the regular curriculum in three months so that she "would be free the rest of the year to do our own stuff."[42]

But it soon became clear that Knowplace was not so much a school as an experiment in communal living. Students and staff together cooked large group meals which were eaten around two large doors that served as tables in the middle of the dining room. Although there had been no provision for boarding (with the exception of Rick Valentine from Argenta who was permitted to set up a bedroom in one of the walk-in closets), students often slept over at the house. Among these were young people having trouble at home with parents, and others who simply didn't want to miss out on any group experiences. Sex was probably another motivation. The floor of one entire bedroom was covered with mattresses and sleeping bags, and sometimes up to a dozen kids would stay over. Students spent endless hours in the evenings talking about themselves and their relationships; as one staff member put it, "teenagers need to talk and talk and talk."[43]

The students spent a great deal of time in the outside community. The Company of Young Canadians had provided a "yellow bus" for the school's use and staff members constantly drove off with groups of kids. They went to the two university campuses, to beaches and parks, museums and art galleries, the law courts, and to evening events such as poetry readings or dances at the Retinal Circus on Davie Street, Vancouver's chief venue for "psychedelic" music. Groups of students occasionally attended lectures at U.B.C. and S.F.U. but visits to the universities were more often to attend noon hour dances or demonstrations against the war in Vietnam. Students went out on their own "in adolescent packs" often just to hang out on Fourth Avenue. Groups of Knowplace students spoke at public high schools and even attended a session of a Vancouver School Board counselling course for teachers.[44] Many people respected them as representatives of needed cultural change and they were treated as celebrities wherever they went.

Knowplace students also went on longer trips in the yellow bus to such places as Long Beach, the Oregon coast, and Argenta. All they needed was a staff member who was willing to

drive them. San Francisco was a favourite destination and groups of students went there on several occasions. Another popular destination was Storm Bay, a remote inlet near the Sechelt Peninsula accessible only by boat. A group of young Vancouver artists and counterculture people, some of whom were friends of Knowplace staff members, had bought a piece of land there about the same time that Knowplace began. Students were free to go to Storm Bay whenever they liked, and it was typical for groups of students to stay there for a week or more.

The educational programme was tentative at best. The original idea had been that students would organize courses they were interested in and arrange for appropriate resource persons to provide instruction. At the Whonnock retreat in September 1967 students and staff had long discussions about the kind of academic programme they wanted. A few students read about alternative education and alternative communities. This was followed by sporadic attempts to organize classes, but anything even resembling a formal curriculum never got off the ground. Jim Harding offered a weekly class in Canadian history and Garry Nixon, a teacher at St. George's private school, offered late afternoon classes in mathematics and science several times per week. Both report that attendance was often as low as two or three students and occasionally there were no students at all. Rob Wood offered classes in photography and drama with the same result. The constant field trips did not help to sustain regularly scheduled classes but, for the most part, the students were not interested anyway.

There were numerous attempts to organize learning activities. One student recalls a political science class at which he reported on the diaries of Che Guevara. But the class didn't last and by the second year he stopped going and spent his time at the U.B.C. library instead.[45] Another former student remembers science equipment brought in and unfulfilled promises to take groups to science labs at U.B.C. Still another student remembers that a mythology and storytelling class presented by poet Nelson Miller met two or three times but otherwise there were "little or no academics the whole time.[46] One student remembers biologist Dr. Mary Wertheim offered classes for five or six students for a period of time, but for the most part there were just

"occasional stabs at education."[47] Students sometimes talked about books they had read and one student tried to start a reading course. It began with eight students reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. However, the group did not continue beyond a few initial sessions.

The lack of an educational programme was justified by one student in the jargon of the day: "we're learning to be, not just to do."[48] Similarly, another student said at the time: "We're getting the education we want here; it's not so much an academic education but an education in being with people and learning about people."[49] But one student recalls her disappointment at the lack of a real programme:

> I approached it like school. I bussed in from New Westminster and stayed for school hours. I was interested in things. I thought there would be interesting topics and discussions, that we would do challenging activities. But I would often be the only one who would show up for classes. It was discouraging for the teachers. I ended up spending most of my time in the library upstairs reading Shakespeare and Tolstoy.[50]

If academics were neglected "sex, drugs, and rock and roll" played a big part in the life of Knowplace. The teenagers spent a great deal of time listening to and playing music. They formed bands and jammed for hours. As one student put it, "that's what we did all day; what spoke to us was music,"[51] while a staff member says "these kids lived for music and listened to it incessantly."[52] Three former students are professional musicians, and two local B.C. bands, "Brain Damage" and "Doug and the Slugs," got their start at Knowplace.

Students and some staff members used a great deal of drugs, mostly marijuana and L.S.D. Two individuals were dealing drugs on the side and one staff person was fired for drug related activities. The staff tried to control drug use on the premises, but it was easy enough for the kids to go somewhere else to get stoned and one student describes psychedelic drugs as a "major teacher" at Knowplace. Several former students developed serious addiction and abuse problems with harder drugs and alcohol that continued into their adult lives.

Sexual relations were common among these uninhibited teenagers. Relations between male staff members and female students also occurred, most staff being only a few years older

than the students. It is important to emphasize that only a minority of staff were involved. Some male and female staff objected but "sexual freedom" remained an overriding value. Several decades later no one would consider this behaviour acceptable but in the late 1960s, principles of personal freedom usually prevailed. One major problem with the Knowplace experiment was the youthfulness of its staff. There was no one in charge who was a little older and wiser.

Staff and students sought to make decisions by consensus, but often problems of policy and day-to-day life went unresolved. To improve communication the school hired a trainer from Saskatchewan to lead a psychotherapeutic encounter group ("T Group") session lasting several days. Such groups were frequent at the time and were often led by individuals with relatively little training. In this case, several students remember it as a "fiasco" with many destructive moments and "a lot of angry people." One student says, "I went to one and I never went back." Many of the personal problems of Knowplace students were normal issues of adolescent emotional development, but no one on staff knew how to address them. Furthermore, personal problems were sometimes exacerbated by drug consumption which became an accepted way of life among members of the community.

Parents had little influence on the school's development and spent little time there. During the early months staff, students, and parents had monthly meetings. Colin Thomson would attempt to defend the school's practices and a few sympathetic parents tried to mediate between the staff and those parents who were worried about drugs, sex, or the academic programme. But even the most supportive lost patience with the school at times. On one occasion infuriated parents threatened to call the police over a relationship between their daughter and a staff member. But in the end most parents believed they were powerless to control their kids.

For their part, the students developed a tight community. As one student puts it "the pack of kids was very close and having an amazing time."[53] Another recalls being exposed to a rich cultural life in an adolescent milieu with access to an interesting adult world of avant garde artists, rock bands, and political activists.[54] The staff, on the other hand, contributed little to the student

dynamic and, for the most part, simply became part of that culture. As the 1968/69 prospectus states: "The teachers have very much in common with the students, as they are, in many cases, only six or seven years older. Thus total integration of staff and students has been achieved."[55] One former staff member admits that "the adults were drawn too much into the life of the kids."[56]

This didn't last of course, and most staff members eventually spent less time at the school as they became more involved in other pursuits. Furthermore, the staff had developed a closeness of their own and most lived together in a house on Point Grey Road not far from the school building. Another house at 16th and Burrard, occupied by Barry and Betty Cramer, became one more refuge for Knowplace students. As in many alternative schools the Knowplace community resembled an extended family, "tribal" as one student describes it, and many friendships remain strong to this day.

Community Relations

Knowplace became a point of fascination for political activists, artists, and educators. Political radicals committed to self-determination and social and educational Romantics interested in co-operative community offered their support. The list of adults willing to teach included Watson Thomson and Jim Harding, Gordon Yearsley (artist), Ed McClure (founder of Intermedia, an artists' co-operative), Art Stone (a Simon Fraser University mathematics professor), Betty Wertheim (S.F.U. biology professor), Nelson Miller (poet), and Jim Kinzel (C.Y.C. activist from Saskatchewan), to name just a few. In addition public figures as diverse as Allen Ginsberg, rock stars Country Joe and the Fish, jazz musician Al Neil, and Vancouver poet bill bissett visited the school, as did an aboriginal chief who impressed students with his talking stick.

An almost daily visitor was Garry Nixon, a mathematics teacher at St. George's exclusive private school. Mr. Nixon was concerned about the large numbers of teenagers alienated from

impersonal and inflexible high schools. He offered math classes to Knowplace students in the afternoons after his St. George's duties were completed. Mr. Nixon would become an important figure in the alternative school movement in the early 1970s as the founder of Ideal School.

The school's link to counterculture youth led to instant notoriety and Knowplace was deluged by visitors, media, and "hangers-on." Some visitors were unsavory, and at worst predatory, individuals who were only looking for a place to "crash" and find free food, drugs, or available females. But most were interested in Knowplace as a social and educational experiment. Knowplace staff were even invited to a United Way meeting to discuss Vancouver's alienated youth problem.[57]

Knowplace staff members took part in a high profile "Free School Conference" held at the New School in December 1967 attended by one hundred people. Colin Thomson and Rob Wood spoke about how difficult it is for free school teachers and students to overcome conditioning caused by traditional notions of authority.[58] Individuals attended from all across Canada and included Bob Davis of Everdale Place and Vancouver speakers Bob Barker of the Barker Free School and Tom Durrie of the New School.[59] The conference was infused with optimism, for participants believed the free school movement would continue to grow. Within a few months two Knowplace offshoots had opened, one located in the Intermedia building downtown and the other in the basement of the New School.[60]

The media and the public were enchanted by the youth movement and Knowplace was featured in prominent publications. *Maclean's*, with its national readership, published a article on Knowplace in December, 1967, "As a cool school, there's no place like Knowplace."[61] *Vancouver Life* featured Knowplace in a lead article, "Free Schools: tomorrow's education or a passing fad?" in April, 1968.[62] The *Vancouver Sun* put Knowplace on the front page of Section Three in December 1967. The headline read "22 Disgruntled Students Open Their Own School" and the article was accompanied by a large photograph of half a dozen "hippieish" looking students and young "bearded" staff members.[63]

Free schools and "hippie" culture were big news in 1967/68 and reporters or politicians could be assured of an interested readership if they drew attention to them. A Social Credit Member of Parliament from the interior of British Columbia, Howard Johnston, caused a furor in the House of Commons in late 1967 when he accused the Company of Young Canadians of misusing public money "to subvert B.C.'s public education system" in funding Knowplace and the Barker Free School.[64] He also criticized Knowplace for drawing its student body only from upper- and middle-class families. In response to the charges C.Y.C. assistant director Stewart Goodings sent information to the government and a letter from Prime Minister Lester Pearson himself assured Mr. Johnston that "the provincial authorities are fully aware of the C.Y.C.'s participation in these two schools but as they are classified as private schools, the province plays no part in their staffing."[65]

This story was carried by major newspapers across the country including the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail*. In the wake of the controversy the *Vancouver Sun* devoted an entire editorial to Knowplace titled "Knowplace to Go?" The editorial posed a number of questions:

> Is this the sort of project to which CYC members should devote their time and effort? One might wonder if there weren't some poor people the CYC could be helping to better social cause than dissatisfied school students who can afford an extra $25 a month to go to Knowplace. Knowplace students say they are not satisfied with public school, its rules, and its lessons. Perhaps if he does nothing else Mr. Peterson [B.C. Education Minister Leslie Peterson], should see if this is the fault of the students or of the public schools. These are some of the questions posed by this unusual school.[66]

However, Mr. Peterson dismissed the issue as outside his jurisdiction since the B.C. government did not have any authority over independent schools in those days. The Deputy Education Minister said: "We aren't concerned about whether these people are hippies or not. As far as we're concerned, it's just another private school."[67] Mr. Peterson also referred to Knowplace as "the same as any other private school[68] and told a *Province* reporter that "he doesn't think Knowplace School is subverting the B.C. public school system; we have no jurisdiction in respect of the school."[69] Although a Vancouver School Board official invited

"school age hippie dropouts" to return to school,[70] the Department of Education had clearly decided it was not worth the trouble to confront marginal schools like Knowplace.

Another controversy erupted in late 1968 when Liberal Member of Parliament Grant Deachman of Vancouver publicly criticized Knowplace as a "hippy-looking establishment that serves as a hangout for potential high school dropouts, agitates among high school activist groups, and lures young girls into compromising and undisciplined situations."[71] Mr. Goodings (now C.Y.C. Executive Director) once again diffused the situation by responding directly to the M.P. Mr. Goodings then summed up some of the broader issues in a memorandum to a senior civil servant in the Ministry responsible for the C.Y.C.:

> We view the project as an attempt to confront the increasingly large number of young people who are questioning established institutions and patterns of behaviour. It is inevitable that this kind of project will make certain people nervous. Most of the students at Knowplace have long hair and wear clothes of their own choosing. Even these minor examples of individualism often attract violent criticism and it is not surprising that the most lurid and sensational stories and rumours will soon develop about a project as unusual as this.[72]

As the most notorious free school of the day, Knowplace drew the attention of politicians and private citizens. Some people feared that such manifestations of the counterculture were subversive. But the government did not perceive Knowplace as threatening enough in 1967 to warrant any intervention. However, by the early 1970s the situation would change and two free schools outside Vancouver (one on the Gulf Islands and another in the Kootenays) were challenged by local authorities.

The Second Year

Knowplace was evicted from the York Avenue house in the Spring of 1968 as neighbours complained about groups of hippie kids lounging around in the front yard. The school moved farther down the street to the second storey of a warehouse at First and Burrard. This location,

which the group named the "Wherehouse," was a less inviting space than the house but it was spacious and hidden from the public eye. But the energy that had propelled the school through its first year was waning. Rob Watt left the school after the first year and was replaced by Dr. George Wertheim, a former Stanford psychology professor who had recently immigrated.[73] The student body officially expanded to thirty students, but as in other alternative schools, the newcomers were mostly teenagers with behaviour problems who were having difficulties at school or at home. They never became integral to the group.[74]

By June 1968 it had become obvious that the academic programme at Knowplace was not working. C.Y.C. assistant director Stewart Goodings described the first year as "stormy and unpredictable." He went on to explain that:

> Since the whole emphasis of the school was on giving students the freedom to choose what they wished to learn, it was inevitable that Knowplace would move into unconventional and unorthodox areas of activity. While the C.Y.C. volunteers had hoped for a high academic content, it became clear that what most of the twenty-five students really wanted was simply a place where they could begin to learn and grow at their own speed and in their own way. This made for a very haphazard programme. While some students did get involved in detailed and substantial study, many others spent their time simply talking to each other, arguing, hanging around the school building, and generally acting as most normal young people would if they suddenly found themselves faced with freedom after a dozen years in the education system.

The school did manage to publish a professional looking prospectus for the second year, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction that Knowplace was an educational institution. In fact, the school had become even more overtly non-academic as the prospectus warns:

> New students contemplating applying to Knowplace should be aware that the focus of 1968/69 will likely continue to be non-academic although help and encouragement will be given to students wishing to follow particular courses of study on their own.[75]

In an effort to inject some order into the programme, the staff decided to divide the student body into three groups of ten students, each working with a staff member on a specific project. But

midway through the second year most students realized the new programme was not working. Though the school never officially closed, in early 1969 students simply stopped coming.

Relations between the Vancouver Youth Project and the Company of Young Canadians leadership were constructive throughout much of 1968. Correspondence from executive director Stewart Goodings and other Ottawa staff was frequent and supportive. However, relations with Ottawa began to deteriorate by the end of the year. There were several reasons for this, some a consequence of change within the C.Y.C. and others specific to the Youth Project itself.

First, the Vancouver Youth Project underwent its first major evaluation in October 1968, prepared by Lionel Orlikow of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. He was critical of the project's staff selection procedures, its lack of accountability, its poor relationship with the educational establishment and the community at large, its individualistic focus, and its lack of a meaningful academic programme.[76] This unsatisfactory report contributed to a change in attitude at the Ottawa office towards the Vancouver Youth Project.

Second, the C.Y.C. leadership was sensitive about the negative publicity generated by the Knowplace project. In addition to the public controversy created by the two Members of Parliament and the numerous newspaper and magazine stories, the Company received complaints from neighbours, concerned letters from individuals, and the criticism of a local high school vice-principal.[77] One Knowplace parent complained about his son's unsatisfactory education to the C.Y.C. regional director.[78] Although Stewart Goodings realized that "most of the articles written about the Company are overwritten,"[79] C.Y.C. leaders must have been tired of the bad press that projects like Knowplace created.

Third, Knowplace staff paid little attention to administrative details. Budgets were incomplete, staffing records convoluted, and monthly reports requested by the Ottawa office were never submitted. This was not entirely the fault of the Vancouver staff, for the entire C.Y.C. organization had developed a reputation for administrative confusion.[80] In fact, Mr. Thomson complained to the Ottawa office about the lack of "communications over the Rockies" and the

"vagueness as to who exercises what power and who makes what decisions."[81] The lack of efficiency was hardly surprising since administration was not exactly a priority among activist youth. But in 1968 the government cut the Company's budget substantially and as the national staff attempted to tighten up their procedures they became more demanding of disorganized projects like Knowplace.

When in early 1969 the C.Y.C. Council appointed a new national director, Claude Vidal, known for his efficiency but lacking in any experience with volunteer service or social activism, the writing was on the wall for Knowplace. The project's unsatisfactory evaluation, its excessive controversy, and its poor administrative practices led to a decision in the spring of 1969 not to fund Knowplace or the Barker Free School beyond their two-year terms. At first, the director authorized other components of the Vancouver Youth Project to continue with reduced staff. But in December 1969, the entire project was terminated.

Colin Thomson and other staff fought these decisions for over six months. Mr. Thomson argued that the Vancouver Youth Project had become "an essential part of the Vancouver youth scene" and was at a "critical stage in its development." In a long submission to Ottawa he described the project's "network of independent community schools" and "the benefit derived by those students directly involved." He then outlined what he saw as the project's wider objectives:

> We have been instrumental in changing and widening the local school establishment. But change is a slow business and the general issues surrounding youth and education become more crucial every day. Consequently it would be near disastrous for the C.Y.C. to suddenly pull out and allow these schools to collapse. Their mere existence is a prime factor in promoting a changing attitude toward young people in the public system.[82]

The few remaining staff members tried to reorganize the project under the leadership of Barry Cramer, emphasizing their unique work with street youth "in a way that few other agencies or organizations have been capable of doing."[83] Parents and young people sent dozens of letters to Ottawa in support of the various projects.[84] But despite numerous requests for reconsideration, Ottawa staff would not continue the programme with the exception of one six-

month extension granted to the contract of Dave Manning for his work with the Floating Free School in Burnaby.[85]

Lack of funding, however, was not the real issue, as Knowplace had lost its vitality.[86] Karen Tallman reflects that "probably the best thing we could do was close the school. It had lost most of its energy; a few of us were keeping it going."[87] The initial enthusiasm disappeared and the school simply fell apart: as one former student describes, "the school ended with a fizzle."[88] As Rob Wood describes it: "The end of the school wasn't very dramatic; few people had that kind of staying power."[89]

A similar school arose in Victoria in 1968 founded by ten high school students for many of the same reasons that Knowplace was created. Called the Victoria Free School and later the Bertrand Russell Academy, the school met in the Unitarian Church hall and in a family home. Some of the students were opposed to the authoritarian school system, others had learning problems or family troubles, and a few just wanted to experience the wider world. Most were the children of politically liberal professors but a few came from other backgrounds. With the help of Joan Schwartz, former teacher at Craigdarroch School, the students hired resource people to help them with English, mathematics, music, and art. Students discussed novels, wrote short stories, had occasional math lessons, performed some theatre, and engaged in political discussions. The school "ran out of steam" in less than a year but students had found it an intense experience. Although the academic component was small, it was more visible than at Knowplace, partly because Victoria had only a small countercultural community to tempt the students. Most returned to mainstream or liberal high schools.[90]

Conclusion

The lack of an educational programme was a disappointment to many early supporters of Knowplace. One of these, Jim Harding, suggests today that the ethic of individualism and individual freedom hindered any serious consideration of a meaningful academic component:

> I never sensed that Knowplace had an educational philosophy other than free play—not even a sophisticated understanding of A.S. Neill. Classes were never encouraged or supported by the Knowplace subculture. The staff didn't think it was important. They didn't have a process to develop a learning community."[91]

A former staff person agrees, saying there was no viable curriculum, not even a Summerhill model. She suggests the problem was simply that "none of the staff were teachers."[92] Another admits "we desperately tried to think of something to do."[93] Former student Bruce Russell says plainly that Knowplace "failed" as a pedagogical institution: "There was little education going on besides life experience. If there had been some good pedagogues in the group they could have excited us with special projects or a series of speakers."[94] Another former student expresses her disappointment about the school this way:

> There was lots of negative attitude towards education. The role of the adults should have been to provide stimulation and opportunity. I found some things myself, but I couldn't find everything. There were a lot of opportunities for learning and discussion that didn't take place."[95]

Gordon Yearsley, an original supporter of the project, had developed serious concerns by 1969. In a separate application to the C.Y.C. for continued funding for his "mini-Art School" he wrote:

> I encouraged the young people who started Knowplace in June 1967 and I was associated with the project during its early development. Within a few weeks of opening Knowplace parents became angry because they saw their young people slipping into total inertia. The students began to drop away and complain that they were constantly distracted by those who only wanted to goof off. Self-motivated people were held down. Reaction against the system absorbed the energies of these young people and the leaders were forced to develop a rationale for inertia. I defended the project for some time into 1968. I assumed the leaders

> working at Knowplace were conscientiously trying to work out their theories of education and were setting up real opportunities for the young people who were hanging around their school. I did not suspect that most of the verbalizing was window dressing to hide an empty project.[96]

What Mr. Yearsley identifies as "window dressing" was a serious problem. Staff and students maintained the fiction for over a year that Knowplace had a real educational programme. A *Vancouver Sun* writer reported in December 1967 that "courses include most of the basic school subjects such as mathematics, French, history, and English, plus unusual ones like religion, psychedelics, and the study of the public school system itself."[97] Another reporter confirmed the existence of subjects such as "French, Canadian history, cooking, knowledge and understanding, jewelry, art, and fantasy."[98] A third writer described how Knowplace offered "independent study" options and how students planned to complete the regular curriculum in three months.[99] None of this happened, of course, but because participants and observers were sympathetic to the goals of the programme, there was a reluctance to criticize Knowplace. These observers looked the other way as long as they could.

Knowplace was the end of the high school careers of almost all its students. As parent Ellen Tallman put it, "it was too hard for most of the kids to go back to school; Karen always felt behind everyone in math and science and had to work twice as hard."[100] A former student agrees that "academically just about everyone was set back."[101] One student was functionally illiterate and a fellow student remembers him at thirteen years old "asking me to write down a telephone message for him and realizing that he couldn't write, and being shocked by that."[102] One student did enroll the following year at Campbell River Senior High School where significant reforms under principal John Young had made the school considerably less authoritarian than other mainstream schools.[103] (See Chapter 13) But most drifted until they were old enough to begin adult life.

Few students pursued higher education although the exceptions are notable. U.B.C. registrar John Parnell had offered Knowplace students an opportunity to audit courses and earn

credit for them if they did well. Karen Tallman took him up on this challenge and passed her first year of university in the Arts I progamme. Ms. Tallman eventually completed a science degree and earned a Ph.D. in psychology. Another former student is pursuing a Ph.D. in anthropology and a third earned a Masters degree in adult education. Still another trained in art therapy and now owns and directs her own school. Several former students have managed to find challenging careers through their own efforts. Bruce Russell, though he never went to university, designed a study programme for himself that was so successful he has become an art historian with the National Gallery in Ottawa. Lowell Orcutt is a self-taught computer analyst and software designer while still another former student, a professional musician plagued by drug abuse for many years, has successfully pursued a Bachelor of Music degree.

The family and early educational backgrounds of these individuals undoubtedly helped them to overcome a deficient high school education. But others were not so successful and several former Knowplace students have drifted for many years without occupations or in jobs that are below their capacity. One parent speculates that the females have fared better than the males, perhaps because girls mature earlier.[104] Another parent concludes, "All these kids have turned out to be good people but it's sad many haven't been able to reach their potential."[105]

Knowplace and other free schools cannot be separated from the counterculture of the late 1960s. This was a diffuse movement which took many forms in North America including: drug use, free love, long hair and bright clothing, artistic and musical expression, back-to-the-land, and a Romantic emphasis on feelings, anti-intellectualism, and spiritual mysticism. Associated political values included pacifism, anti-authoritarianism, anti-materialism, and communitarianism. Some proponents of this new lifestyle were interested in reforming society and culture. But above all the counterculture was about individual freedom and personal transcendance. Free schools were considered the natural way to help growing individuals free themselves from personal inhibitions and unwanted cultural and intellectual baggage.

Both staff and students were caught up in the anti-intellectualism that pervaded

countercultural values, as Bob Makaroff puts it, "a rejection of discipline and scientific thinking."[106] According to one former staff member, some free school advocates believed that even Summerhill, Everdale, and the Barker Free School were halfway measures because adults were still in control: "At Knowplace the kids didn't want a flexible programme, they didn't want innovative courses, they didn't want individualized tutoring. They thought education was learning to live in a more meaningful way."[107]

Staff members had little or no educational expertise and were not mature enough to be effective role models for a group of questioning teenagers. They accepted the Romantic notion, prevalent at the time, that adults had nothing to teach children, that if they simply supported kids in whatever they wanted to do, education and growth would take care of themselves. There were many platitudes about "learning to be rather than learning to do" and "learning how to relate to people rather than to knowledge." But as Jim Harding wrote in 1970:

> We do not have to abandon intellectual curiosities to have human freedoms, in fact, the two are very much intertwined. In letting the kids do what they please and being supportive passively, rather than in a challenging way, something quite different from education is allowed to go on.[108]

Knowplace students have been at a disadvantage in establishing careers. This was due to an abrogation of adult responsibility as educator Jonathan Kozol argued in his 1972 book, *Free Schools*. He lamented that free school adherents did not recognize the virtues of consistency and discipline. Kozol praises "teachers who are not afraid to teach" and exhorts alternative educators:

> It is time for us to face our own inherent fear of strength and of effectiveness head-on. I think we must be prepared to strive with all our hearts to be strong teachers, efficacious adults, unintimidated leaders, and straightforward and strong-minded provocations in the lives of children.[109]

Knowplace was one of the most "Canadian" of all B.C. alternative schools. It was staffed by young Canadians and much of its inspiration stemmed from Canadian socialist idealism and Canadian youth radicalism. The sponsorship of the federal government, through the Company of Young Canadians, was a particularly Canadian development. It is unlikely that government

funding for such a radical experiment could have occurred in the United States. However, Knowplace was also influenced by American countercultural values as well as the American Progressive and English Romantic traditions. Knowplace was a uniquely British Columbia experiment that combined Canadian communitarian socialism and English Romanticism with the American counterculture.

Knowplace existed for less than two years and must be judged unsuccessful by strictly educational criteria. The school had no academic programme and did not prepare its students for further educational pursuits. The staff took few opportunities to stimulate intellectual growth, whether formal or informal. Nor did Knowplace fulfill a therapeutic or problem-solving objective; on the contrary, drug use was so prevalent that it became a way of life for some. The school began with high ideals but did not achieve them, chiefly because the staff had no educational experience or any well-conceived programme. One former staff member reflects that the "kids were at the very edge of danger and we adopted their mindset, immersed ourselves in it." Knowplace was really "a bridge for kids rather than a school; a halfway house in a transition of lifestyles."[110]

However, some former students suggest, three decades later, that the Knowplace environment helped them learn to rely on their own resources to acquire skills and information or to solve personal problems. Exposed to many unusual people and a rich cultural life, students had experiences that they could never have had elsewhere. One student, now pursuing a Ph.D., describes Knowplace as a "worthwhile experience. It cracked my world open. I was very shy. I needed a major shock. It was an experience of extreme value to me."[111] Another says: I'm happy with who I am." Karen Tallman reflects: "There was something there. We had a brash confidence; we didn't look to anyone for permission. There were costs but the alternative for many of us would have been worse. I wouldn't have given it up. We were doing things that were uncharted. It changed the face of education. My kids can thank me."[112]

Students came to Knowplace because they had become so alienated from the public school system they were determined not to go back under any circumstances. There was nowhere else for them to go in 1967. Recognized alternative programmes for high school students would not be established for several years, and the counterculture was too strong a force in these young people's lives for their parents to have been a useful support. For these students, Knowplace at least provided a semi-safe environment supervised by sympathetic adults that kept them away from the organized drug trade and street life. More free schools would be established in the province during the next several years and would be, in some respects, even farther removed from mainstream society than Knowplace had been.

NOTES

1. For a description of Vancouver in 1967 see Myrna Kostash, *Long Way From Home* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1980), pp. 121-124; Ron Verzuh, *Underground Times: Canada's Flower-Child Revolutionaries* (Toronto: Deneau, 1989), Chapter 3; and Tina Loo, "Flower Children in Lotusland," in *The Beaver* (February-March, 1998) pp. 36-41.
2. Karen Tallman, personal interview, October 9, 1996.
3. Sonya Makaroff quoted by Olive Johnson, "As a cool school, there's no place like Knowplace" in *Maclean's* 80: 12 (December, 1967) p. 5.
4. Bruce Russell, personal interview, December 11, 1996.
5. Lloyd Griffiths, personal interview, December 5, 1996.
6. Hilda Thomas, personal interview, December 15, 1996.
7. Lowell Orcutt, personal interview, November 21, 1996.
8. Rick Valentine quoted by Olive Johnson, "Free Schools: tomorrow's education or passing fad?" in *Vancouver Life* (April, 1968) p. 19.
9. See Michael Welton's biography of Watson Thomson, *To Be and Build the Glorious World* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1984).
10. Michael Welton, "Mobilizing the People for Socialism: The Politics of Adult Education in Saskatchewan, 1944-45" in Michael Welton, ed. *Knowledge for the People* (Toronto: OISE Press, 1987), 151-169.
11. Mary Thomson, personal interview, November 4, 1996.
12. See George Bowering's colourful description of this event in *Bowering's B.C. A Swashbuckling History* (Toronto: Penguin, 1996) pp. 320-321. The Festival was headlined by "Black Mountain" poets Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan, as well as Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, and Canadian Margaret Avison.
13. Hilda Thomas, personal interview, December 15, 1996.
14. Bruce Russell, personal interview, December 11, 1996.
15. Jim Harding chaired the Federal Council of the Student Union for Peace Action (S.U.P.A.) in 1966 and was an editor of and frequent contributor to *Our Generation*, the most important radical student periodical in Canada during the 1960s. See, for example, his "An Ethical Movement in Search of an Analysis in 3: 4 (May, 1966).
16. Jim Harding, "Two Winnipeg Schools" in *This Magazine is About Schools* 2: 4 (Autumn, 1968), reprinted in Tim Reid and Julyan Reid, *Student Power and the Canadian Campus* (Toronto: 1969).
17. Karen Tallman, personal interview, October 9, 1996.
18. Bruce Russell, personal interview, December 11, 1996.
19. Ellen Tallman, personal interview, October 23, 1996.
20. Ellen Tallman, personal interview, October 23, 1996.
21. Olive Johnson, "As a cool school, there's no place like Knowplace" in *Maclean's* 80:12 (December, 1967, p. 5.

22. Personnel data in Lionel Orlikow, "The Vancouver Youth Project," an assessment submitted to C.Y.C. Acting Director Stewart Goodings, October 5, 1968, Appendix B, in National Archives of Canada, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
23. See Doug Owran, *Born at the Right Time* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), Chapter Nine.
24. Robertson Wood, personal interview, October 10, 1996.
25. Greg Sorbara, personal interview, October 16, 1996.
26. Rob Watt, personal interview, November 19, 1996.
27. Heather-Jon Maroney, personal interview, January 14, 1997.
28. See Edward Morgan, *The Sixties Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), Chapter 6.
29. Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 222-225.
30. See Ian Hamilton, *The Children's Crusade* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1970), particularly Chapter 5.
31. Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 225.
32. See Ian Hamilton, *The Children's Crusade* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1970), p. 77.
33. According to Ian Hamilton most staff received between $10,000 and $15,000 per year. *The Children's Crusade*, p. 32.
34. Ian Hamilton, *The Children's Crusade* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1970), Chapters 2, 6, and 7.
35. Greg Sorbara, personal interview, October 16, 1996. Mr. Sorbara taught for a year at Everdale after leaving Knowplace. This is also the view of Bob Davis, personal interview, October 18, 1996. An Everdale fund-raising appeal in *This Magazine Is About Schools* 3: 2 (Spring, 1969) lists two of the five goals as "to practice real democracy" and "to encourage a critical view of society."
36. Alan Clarke (C.Y.C. executive director), letter to George Martell, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
37. C.Y.C. correspondence, Colin Thomson to and from Alan Clarke, Stewart Goodings, Campbell Mackie, Jacques Noel, and others.
38. Company of Young Canadians internal correspondance on the Barker Free School, May-July, 1967, National Archives of Canada, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
39. "Knowplace, A Project Submission to the Company of Young Canadians" September 29, 1967. National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
40. "Knowplace, A Project Submission to the Company of Young Canadians" September 29, 1967. National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents.
41. "Knowplace, A Project Submission to the Company of Young Canadians" September 29, 1967. National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents.
42. Jennifer Orcutt quoted by Olive Johnson, "As a cool school, there's no place like Knowplace," in *Maclean's* 80:12 (December, 1967), p. 5.

43. Rob Wood, personal interview, October 10, 1997.
44. Letter of appreciation from Jim Melton, Vancouver School Board Special Counsellor Programme Co-ordinator, November 26, 1968, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. Documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
45. Bruce Russell, personal interview, December 11, 1997.
46. Rick Valentine, personal interview, November 26, 1996.
47. Lowell Orcutt, personal interview, November 21, 1996. Mary and George Wertheim came to Vancouver from California.
48. Maryann Campbell quoted by Olive Johnson, "Free Schools: tomorrow's education or passing fad?" in *Vancouver Life* April, 1968), p. 16-21.
49. Bob Wilson, "22 Disgruntled Students Open Their Own School," in *Vancouver Sun*, December 16, 1967, p. 33.
50. Monica Carpendale, personal interview, November 25, 1996.
51. Karen Tallman, personal interview, October 9, 1996.
52. Greg Sorbara, personal interview, October 16, 1996.
53. Karen Tallman, personal interview, October 9, 1996.
54. Bruce Russell, personal interview, December 11, 1996.
55. Knowplace Prospectus, 1968/69; National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
56. Rob Wood, personal interview, October 10, 1996.
57. Letter from C.H. Naphtali, Executive Director of United Community Services of the Greater Vancouver Area, May 14, 1969.
58. *Vancouver Sun* "Boss System Hard to Shake Says Free School Teacher," December 29, 1967, p. 13.
59. *Vancouver Sun*, "Public Schools Turning Out Slaves or Rebels, Meet Told," December 30, 1967, p. 13.
60. These schools were short-lived, one run by Lynn Burrows (formerly of Knowplace) and the other by C.Y.C. staff person Lynn Curtis.
61. Olive Johnson, "As a cool school, there's no place like Knowplace," in *Maclean's* 80:12 (December, 1967), p. 5.
62. Olive Johnson, "Free Schools: tomorrow's education or passing fad?" in *Vancouver Life* April, 1968), p. 16-21.
63. Bob Wilson, "22 Disgruntled Students Open Their Own School," *Vancouver Sun*, December 16, 1967, p. 33.
64. Bob Wilson, "22 Disgruntled Students Open Their Own School," in *Vancouver Sun*, December 16, 1967, p. 33.
65. Letter from Prime Minister Pearson to Howard Johnston, March 13, 1968, and memos from Stewart Goodings, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
66. "Knowplace to Go?" *Vancouver Sun* editorial, December 27, 1967, p.4.
67. Tony Eberts, "Knowplace: An Answer to Boredom," *The Province*, October 14, 1967.

68. Bob Wilson, "22 Disgruntled Students Open Their Own School" in *Vancouver Sun*, December 16, 1967, p. 33; also Olive Johnson, "As a cool school, there's no place like Knowplace" in *Maclean's* (December, 1967), p. 5.
69. *The Province*, "Knowplace School okay, according to Peterson," December 20, 1967, p. 14.
70. R.F. MacKenzie, Vancouver School Board pupil personnel services, quoted by Tony Eberts, "Knowplace: An Answer to Boredom," *Vancouver Province*, October 14, 1967.
71. Grant Deachman quoted by Stewart Goodings, C.Y.C. memorandum, December 23, 1968, National Archives of Canada, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
72. Stewart Goodings, memorandum to Bob Ravinovitch, December 13, 1968, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
73. Colin Thomson to Stewart Goodings, October 1, 1968. National Archive of Canada, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
74. Karen Tallman, personal interview, October 9, 1996.
75. Knowplace Prospectus, 1968/69, National Archive of Canada, C.Y.C. documemts.
76. Lionel Orlikow, "The Vancouver Youth Project," submitted to Stewart Goodings, C.Y.C. Director, October 5, 1968. National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents.
77. Stewart Goodings, memo, December 23, 1968, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
78. Geoff Cue to Stewart Goodings, August 28, 1968, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
79. Stewart Goodings to director Alan Clarke, November 22, 1967, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
80. Ian Hamilton, *The Children's Crusade* (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1970, Chapters 3 and 14.
81. Colin Thomson, Letter to director Claude Vidal, April 1, 1969, National Archives of Canada, C.Y.C. documents, Record Group 116.
82. Colin Thomson, Project Report, Vancouver Youth Project, June, 1969, National Archives of Canada, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
83. Colin Thomson, Project Report, Vancouver Youth Project, June, 1969, National Archives of Canada, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
84. Numerous letters in C.Y.C. documents, National Archives of Canada, most in support of the Experimental Education Foundation (Floating School) directed by Dave Manning.
85. Letter from C.Y.C. Director Claude Vidal, December, 1969, National Archives of Canada, Record Group 116, Volume 142, File 884.
86. Former Knowplace staff members have pursued a variety of careers. Colin Thomson taught for several years in China, Rob Wood has continued in education, Rob Watt owns a small manufacturing business, and Greg Sorbara became a lawyer and served as a cabinet minister in Ontario's Liberal government.
87. Karen Tallman, personal interview, October 9, 1996.
88. Lowell Orcutt, personal interview, November 21, 1996.
89. Rob Wood, personal interview, October 10, 1996.

90. Personal interviews: Jeff Creque, February 26, 1997; Sally Kahn, April 9, 1997; Garth Dickman, April 3, 1997, and Erica Peavy, February 20, 1997. Three students were American; one had attended an academic Quaker school, and another had attended liberal schools in the United States. Several had a family connection with Craigdarroch School.
91. Jim Harding, personal interview, November 29, 1996.
92. Heather-Jon Maroney, personal interview, January 14, 1997.
93. Greg Sorbara, personal interview, October 16, 1996.
94. Bruce Russell, personal interview, December 11, 1997.
95. Monica Carpendale, personal interview, November 25, 1996.
96. Gordon Yearsley, Application for C.Y.C. Funding, May 6, 1969; National Archive of Canada, C.Y.C. documents.
97. Bob Wilson, "22 Disgruntled Students Open Their Own School," in *Vancouver Sun*, December 16, 1967, p. 33.
98. Tony Eberts, "Knowplace: an Answer to Boredom," in *Vancouver Province*, October 14, 1967.
99. Olive Johnson, "As a cool school, there's no place like Knowplace," in *Maclean's* 80:12 (December, 1967), p. 5.
100. Ellen Tallman, personal interview, October 23, 1996.
101. Lowell Orcutt, personal interview, November 21, 1996.
102. Monica Carpendale, personal interview, November 25, 1996.
103. See J.A. Young, "A Rural High School Tries Freedom," *This Magazine Is About Schools* 1: 3 (Winter, 1967) 63-70. See also Chapter 13.
104. David Orcutt, personal interview, April 24, 1997.
105. Bob Makaroff, personal interview, February 18, 1997.
106. Bob Makaroff, personal interview, February 18, 1997.
107. Rob Watt, personal interview, November 19, 1996.
108. Jim Harding, "Freedom From *For* Freedom To: Ideas for people in free schools," in *Free School: the journal of change in education* Free School Press, Saturna Island, B.C., June, 1970.
109. Jonathan Kozol, *Free Schools* (Boston: Houghton Miflin, 1972), p. 61.
110. Greg Sorbara, personal interview, October 16, 1996.
111. Martha Jackson, personal interview, December 2, 1997.
112. Karen Tallman, personal interview, September 15, 1998.

CHAPTER 6: THE NEW SCHOOL: MIDDLE YEARS

A few months before the establishment of Knowplace transformed the free school movement into a high profile venture, the New School was quietly completing its fifth year of operation in the spring of 1967. The New School had been based on the principles of John Dewey and a moderate Progressive curriculum. But by the late 1960s the parent body had come to include many proponents of "free schools," most of them influenced by the counterculture emerging at that time. Ideological tension increased until, eventually, Progressive and Romantic views would become irreconcilable.

With the resignation of director Graham Smith in March 1967, the New School hiring committee began searching for a new teacher-director to replace him the following September. Tom Durrie, an elementary teacher in a Williams Lake public school, saw an advertisement for the position in the Summerhill Society Bulletin and applied for the job (for Mr. Durrie's background see Chapter 7). Three New School parents made the long trip north to interview him and spent the day at his school. They were impressed and invited him to come to Vancouver to meet the Board and the other teachers.

However, some parents, believing it would be "a great mistake to hire a director who had not taught at the school," opposed bringing in an outsider. They thought the directorship should be offered to Anne Long who, having taught at the school for a year, would provide continuity. One parent, Norman Levi, wrote to president Barry Promislow:

> After five years in the New School I am convinced that the teaching staff must produce its own director because they know the intricacies of the teaching problems and the parent-teacher problems, and have worked out techniques to handle them. We have seen that there has to be a learning process in regard to our somewhat nebulous views on Progressive education. After five years we should realize that directors are made in the system they work. They certainly are not born that way.[1]

Ms. Long did eventually put her name forward for the director's job but, due to her insufficient experience, neither she nor the Board took her candidacy very seriously.[2]

Many parents, reacting against the traditional methods of Graham Smith, wanted a director who would introduce considerably more "freedom." The composition of the parent body was changing by 1967 and most parents were more influenced by Neill than by Dewey.[3] "Free schools" were the talk of the day and their proponents, considering Mr. Durrie something of a "messiah," succeeded in selling him to the rest of the group.[4] He was hired even though the teachers had misgivings about his ideas. In an interview with the *Vancouver Sun* in August 1967 titled "Far Out School to be More Free," Mr. Durrie explained that the school would be "more liberal and free in its approach."[5] He thought, since New School children were less repressed than his special class students, they would be far less disruptive when given real freedom. He was just as surprised as their parents when this turned out to be incorrect.[6]

New School parents embraced freedom in theory without having any idea of what that meant in reality. Mr. Durrie questions whether they really wanted a school resembling Summerhill: "They thought they did. But they weren't prepared for what that meant—their nice well behaved children running around yelling 'fuck you.' I don't think they knew, any more than I did, what would happen."[7] The freedom Mr. Durrie allowed his students in Williams Lake was tempered by the traditional school environment where some outside constraints were in effect. The New School parents observing him there were not able to imagine what complete freedom in an entire school would be like. The infatuation ended a few weeks into the school year.

The other teachers were Anne Long, and new staff members Rita Cohn and Diane McNairn (another teacher had resigned when Mr. Durrie was hired). Rita Cohn was no stranger to the New School, having been one of the founding parents in 1962. She was an experienced teacher, fluent in French, and looked forward to her new role in the school. All three teachers expressed reservations about Mr. Durrie's extreme laissez-faire approach, but an agreement was reached at a meeting late that spring. The mornings would be set aside for the teachers to organize whatever "structured lessons" they wished. Afternoons would include creative arts, sports, field trips, and other activities that students would not be compelled to attend.[8] What was misunderstood, however, was that Mr. Durrie intended the morning sessions to be strictly

voluntary, whereas the other teachers expected their students to attend.[9] The "compromise" did not work.

Rita Cohn had organized her kindergarten/grade one classroom prior to school opening.

> But after the first day, it didn't make any difference who you had in your class, because the kids could go anywhere they wanted. I looked into Tom's class that first day and there was nothing. Not a book, no furniture. I asked him, "What are you going to do, Tom?" He said, "Well, I'll see what the kids want to do." I remember thinking, that's not going to work.[10]

Mrs. Cohn reports that although some students enjoyed the freedom given by the director, others simply attached themselves to one of the other teachers. Those who remained with Mr. Durrie "ran rampant and became quite destructive, and the school building suffered greatly." One former student recalls that he "did not open a book all year" and another remembers school that year as being "lots of fun."[11] Anne Long describes that eventful year:

> With no expectation of class work, an anti-academic attitude pervaded the school and the students were quick to reject anything that even half looked like a regular lesson, no matter how skillfully devised. They discovered that freedom was limitless.[12]

The Monkey Patrol was a group of four boys who made life difficult for everyone else. "They spent their time building forts, fighting over materials, disrupting activities of other kids, lighting fires, and wrecking furniture, school equipment, other forts, and the very walls of the school itself." Parents on the maintenance committee remember having to repair holes in the walls as big as basketballs. Mr. Durrie "tried to help these kids work through their problems by accepting all of their antisocial and destructive behaviour, buying them candy and pop, and taking them on exclusive outings leaving the rest of his class to fend for themselves."[13] Students soon learned that Mr. Durrie would never disapprove of any behaviour. One former student remembers having to fight her way out of a room after being dragged in by four or five boys. She describes a "gangland situation with no control over the kids—you had to learn to defend yourself."[14] Ms. Long continues:

> There were Cuisenaire rod fights, fort fights, paint fights, water fights. Student meetings were screaming matches. Student artwork was destroyed, chairs broken up, desks sawed in half. The ditto machine became a juvenile pornography plant. I began feeling that I was living in the land of *Lord of the Flies*.[15]

Students would drift into school in the morning. "There was no particular structure—they would go where they wanted to go and do what they wanted to do. The older kids circulated around the whole place and created a lot of mayhem." The other teachers and the younger students were not prepared for the older kids to be so energetic, rambunctious, or hostile and "were afraid of the madness that burst forth without any structure."[16] Students were not allowed to hurt each other, but for the most part suggestions to control them were ignored.

Mr. Durrie remembers one day when a group of students had flooded the basement and spent much of the day running and sliding on their bellies. Upon being picked up and asked by a horrified mother, "why would you do a thing like that?" the child replied, "nobody stopped me." Mr. Durrie believes that New School parents were genuinely anti-authoritarian but were too middle class to accept such uncontrolled behaviour from their kids and that "some of the kids found it difficult to accept in themselves."[17] But the director saw their behaviour as natural. He had lots of fun with the kids building electronic equipment or terrariums for frogs, building dams and rivers at the park, and driving to interesting places in the city.

Several incidents finally caused Anne Long to challenge Mr. Durrie openly. He would not intervene when members of the Monkey Patrol refused to allow other students to go along on their outings with him. He expressed no disapproval of the students' shoplifting activities when they were downtown.[18] But the most serious disagreement occurred when students began lighting fires all over the school building—in wastebaskets, washrooms, under the stage, and in corners of the basement. Ms. Long finally began confiscating matches and telephoning parents, and Mr. Durrie agreed to move the burning outside.[19] Staff relations became increasingly strained.

The majority of parents disapproved of Mr. Durrie's methods. The apparent lack of control over the children caused more concern than the decrease in academic activity although

parents and even a few students were worried that they were not getting an education. However, a significant minority (mostly recent members of the school community) supported him, including president Jean Kuyt, and the school divided into two camps. According to Mrs. Long more than twenty students were withdrawn during the first two months and by November it had become difficult for the school to function at all.[20]

The school limped along through a series of crises and intense meetings including a three day session with a Simon Fraser University consultant. One temporary solution designated the basement as the area where students could do whatever they wanted while the upstairs would be reserved for academic activities but this and other "adult generated plans" broke down quickly.[21] Mr. Durrie found himself under widespread criticism, but he believed strongly in what he was doing. The situation continued to deteriorate after the Christmas break and the school closed for encounter groups ("T-Grouping") in January in an unsuccessful attempt to resolve the differences.[22] Finally, at a meeting of the entire school community on March 14, 1968, the parent group decided to divide into two schools.[23] The Progressive majority retained the school building while Mr. Durrie and his supporters met in their homes throughout the spring.

The more moderate group set out to re-establish itself as the Progressive school it had been prior to 1967. But despite the end of the free school experiment, this would not be as easy as they had hoped. The times had changed significantly since the school's founding in 1962 and the Summerhillian free school ideology had become so pervasive in the countercultural and alternative communities that it was difficult for an alternative school to retain a moderate position. Furthermore, the parent group had never resolved their ambivalence as to what kind of school they were to be, and without a strong vision they were easily pulled along with the times.

The New School reopened in April with just under thirty students. Anne Long was appointed acting director for the rest of the year and explained that "we will not be an unstructured school, but we will be much freer than the public schools.[24] We will teach the basic skills, but the kids will also be involved in academic things outside the classroom."[25] According to Ms. Long the students responded with enthusiasm to the new structured order because they

now understood why it was necessary.[26] Following the resignation of President Jean Kuyt and four other Board members, an interim Board under president Kay Stockholder, a U.B.C. English professor, was elected in April.[27] The parents cleaned, repaired, and painted the school building, and the students completed the year without further incident. The events of the previous six months did not appear to harm the students in any lasting way. Many of the older students were soon to begin their secondary school careers and it was time for them to make the transition to public school anyway. Few students or their parents believe they suffered any serious consequences from the year of academic inactivity.

In May, the teachers petitioned the parents to hand the operation of the school over to them. Having endured unreasonably difficult teaching conditions, they saw the aftermath of the crisis as an opportune moment to gain control over their working environment. There was little parental resistance to this proposal due to fatigue and the constant strife of the previous six years. In fact, one parent, Norman Levi, had suggested the school become a teacher co-operative more than a year earlier.[28] Few of the original families remained and parents had no desire to administer the school any longer. The motion carried at a general meeting on May 16 without a dissenting vote.[29]

When the New School opened for its seventh year in September 1968, it was a different school than it had been in 1962. A new clientele influenced by the cultural movements of the late 1960s had begun to replace the original academic and professional families. Even with the leadership of the school secured by teachers who opposed Summerhillian ideology, the New School in many ways soon came to resemble a typical late 1960s Romantic school.

The Teacher Co-operative

Anne Long, Rita Cohn, and Beth Jankola took charge of the school that September. Ms. Long taught the intermediate students, Ms. Jankola worked with the older primary students, and Ms. Cohn taught the very young children. A few months into the school year Daryl Sturdy joined

the staff. He and Anne Long had been colleagues at Hastings School three years earlier and had spent many hours talking about Summerhill and other alternatives to the "repressive" public school system. He had attended the Free School Conference at the New School the previous December and had come away even more enthusiastic about alternative education. In April 1969, after almost three years at the New School, Ms. Long left to pursue an artistic career and Mr. Sturdy took her place with the older class.[30]

The New School was re-incorporated as The New School Teachers Society, a teacher co-operative, in June 1968.[31] The constitution was set up to produce maximum stability and to put strict limits on future membership of the new society. Only teachers who had been on staff for two years (later reduced to one year) could become permanent members, thus providing a probationary period and former teachers could remain with the society for two years after leaving the school.[32] New members joined the society only after a majority decision of existing members. The constitution also provided for parents to elect two representatives to the society, but in practice this rarely happened.[33] Society members typically numbered between six and twelve and because of the small membership usually all became directors.

The Society had two principal functions: administering school finances and supervising staff. Each spring the members met to decide whether or not to rehire new teachers on a permanent basis, thus admitting them to membership in the society. But these decisions were usually already made at a staff meeting. The legal details took over a year to work out and were finally concluded in 1969 when the New School Teachers Society bought the building for one dollar.[34] The school often fell behind in filing society documents and was fortunate that the bulk of the legal work was done by two parents, Sid Simons and Marvin Stark, at minimal cost.[35]

The teachers made all school decisions and parents no longer participated in administrative functions. Decision making by the teachers was much less stressful than under the parent organization. Weekly staff meetings and frequent small group meetings were natural extensions of the school day. The teachers were together all the time, at lunch and after school, and became friends as well as colleagues. Evening meetings were often held at a staff member's house over

a pot luck dinner while the teachers discussed curriculum, philosophy, and day-to-day school operation. Team teaching became the norm, but individual teachers were also free to develop and implement their own programmes as they saw fit. Daryl Sturdy describes the atmosphere:

> We weren't just teachers leaving at the end of the day—we ran the school. It humanized the workplace. It wasn't just a job. There was a real feeling of family, of connectedness; it was fun. We didn't have to deal with levels of bureaucracy.[36]

Decisions were reached through consensus and, although some issues required extensive discussion and occasionally had to be brought to a vote, most of the teachers agreed on how they wanted to work with kids.[37] On the other hand, meetings were still long and difficult, and at times there were heated arguments. It was a time of strong beliefs, experimentation, and high emotion. People expressed themselves freely and sometimes feelings were hurt as everyone took the issues very seriously.[38] This more cohesive group was not spared the personnel crises of earlier years. In 1969/70 and 1970/71 disagreements about whether to rehire particular teachers called the decision making mechanism into question once again.

The school could not afford any administrative, secretarial, or janitorial staff so each staff member took responsibility for various tasks.[39] The most important were finance and bookkeeping, admissions, supply ordering, building maintenance, secretarial work, fund-raising, volunteer co-ordination, and fielding telephone calls from concerned parents.[40] Every year one teacher would volunteer to be treasurer, the most demanding of the administrative jobs. Some performed this task well but at times the books were in a shambles.[41] Administration was tiring after a full day of teaching and in 1971 the teachers attempted to revive parent committees.[42]

But this group of parents lacked the drive and commitment of the founding group. They had not created the school and no longer owned it, and many were too busy with jobs and enjoying their countercultural lifestyle to the fullest. Parents were informed of ongoing events and issues through a monthly newsletter and provided informal feedback to the teachers at monthly parent/teacher class meetings. Some parents did perform various kinds of volunteer work in the school. They transported children and helped with the endless cleaning. Full day

work parties took place several times a year and each Labour Day weekend was usually a marathon of painting, fixing, and cleaning.[43] Parents also built an adventure playground in the early 1970s. Some volunteered in the classroom and assisted with field trip supervision. Several parent volunteers became staff members in subsequent years.

Parents were content to let the teachers run the school and many parents did not even know the Society existed. However, in May 1971, the controversial dismissal of a teacher led to an uproar among the parent body. More than ten parents wrote letters protesting the decision and the way it was made and several parents withdrew their children from the school.[44] They accused the staff of operating a "secret society" and demanded greater participation in decision making. Although most decisions were made at weekly staff meetings with little secrecy, the teachers had neglected to communicate adequately to the parent body how the school was governed. Following this incident the staff took steps to "acquaint the parents more fully with the administrative structure of the school" and invited non-permanent staff to attend Society meetings.[45] Barbara Shumiatcher, a parent who supported the teachers, reminded others how disruptive personnel decisions had been under the earlier parent co-operative:

> Some parents are agitating for more participation in decisions at the school. This was disastrous in the past as gossip increased and factions grew: stranglehold was the basic political attitude. Since teachers have to take day-to-day consequences for policy decisions it seems only reasonable that they alone should make those decisions.[46]

While less confrontational than during the parent administration, decision making was never easy, particularly about personnel matters.

Despite the parents' diminished role in decision making, the school remained a central part of everyone's life and parents, students, and teachers attended many evening social events. There were educational evenings, craft nights, dances, political discussions, singing evenings, pot luck meals, and birthday parties. One teacher, Daniel Wood, remembers these evenings well:

> They would get someone in to teach them how to tie-dye. For the next week or two everyone in the school would be tie-dying. Or they would have a film and video night where they would learn how to make films. Parents and teachers

> would get together and talk about issues. Everybody would sit around and sing folk songs or dance. The lights were on in the school all the time, evenings and weekends, and for many of the adults it was the centre of their social life.[47]

Most teachers enrolled their own children in the school adding to the family-like atmosphere. One parent, artist Roy Kiyooka, describes the social structure as "tribal, familial, extended family."[48] There was a sense of camaraderie and participants remember the New School as a welcoming place. This feeling carried over to the children and one student recalls that "we were a lot closer than kids in a regular school."[49] The New School provided a ready-made community, exactly what many parents wanted. The school became an extension of home.

Students were recruited mainly by word of mouth. However, the teachers also advertised in daily newspapers, Anne Long appeared on a radio talk show, and CKLG radio (the local rock station) aired a full length interview with two New School teachers and two students in 1972.[50] Prospective parents were required to observe in the school for half a day before applying after which two teachers interviewed the applicant families. The staff believed this was essential to ensure that they could "support the parents' aims for their children and be able to meet the parents' expectations."[51] Despite a temporary decrease in numbers after the school split in 1968, the school was popular during this period and enrolment reached a peak of eighty students in 1972, higher than during the Progressive years.[52]

Parents were attracted to the school for many reasons, but mainly because they valued individual freedom. They perceived the public schools as excessively rigid, unresponsive to individual students, and inhumane in methods of discipline (such as the strap which was legal in B.C. public schools until 1973). One parent describes being drawn to the school by "warmth and colour and kids running in and out." She "hated and feared the school system and didn't want my energetic four year old pounded into a mould."[53] Another parent, who had taught at the Progressive City and Country School in New York, hoped the New School would make her daughter less "conforming."[54] Others wanted to eliminate the pressure their children experienced in public schools. Some were attracted by what they knew of Summerhill and wanted their

children to have the kind of freedom they never had.

The teachers hoped to attract self-motivated students and to retain a mix of family income. However, the school no longer appealed to academic, professional, or higher income families primarily because it was not offering a standard Progressive education. Most professional parents ultimately wanted their children to do well academically; when academic learning became less of a priority, these families left. Parents who thought they were getting the kind of Progressive education offered during the early period rarely stayed longer than a year or two and most were gone by the early 1970s.[55] As the public schools became somewhat less rigid in the 1970s, the professional families could usually find an acceptable alternative in the public system.

Students with learning and behavioural difficulties were admitted to the school in significantly greater numbers by 1970. With few programmes for these children in public school, many parents chose the New School as their last resort. Of the twenty students in Anne Long's 1968/69 class "nine had serious enough problems in the public school system for their parents to look for alternate schooling."[56] This compromised the regular programme even further and the teachers were forced to be less discriminating in their selection criteria. The school had to maintain its enrollment level to be financially viable. Furthermore, their idealism led them to genuinely believe they could work with troubled children.

Over the next few years the proportion of students with emotional or behavioural problems increased. Some of these kids exhibited aggressive or anti-social behaviour while others were withdrawn.[57] One student, referred by U.B.C., was a musical genius who would throw chairs and scissors and wander around in the unconfined area. Sometimes he would go into a storage room and write three and four part music. Such students were difficult to work with and strained the teachers' abilities and energy. With few exceptions the teachers were not trained to help these students other than to provide them with a safe, supportive environment.

The New School continued to receive a constant stream of visitors. The school newsletter reported in December 1970 that 150 observers had visited the school during the first three months of the year.[58] Professors and students in the education faculties were interested in the free school

phenomenon, and instructors who wanted their students to observe a free school in action often took them to the New School. A group of New School teachers and students was invited by the U.B.C. education faculty to make a presentation in the fall of 1972.[59] The school also attracted students training for other professions. Students in the pre-school programme at the Vancouver Night School observed for two weeks in 1970 and a group of counsellors-in-training spent an afternoon at the school. A New School parent who taught social work at U.B.C. arranged for her students to work with New School children on a regular basis during the early 1970s. A group of U.B.C. architecture students experimented with design exercises at the school. The New School was out of the mainstream and people used it to broaden their experience.

Parent observers were always welcome but their visits were pre-arranged and limited to one specific morning or afternoon per week. Restrictions on observations were undoubtedly a reaction to parental harassment of teachers during the parent co-operative years. Sometimes the school conducted a formal open house. The school invited parents in for an entire week in December 1970, culminating with an evening of discussion for all participants.[60]

With parents less intensely involved in the school, there was far less energy for fund-raising. An art auction in November 1968 raised $1,000 but events were less frequent and less lucrative than before.[61] In 1969/70 the only fund-raising event was a smorgasbord dinner.[62] The following year the school collected newspaper for recycling,[63] held a raffle, and organized a Spring Fair which "transformed the school into colourful craft areas, a coffee house with a foot stomping blue grass band, a health food store, and a fun and games room."[64] But these activities only raised $500 compared to $3,000 in 1966/67.[65] Teachers and parents used their contacts among local rock musicians to organize fund-raising concerts and one New School teacher who wrote part-time for the *Georgia Straight* arranged for the school and the newspaper to co-sponsor a successful benefit dance in 1972. The school occasionally rented its premises to like-minded educational or political groups such as the Free University, but the revenue was minimal.[66] After 1969 the New School rarely earned over $500 from fund-raising activities.

The school therefore had to depend on tuition fees for its income. The sliding fee scale

was still in use and parents were asked to bring their income tax returns to registration. The fee was 8% of family income (less for more than one child) and had risen significantly. The minimum was $350 per child by 1972 with a maximum (for an income over $15,000) of $1150.[67] The debenture system remained in place and new families had to advance a small interest free loan to the school.

But the decreased number of higher income and professional parents meant that more families were paying fees at the lower end of the scale than ever before. With fewer families able to contribute at higher levels, the school suffered a serious financial crunch. Daryl Sturdy describes the difficulties this way:

> We were always on the edge. Financially, it became more and more difficult as the years went on. The parents were not working class people, they had hippie type life styles. There were a lot of single parent families and a certain number of those were on welfare. The public school system had changed a lot. Professional families could find what they wanted in the public system.[68]

After managing to break even or keep deficits to a minimum from 1966 to 1971, the school suffered a major loss of $8,000 in 1971/72.[69] It remained in financial difficulty throughout its later years.

The deterioration of the school building added to the financial problems. By 1973 the basement floor, back porch, roof, and outside yard were all in poor condition and there were no fire exits.[70] Frequent work parties and attempts to scrounge replacement furniture and equipment did little to improve the situation. Although a group of U.B.C. architecture students designed an extensive redevelopment plan in 1970 the school did not have the funds to pursue it.[71] The state of the building became an increasingly serious problem during the school's last five years.

Teachers now earned far less than in the public school system. Full time New School teachers earned $6000 in 1968/69 while teacher assistants averaged $2,500.[72] By 1970/71 salaries for long-serving teachers increased to $6,600 while other staff earned from $3,000 to $5,800.[73] But in 1971/72 all salaries decreased to $5000 and fell even lower several years later.[74] Ironically, the parent administration had been able to pay higher salaries than the teachers could

afford to pay themselves. In 1971 teachers began sharing salaries equally, regardless of their background and experience, adding to the spirit of egalitarianism. They didn't mind earning less than half of what they could have made in the public system. As one former staff member put it: "It was politically correct. No one worried about money then."[75]

The school organization changed in several important ways between 1969 and 1971. First, the teaching staff grew significantly larger. In 1969 the staff hired teaching assistants to work with each of the four teachers so staff could devote more time to individual students. This was necessary because of the unstructured nature of the programme and the increasing number of special needs students. The pairs worked so closely together that in 1970 the assistants were made full fledged teachers with equivalent salaries. This doubling of the size of the staff produced an enviable pupil-teacher ratio but placed a severe financial strain on the school.

Secondly, in 1971 the four classes were reorganized into two larger units with three or four teachers attached to each group. The younger group ranged in age from about four to seven years old, while the older group included ages eight to twelve. The larger classes were conducive to an open area or team teaching approach (then becoming popular in the public system) and produced a more informal style of teaching.

Thirdly, in an important departure from the earlier years of the school, it began hiring non-certified teachers in 1970, a practice that increased throughout the next few years. Although some of these individuals were capable, this further weakened the academic and professional orientation of the school.

The school opened a licenced day care centre for twenty-four pre-school children in 1969 and added an after-school programme the next year. However, due to inadequate facilities the school had trouble renewing its permit each year.[76] The day care programme managed to make ends meet through Ministry of Human Resources subsidies. However, the bureaucratic requirements for day care centres were a chore and Rita Cohn had to deal with endless correspondence from Human Resources and the Vancouver health and licensing departments. A summer day care, which constantly lost money, also operated out of the school building.

Staffing

Fifteen individuals taught at the New School during these five years. They had a variety of interests and backgrounds and while most had teaching certificates, several did not. The majority were committed to substantial freedom for children and were influenced by the 1960s counterculture, left-wing political ideals, and the nascent women's movement.

Daphne Trivett joined the staff in September 1969. She had trained in Progressive teaching methods and had taught for a year at the University of Chicago Laboratory School founded by John Dewey. Like Anne Long, she had spent an unsatisfying year trying to apply child-centred methods at an east Vancouver public school only to be told to tighten up her discipline. Instead, she gratefully accepted a job at the New School, assuming it was a Progressive school.

> So when I arrived at the New School I encountered a new kind of difficulty. Instead of being perceived as the wild one, I was perceived as the straight one. I was too rigid, I was too formal, I wanted to teach lessons.[77]

Ms. Trivett felt isolated from most of the staff.[78] She was the only teacher without a teaching assistant and four of her students were the children of other New School teachers who sometimes disapproved of the way she handled their children. Nevertheless, several parents report that her reading and mathematics programme served their children well.[79] Ms. Trivett had contacts in the U.B.C. and Simon Fraser education faculties and arranged workshops at the school in mathematics and other areas.

Kathryn Chamberlain taught at the New School for two years. She was also familiar with Progressive methods having been educated at the well-known Peninsula High School in Menlo Park, California, where her mother was head teacher. She heard about the New School while doing graduate work in education at U.B.C. and working at the Child Study Centre. During this period she became active in the women's movement and eventually returned to California. Catherine Pye, a child care worker, was hired in 1969 and remained at the school for two years.

Staff relations from 1969 to 1971 were hindered by several personal and professional differences. Ms. Chamberlain believes the teachers lacked the skills and experience necessary for effective consensual decision making. The "do your own thing" attitude inhibited staff co-operation. Staff interaction became even more turbulent when several intimate relationships developed among the teachers in 1970. These were all discussed openly[80] and according to one teacher "staff dynamics took over the whole programme."[81]

In 1970 the staff hired a facilitator to conduct evening sessions in communications which eased teacher relations. Daphne Trivett and Kathryn Chamberlain began working together and developed more effective methods of classroom management. Ms. Trivett had an easier time during the last few months of the year, but a staff majority decided not to rehire her. That she was not accepted despite her Progressive background and teaching skill, indicates that by 1969 the academic programme was not the highest priority for the New School.

Saralee James, an active parent at the school since 1966, was hired in 1970. She was not a certified teacher but had volunteered extensively in the intermediate class. She devoted a great deal of energy to the school and would share the older class with Daryl Sturdy for over three years. Daniel Wood joined the staff in the fall of 1971 and also worked with the older class during his two years at the school. A humanitarian activist, he had helped establish schools for black children in the American south during the 1960s and also assisted in setting up primary schools in rural Borneo during a stint with the United States Peace Corps. Mr. Wood taught for one year in the American public school system before coming to Vancouver because of his opposition to the Vietnam war.[82] Mr. Sturdy, Ms. James, and Mr. Wood became a close team, and during their two years together developed an effective co-operative working relationship. Mr. Wood remembers that the "close team spirit" and friendship made teaching easier and concludes simply, "we all liked each other."[83]

Daniel Wood is a good example of a second wave of young Americans at the New School as teachers and parents after 1969. They had come to Canada not for employment reasons (as had the earlier group of American academics) but rather to escape what they saw as an oppressive

and morally unacceptable political climate in the United States due to the war in Vietnam. Their thrust and background were different from that of earlier immigrants. This group of Americans were a small minority (less than 20%) at the school but were psychologically significant in bringing with them a whole range of counterculture values in a more intense form than their Canadian counterparts.

Barbara Hansen, another staff member who began as a parent classroom helper, worked with the younger group as a teaching assistant in 1969 and as a full teacher from 1970. Her background was in social work and child care, and she played a central role in determining the school's direction throughout the 1970s. Although not a trained teacher, Ms. Hansen was an intuitive problem solver and could usually find the right way to reach any individual child. Joan Nemtin became a full time teacher with the younger group in 1971 and stayed for three years. She was a newly certified teacher and her background in working with emotionally disturbed children proved to be useful as the school admitted increasing numbers of such students.

Claudia Stein was also hired to work with the younger group in 1970. She was remembered for her language arts programme which included drama and puppetry. Jonnet Garner, who had been trained in the Nuffield science method, joined the staff the following year. Like Ms. Trivett, she emphasized academic subjects and also introduced such art activities as weaving and natural wool dyeing and one year organized a group to paint the entire outside of the school. Ms. Hansen, Ms. Nemtin, Ms. Stein, and Ms. Garner formed the core group who worked with the younger class between 1971 and 1974.

Geoff Madoc-Jones and Tim Frizzell taught at the New School in 1970/71. Mr. Madoc-Jones was a charismatic individual and parents appreciated the creative work he inspired in his students. However, he was not rehired for personal reasons. This angered his supporters but the decision stood. Mr. Frizzell, his team-teaching partner, resigned at the end of the year, out of sympathy. Several students remember Mr. Frizzell for helping them with reading skills and were upset when he left. One former student remembers them as a well organized and effective team, providing one of her best years at the school.[84]

Some teachers participated in conferences and made the community aware of New School activities through speaking engagements. In late 1970 Claudia Stein attended a national environmental conference and spoke to Simon Fraser University education students on the socialization of children.[85] During the same period Barbara Hansen spoke to staff at the Northshore Neighbourhood House and was a panel member at a secondary teachers conference on "Fostering creativity in teacher and child."[86]

A rift between the senior and junior class teachers developed in 1971. This encompassed both professional and personal issues and led to vigorous disagreements at times. However, although staff relations were strained the school was not paralyzed as it had been during earlier conflicts. Rita Cohn, an influential and popular staff member, left in June 1971 having taught at the New School for four years. She was praised by colleagues and students as an excellent teacher.[87] Beth Jankola had departed the previous year. Despite several staff changes and some contentious personal issues, the central core of teachers remained remarkably constant between 1969 and 1973. This stability was mainly due to the teachers' control of school policy and practice, and their general agreement about the school's direction.

Curriculum

The curriculum was free flowing, exploratory, and open-ended[88] and students were allowed to choose and develop their own activities. The teachers agreed with John Holt, author of *How Children Fail*, that "we learn best when we, not others, decide what we are going to try to learn, and when, and how, and for what purpose."[89] But the most important aspect of the New School curriculum was not about learning. Teachers were concerned about "human interaction and rapport, personal motivation, meaningful social relationships, and unplanned spur-of-the-moment experiences." One group of visitors observed, in typical 1970 jargon, that the teachers were reluctant to "define what the school is all about because to define is to limit."[90] The teachers wanted no limits on their students or on themselves.

Barbara Hansen described the social/emotional objectives in an interview with radio station CKLG in 1972:

> Kids are learning to cope with themselves and to cope with the environment. They have to come in contact with themselves as people and with adults as adults. They come in contact with other kids in the school from four to twelve as individual people with needs and joys and angers and highs and lows. It's hard work. They are working at being human beings and finding out about themselves and the people around them. It's the same for the teachers. It's not the kind of place where you can hide behind a desk or behind a role.[91]

The teachers believed learning had to be fun "whether in academic learning like math or non-academic learning like cooking or carpentry." One student described the curriculum this way: "At our school you work for maybe two hours in the morning and then we do different things all though the day. It's not exactly what you'd call play. We do what we want or what we know how to do. We ask the teachers and if they're not busy they'll help us with it."[92] New School students interviewed in 1972 by the *Vancouver Province* agreed that they did not have to work as hard in mathematics and reading as at their former schools. One said "at the school I went to before we studied harder. But at our school it's kind of a wide field of learning."[93]

There was little formal academic content. Parents and students describe the curriculum as loose, "unstructured," or "laid back," and one parent says "there was nothing very challenging in a teaching way."[94] Classes were "sort of compulsory."[95] One former student cannot remember doing any mathematics or other academic subjects at all.[96] Another says "we had to do a certain amount of academics but it wasn't much. We watched a lot of National Film Board films."[97] Another student remembers sitting down to do academic work in the kindergarten/grade one class, but after that she spent most of her time "on the swings at the park." There was some mathematics offered but "we had a choice to do it or not. We could get away with doing nothing."[98] This de-emphasis on academics was consistent with other North American free schools where teachers were reacting against what they saw as too much book learning in the public schools.

Periodically teachers would plan lessons in the standard academic subjects. Anne Long

organized writing activities every morning for several months but finally gave up, citing student disinterest. She also developed an individualized mathematics programme for the first hour of each day. Although most students participated, she was disappointed by the lack of enthusiasm for any structured activities, even creative ones.[99] Daryl Sturdy and Daniel Wood organized mathematics, writing, and science classes but these initiatives rarely lasted more than a few weeks. One year students would sign up for academic work on a large piece of cardboard, but there was no consequence for students who did not work.[100] Joanne Garner taught a regular reading and science programme. Daphne Trivett implemented a reading programme called Words in Colour which assigned different colours to different sounds. This method allowed beginning readers to proceed with confidence despite the uncertainties of English spelling and was successful with a number of students.[101] Ms. Trivett also instituted structured mathematics classes and students remember extensive use of Cuisenaire rods.

But these were exceptions and few students remember doing much academic work at the New School during these years. Reading was individualized but haphazard—students found their own library books and read them when they felt like it. Most teachers read aloud to students during some part of the school day but there was little reading instruction and students remember few formal writing activities. Daryl Sturdy summed it up as follows:

> Students did a lot of incidental reading and incidental learning but the academics were never very strong. The teachers presented ideas and possibilities and the kids went on from there. Students looked after things themselves and provided their own activities.[102]

Many primary students taught themselves to read. One parent recalls how his oldest daughter taught herself to read and then taught her sister.[103] Another parent only discovered that her daughter had learned to read upon her transfer to public school the following year.[104] Joan Nemtin describes the primary programme:

> There were generally quiet activities in the morning. We would set out activities in areas, such as a science area, cut and paste, arts and crafts, fantasy, a little bit of number stuff, and lots of stories. The kids were free to come and go. There were enough of us to do a good reading readiness programme one-to-one, but

> there wasn't a real reading programme. Some kids had trouble reading at the New School and we weren't trained to help them. It wasn't an easy setting to sit around and read.[105]

The teachers incorporated play as a valuable aspect of learning.[106] Mr. Wood organized treasure hunts with clues in the form of science, mathematics, and reading questions, while Mr. Sturdy devised science problems and experiments to promote thinking skills. One year he organized the Great Egg Drop. Students were given a raw egg and had to design a package so that the egg could be dropped from the school roof without breaking. Students used cotton batting, wings, parachutes, and other creative solutions.[107] Teachers had to improvise, for the school did not have sophisticated science equipment. Students made batteries out of lemons, mixed vinegar and baking soda to observe the reaction, observed tadpoles, and cared for class pets. Such creative ideas were, to a lesser degree, also being used by a few public school teachers at the time.

The New School continued to emphasize creative expression and students participated in art activities almost every day. Ms. Long, herself an artist, taught batik, papier-mache, painting, collage, and pottery. Students learned popular 1960s crafts like making sand candles. In the early 1970s artists were brought in to teach origami, tie-dying, weaving, and bead work.[108] Students photographed downtown Vancouver sites, developing and printing the film in the school darkroom in the basement.[109] One former student, now a professional photographer, says that taking pictures and developing them at age nine was "the spark that got me going."[110] Many parents, such as musician Robert Minden, were pleased their children had so much opportunity for artistic expression and exploration.[111]

Teachers and parents had contacts in the arts community and students attended openings of avant-garde art shows, an arts festival at U.B.C., and other events. They enjoyed "interactive art" and the Vancouver Art Gallery invited New School students to help "create an environment" for several special events.[112] The teachers took students' interests seriously. One year several students wanted to learn macrame and a teacher bought the necessary supplies right away.[113]

Dramatic activity thrived during this period and included acting, play writing, designing costumes, and puppetry for the younger children. Students also participated in film-making, animation, and video work. Mr. Sturdy taught them how to write scripts and operate technical equipment. The older class presented a fashion show at the Vancouver Art Gallery featuring student-designed clothes and performed to Beatles' music. But, as in many alternative schools, the music programme was weak, consisting mainly of singing traditional North American folk songs.[114] A local dance studio offered creative movement sessions after school to interested students.[115] Some students pursued carpentry in the workshop while others spent time cooking. The afternoons were usually reserved for art, music, and drama activities.

The teachers divided students into groups for special activities one afternoon each week. One teacher often took her group home to do cooking while other classes sometimes went on all day "juice trips" to other children's homes.[116] These were valuable experiences in seeing how different students lived. Teachers also organized occasional "sleepovers" at the school to provide students with an opportunity to get to know each other better. At one sleepover a teacher took the group to a horror film and then to the cemetery at midnight.[117]

Students had access to the duplicating machine and produced school newspapers. They published field trip reports, interviews with teachers and students, commentary on world events, recipes, advice to parents, and accounts of school plays and art work. Two nine year old boys produced a professional looking eight page magazine of cartoons and jokes entitled FLOP. They did all the writing and drawings and even took part in the technical operations at Press Gang publishers. Most of the publications were written and produced entirely by students without adult assistance.

Many parents were happy their children were free to follow their interests. One parent says he didn't care if his children learned to read at age six and was more concerned that the school be a gentle place.[118] Another parent says "I thought it was a little chaotic but the kids were having a good time. I like the idea of deformalizing our institutions."[119] Still another wrote in a letter to the teachers: "As a result of their New School experience, my children have become

more untidy in their appearance, more opinionated, and more argumentative. They have also become more willing to undertake new experiences, more trusting of people, and enormously creative in the projects they undertake and complete."[120]

Rules about behaviour were permissive. One student remembers the only rule being that students were not allowed to play on the roof, "but we broke it anyway."[121] Another student remembers being allowed to do whatever they wanted, even paint on the walls. Students who did not want to go on field trips were sometimes left unsupervised at the school, and supervision on camping trips was relaxed. One student describes their behaviour as "pretty wild. Out in the woods we were uncontrolled, attacking other people's campsites with flaming spears."[122] Accidents occasionally happened but fortunately, no one was seriously hurt. Younger students were prohibited from going to the store[123] but, other than attempts to keep children from screaming and yelling in the hall, teachers allowed students to do much of what they wanted.

Ms. Long describes her frustration at not being able to enlist student co-operation in tasks such as cleaning up.[124] One former student returned to the New School as an adolescent in 1972 with an improvisational theatre group. He reports that "we could barely get an audience because they were all watching television and the teachers wouldn't dream of telling them they couldn't do that. They seemed like a lot of uncontrolled kids."[125]

Teachers were equally reluctant to impose censorship and debated how to handle students reading pornography or drawing swastikas. Some took a strict libertarian position and criticized others for not understanding the ramifications of censorship. Others felt that to allow abusive expression was an abrogation of responsibility.[126]

Students were expected to work out disagreements among themselves. Although the teachers thought this approach worked well, some students offer a different perspective. One student describes how she had to learn to be resourceful and "fend for herself, defend herself, and disarm bullies because the teachers would not step in."[127] Another student remembers that "the attitude was to just let the kids do what they wanted and I don't remember the teachers doing or saying anything."[128] Still another says that a few students were ostracized and teased mercilessly

without sufficient intervention by the teachers.[129] Peer pressure was powerful and, as with any group of children, certain kids were given a hard time. But the adults did not become involved even when some behaviour should not have been tolerated.[130] The teachers could not develop an appropriate response to student conflict because "there was no commitment to a clear set of principles."[131] Although some teachers tried to minimize bullying and destructive behaviour, no one wanted to be authoritarian and the only thing the adults could usually agree on was that "you didn't lay your own trip on anybody else."

The teachers believed that students would develop self discipline if they were given responsibility.[132] Some teachers tried to set a basic tone and convey certain limits but this was a recurring battle. Kathryn Chamberlain remembers that not all behaviour was accepted by the teachers and that one student was even sent home. But overall, the idea of establishing consequences for inappropriate student behaviour did not receive much support.[133] Daryl Sturdy explains the school's general philosophy on discipline:

> We had kids who fought or who said fuck or who gave each other a rough time. But we dealt with those things, not by calling down the wrath of the principal, but by talking to the kids and by having school meetings. We tried not to have the kind of rules that would create problems in the first place. Then we could deal with real problems like fighting when they came up. We didn't try to keep the lid on.[134]

Daniel Wood adds that "if an issue arose it was discussed right there on the spot."[135] There were few secrets at the New School.

The day-to-day atmosphere at the New School was easygoing. Students called teachers by first names and student-teacher relations were informal. Dress was casual and one student who transferred from a West Vancouver school remembers having to buy jeans immediately. Students played most of the time and many remember school as lots of fun. One year several groups of students built forts right in the middle of the school building. Roy Kiyooka describes the atmosphere as "uncontained liveliness" and says that the New School was the only school for which his children were glad to get up in the morning.[136] The 1972/73 school prospectus

concluded: "The days are best summarized by the word 'flow': an easy interaction between the kids and their teachers, between the school and its environment."[137] Mr. Sturdy describes further:

> The kids were fun to be with and the teachers did with the kids the things they liked doing themselves. The teachers didn't have to teach anything they didn't want to and could afford the luxury of doing the things they enjoyed doing. We didn't do a great deal of planning. The days seemed to flow.[138]

As in the Progressive period, teachers discouraged competition. There were no marks or report cards and teachers conveyed information to parents through individual conferences. Older students were encouraged to help younger kids and children of different ages played together frequently (several students remember having been teased for playing with younger children at public school). Boys and girls played together regularly as well. Children and adults were encouraged to be individuals without the need to conform and one student explains how "you had to develop a tolerance there." Students felt emotionally supported at the New School.

Academic Deficiencies

The lack of attention to basic skills caused problems for some students. One student says that she "didn't have any math skills when she went into public school."[139] Another describes how her public school teacher was shocked when she showed up in grade five without knowing how to read or write. She never caught up in mathematics.[140] A third student says that his younger sister can barely read to this day[141] and a parent describes how her son can barely read parking signs. Several students report that they can read for information when necessary but they do not read for pleasure. According to one parent, whose son was dyslexic, it took him two years to make up the time he had lost at the New School.[142] Another parent says "my preference would have been for more academics. I was expecting something more along the lines of Montessori or Ashton-Warner. It was a frustration for me."[143] A third parent agrees that "there were kids who managed not to learn to read as well as they should have. One of them was one of my kids. Some kids fell through the cracks."[144]

One student, who attended the New School in grade three, was far ahead in reading and was advanced to the older group. She describes that year and her difficult transfer back to public school:

> I feel like I took grade three off. When I went back to Shaughnessy for grade four that was the toughest year of my life because I didn't know a lot of the skills that they had learned in grade three. I had forgotten how to write, I didn't know how to use a dictionary, I didn't know how to read maps. The only thing I wasn't behind in was math. By grade five I had caught up. I think that one year was an interesting experience but two or three would have been dangerous. Once you were that far behind, unless you were very motivated, you'd never catch up.[145]

Another student who spent six years at the New School talks about the academics she missed:

> I think a lot of kids left the New School with a lack of basic education. I felt lucky that I went to grade one [in public school] because that's where I learned how to read. If I hadn't gone to grade one I don't know how long it would have taken me to grasp that kind of stuff. In the morning they would try to get us to sit around the table and do arithmetic. But I don't ever remember doing any writing or being encouraged to read books. I wasn't able to make up the academics I lost. The kids were given a lot of power and could decide what was going to happen on any day. I knew kids who didn't learn how to read quicker than out loud; they couldn't get through a book without it taking forever. A lot of what we did could have been turned into informative or educational experiences, even if we had just written about it. You get addicted to the fun part. My younger sister didn't get any of the basics and she has really paid the price.[146]

Still another student who attended the New School for grades four and five in 1969-1971 describes her experience as follows:

> I had learned basic reading in grades one to three and was quite good at reading and writing. But I don't remember us doing any academics at all [at the New School]. After the New School I went to a regular school in North Vancouver and I was miserable there because I was so far behind. They put me back a year into grade five. Then I failed grade five so I was two years behind. It became a nightmare that I couldn't get out of. I felt bad particularly since it wasn't my fault. I wish I had kept the same level as all my peers. Halfway through my second try at grade five I quit. If I had started my education at the New School I think I would be illiterate now.[147]

This student eventually went to City School, a Vancouver alternative secondary school, and two

mainstream secondary schools but says: "I never graduated. I'm just getting my grade twelve now."

On the other hand, these students acknowledge that the New School's academic deficiencies were partially balanced by other benefits including increased verbal skills, assertiveness, independence, and self-reliance. As one former student put it: "We learned to make decisions. We had to live by the decisions we made."[148]

Some teachers had misgivings about the lack of skill based learning but attempts to teach reading, writing, and mathematics were largely unsuccessful. Mr. Wood admits that "we didn't do as good a job as we could have" and Mr. Sturdy says that, in retrospect, he would probably do it differently.[149] Mrs. Chamberlain adds "the desire for knowledge has to be fed and I don't know how well we did that."[150] Joan Nemtin thought so little of the reading programme that she took her own child out of the school when she was old enough to read.[151] But despite occasional doubts, the teachers, committed to the free school ideology of the day, were reluctant to make significant changes to the programme.

Many students in the post-1970 period spent much of their elementary careers at the New School and developed permanent habits. By the time they reached secondary school they were too far behind to catch up and had lost confidence in their academic ability. Not that the reading programme had been much better in the earlier Progressive years, but students then had spent enough time in public school to ensure the acquisition of literacy skills, and more often had substantial exposure to academic learning at home.

As for students with learning problems, the teachers did not have the expertise to help them. In most cases they could do little more than make the kids feel better about themselves emotionally. However, this could be a considerable service in itself considering the lack of other support services at the time. One mildly dyslexic student describes how the New School "saved my life in a way, from the labelling, emotional trauma, and hell" he experienced in grade one at public school.[152] But that still didn't help them learn to read. As Joan Nemtin put it: "If a kid wanted to read you couldn't stop them," but if a child arrived at the school with a reading problem

improvement was unlikely.[153] This lack of specialized expertise in handling children with learning problems was not specific to the New School. Large numbers of such children caused difficulties for almost all alternative schools.

A few parents with the will or the resources sought the expert help of doctors or specialist teachers. One parent, whose son had a severe learning disability, sent him to the Centre for Exceptional Children at U.B.C. where he learned to read in three months. Although she acknowledges that the New School provided a good environment for her child with the teachers' non-judgemental attitude and their policy of allowing students to learn at their own pace, she believes he would not have learned to read without this intervention.[154]

Nevertheless, many New School students during this period did learn basic skills and managed to return successfully to the public school system. One parent reports that his children learned reading and math at the New School, and that they experienced no academic or adjustment problems in public school.[155] Another student remembers, while at the New School, working on her own through the grade three math textbook and part of grade four in one year.[156] However, these students had professional parents and spent a relatively short time at the school. Another student who spent six of her elementary years at the New School went on to a successful career at a mainstream secondary school. In this instance the student learned to read at home and travelled a great deal with her parents. Even so, she reports "it took me a year to get adjusted but I did well in school after that."[157]

Although some public schools put students back a year, New School teachers strongly opposed this practice. Mr. Wood claimed "many kids are not behind, but if they are most will catch up quickly" and Mr. Sturdy believed "as long as students were average learners they had no trouble catching up."[158] But students who had an unstimulating home atmosphere, had below average ability, spent many years at the school, or came from troubled families often experienced academic problems. However, many of these may have had difficulty in any school setting.

Many New School students from this period attended alternative high schools such as City School, Total Education, Ideal School, or Relevant High throughout their secondary careers.

One student was "too scared" to go to a mainstream high school because she didn't have the academic background.[159] Some of those who tried became overwhelmed by the rigid structure, except in a few special programmes at schools like University Hill. Conversely, several secondary alternative teachers enrolled their own children at the New School.[160] A minority of New School students from this period attended university and some only completed their secondary education as adults. One parent describes how her daughter graduated from Total Education and took two years at Simon Fraser University: "She wanted to take medicine but what she missed at the New School was discipline." Roy Kiyooka adds:

> When all of this came unravelled at the other end, the kids found themselves faced with the fact that, if I'm going to get ahead in the world I still have to go back to the three R's. Years having gone by it was not easy for them. And some of them did and some of them didn't.[161]

Field Trips

New School teachers believed students should learn from the outside community and developed an extraordinary field trip and recreation programme.[162] Students went swimming, ice skating, skiing, bicycling, horseback riding, and hiking in the local mountains.[163] They went to the beach, to parks, on forest walks, and took full day trips to Lynn Canyon and White Rock.[164]

Anne Long and one parent organized a series of urban living trips. They visited the police station, warehouses, Chinatown, the Salvation Army, grain loading facilities, and two freighters.[165] Another year students toured the Vancouver General Hospital maternity ward,[166] Gastown, the airport, a pulp mill, the police dog training centre, the two universities,[167] and a train wreck.[168] Students were encouraged to organize tours and they used the telephone to gather the necessary information. They developed a feeling of independence and often rode the busses alone. Teachers responded readily to student suggestions about places to visit as one former student explains: "If we were interested in something we would bug a teacher to take us. For example some kid would ask how neon signs are made. We'd jump in the car and go right down

to the factory and ask them to give us a tour."[169]

Student awareness of environmental issues was raised through visits to the Delta city dump, Joshua Recycling, an organic garden in Sardis, salmon spawning grounds, and the Reifel Bird Sanctuary in Ladner.[170] Students also participated in political activities. They interviewed civic election candidates, attended a Vancouver City Council meeting, canvassed for the N.D.P., attended a "Jewish solidarity rally,"[171] and took part in a protest demonstration against the 1972 nuclear test at Amchitka. One year Mrs. Hansen took a group of students to "confront the School of Social Work at U.B.C."[172] Teachers chose activities that coincided with their own political and social interests.

Parents also contributed their own expertise to the school programme. One parent who was a doctor came in and put casts on students. Parent musicians played at the school and some parents conducted cooking lessons while others taught kids how to run the video cameras.[173]

The New School's ambitious outdoor education programme was one of its most innovative curriculum developments. As early as 1968 Mrs. Long and the older students spent five days on a farm in the Gulf Islands. Students hiked, rode horses, sighted deer, tried their hand at spinning, visited farm families, and worked out problems of living together in close quarters.[174] The camping programme went into high gear in 1969 under Daryl Sturdy's leadership when he and Catherine Pye took the students to Allouette Lake at the end of the school year. Students also camped on Saltspring Island[175] and went a survival trip to Gabriola Island where they had to make do with only a tarp, some rope, and a few matches.

The next year, Mr. Sturdy took a group of students aged eight to eleven on a bicycling trip to Vancouver Island "in the Outward Bound tradition."[176] They took the ferry to Nanaimo and cycled to Port Alberni where they took the Lady Rose to Ucluelet. They continued to Long Beach, where they met parents who had brought supplies, and camped for several days. Mr. Sturdy recalls: "I spent most of my time fixing bikes. Some of the kids had done very little exercise and I was pushing them all the time. It was hard—twenty miles on a bike with just one speed going up and down hills!"[177]

Another time Mr. Sturdy and Mrs. James took a group of students to an archaeological site on the Olympic peninsula:

> We hiked down to the beach and during the night it absolutely poured and we got soaking wet. So we decided to hike all the kids back up and drove to Olympia where we dried them all out in a laundromat. We headed into the interior of Washington and eventually ended up at Grand Coulee Dam.

They followed the Columbia River north and, after some trouble at the border, returned to Vancouver through southern British Columbia. They were gone for ten days. Mr. Sturdy explains: "The kids took a large part in this. We didn't mollycoddle them. They had their own tents and were responsible for their own food. They were great trips."[178]

Even the youngest children took part in the camping programme. In June 1971 Barbara Hansen and Catherine Pye took the five to seven year olds to Alice Lake via the P.G.E. Railway where they slept overnight.[179] In other years the younger group went tenting at Sechelt and at Camp Alexandra near White Rock.

In June 1972 Daryl Sturdy, Saralee James, and Daniel Wood took twenty-four students, aged seven to twelve, on a two week camping trip to the Kootenays that covered 1,500 miles. This trip was the culmination of almost a year of planning and was the subject of a full page story in the *Vancouver Sun*.[180] Students looked after their own food and made their own campsites. This didn't just happen haphazardly; student knowledge and skills were developed over several months. Preparation began with sleepovers at the school followed by two weekend survival hikes on Galiano Island where the older students learned about edible wild plants, making lean-tos, and how to make fires and cook over the campfire. Cooking groups of five students each were responsible for planning, shopping, and cooking according to an allotment of $1 per child per day. If a group shopped unwisely or ate too much during the first few meals, they had to live with the consequences. Students accepted the challenge willingly and careful shoppers with money left over at the end of the trip were allowed to buy junk food. Two weeks before departure students made equipment lists, conducted practice shopping trips, and helped decide where to go and what to see.

On departure day three cars crammed with students, teachers, and supplies pulled away. They visited such diverse places as the ghost town at Sandon, a communal farm, a naturalist park, abandoned mines at Hedley and Silverton, and the Arrow Lakes. They learned about fires, finding edible food, and what to do when it rains on the campsite in the middle of the night. Students also learned how to co-operate in cooking groups and the consequences of not doing so.

The camping trips were a metaphor for New School philosophy during the free school period. The teachers believed that kids are capable of far more than adults normally give them credit for. They saw their task as providing materials, challenges, or stimulation for students to develop and carry out their own goals and activities. Preparing for the trips created an ideal learning opportunity which integrated skills such as writing, mathematics, map reading, cooking, planning, and co-operative group process. The result, according to Daniel Wood, was growth in student confidence and responsibility:

> Children are too frequently protected from real challenges and self discoveries by the very people whose job it is to promote challenge and discovery. Basic to the philosophy of the New School is the conviction that children, given considerable responsiblilty, can learn to think, choose, and act wisely.[181]

The Counterculture

The New School parent community changed dramatically between 1967 and 1973. Most academic families departed and the school increasingly appealed to artists, writers, musicians, craftspeople, "seekers," and "free living types of people."[182] Parents were strongly libertarian and objected to the authoritarian structure of the public schools. Many also questioned the value of academic learning and felt that the public schools were too book oriented. Parents were searching for new social values and worked them out through participation in the school. The teachers were exploring values as well, about education and about life, and the New School provided an environment where they could do so without interference. Daryl Sturdy explains:

> I left the public school system because I was tired of being a policeman. A lot of the curriculum was irrelevant. This was a chance to give children more responsibility, to let them have more say in what they were doing, to be friends with the children. It was a time to explore different ideas about what education should be.[183]

The New School was enormously influenced by the counterculture of the late 1960s. This was a diffuse movement which took many forms in North America including: drug use, "free love," long hair and bright clothing, "do your own thing," artistic expression, "back to the land," and an emphasis on feelings rather than reason. Intellectual and political components included pacifism, anti-materialism, personal freedom, spiritual mysticism, and communitarianism. Many teachers and parents in alternative schools held these values and saw themselves as part of a movement to reform schools and to reform society.

Some parents lived communally, many were artists or members of local rock bands, and others ran alternative businesses such as an herb and sprout farm. Many of the children were long-haired kids with names like "Lark" or "Sage," typical of counterculture parents.[184] Daniel Wood describes the atmosphere:

> Parent meetings would often turn into "love-ins." Everybody would sit around singing folk songs. There were plenty of affairs and breakups. There were not many stable families, there were plenty of single people, and it was the age of free love. If parents were together when they got involved in the school, it was more than likely that they would not be together when they left. Field trips were great social events for the adults as well as for the kids. There would be caravans of Volkswagen vans. Parents would sit around smoking dope and flirt with each other. Kids would go skinnydipping, climb trees, and tell ghost stories. We were like a big family and I think the kids felt well loved. We were very close.[185]

The period around 1970 was a time of rapidly changing sexual values and the adults at the New School were strongly affected by the new permissive attitude. There were relationships between teachers, affairs between teachers and parents, love triangles, nude swimming parties, and frequent marital breakups. The teachers attempted to deal with sexuality issues among students with the same kind of openness. On one occasion a group of older students began experimenting with sex in a confined area under the basement steps. One teacher explains:

> When we found out about it we didn't suspend anybody; we realized that the kids were expressing something they needed to express. Some of the kids who got caught up in this didn't relate to the other kids very well and and didn't feel too good about themselves. We ended up having a class meeting and had the kids verbalize what had gone on and got it all out so we could talk about it. We realized that we weren't all that clear about our own feelings about sexuality. We ended up having a weekend workshop for the staff so that we could deal with the kids from a more positive position ourselves. I think that illustrated how differently we dealt with problems."[186]

However, openness about sexuality sometimes approached or crossed the limits of what today would be considered appropriate. The intermediate class fashion show at the art gallery exhibited the girls in skimpy clothing and suggestive poses.[187] Younger children often ran around the building naked and several former students remarked on the nudity at the school. There were varying degrees of sexual experimentation in the older class and, according to one student, the teachers tolerated too much sexual exploration among students. One teacher took students to Wreck Beach for nude sunbathing and on camping trips everyone swam naked together, male and female, teachers and students. The adults also acted out their own sexual freedom with each other, often with the knowledge of the students.

Students were often present while the adults used alcohol and drugs, and kids sometimes served as bartenders at evening dances. Some former students believe that the adults used the school community as a vehicle for their own fun and inclinations. At times the students seemed to be incidental, and some parents admit that they sometimes forgot why they were there.

Teachers and parents began questioning gender roles by the early 1970s. On one occasion a male teacher initiated a writing exercise on dreams. To stimulate the students' imagination he brought in some images from magazines including a Playboy centrefold. The teacher was severely criticized at several angry school meetings. Parents' main objections to the photographs concerned their stereotyping and objectification of women. Following this incident, parents encouraged female students to confront teachers whenever they saw examples of sexist behaviour. The contemporary feminist movement in Canada was in its early stages at this time and responding to sexism became a central concern of the New School community.

The Human Potential Movement also influenced the New School community during the early 1970s. Several teachers and parents did personal growth work and group therapy at such institutes as Esalen in California and Cold Mountain on Cortes Island in B.C., and three parents were popular gestalt therapists. In 1970 when staff relations became seriously strained "someone suggested that we might work together better if we did a communications workshop."[188] A faculty member from Simon Fraser University presented several sessions on listening, expressing feelings, and taking responsibility in an attempt to resolve issues among staff members.

But the teachers wanted something more intense so Richard Weaver, director of Cold Mountain Institute, was engaged to do a weekend gestalt therapy session for the staff in June 1970. The interaction "brought up so much personal stuff between people," that they decided to schedule another session. So that fall, the whole staff went to Cortes Island for an intensive weekend retreat. One teacher describes how "it shook the school up and brought interpersonal issues and relationships out into the open."[189] Another says more bluntly that "all hell broke loose," in regard to steamy relationships among staff and parents.[190] These experiences encouraged some participants to continue this kind of personal exploration.

Encounter group jargon became common during daily school life. Teachers taught students how to express their feelings using phrases like "I have a resentment about...." or "I have an appreciation about...."[191] Teachers described the students with typical counter-culture adjectives: warm, vibrant, open, fully alive, human, loving, people.[192] One former New School student captures the spirit of the times well: "If you can cope in the world emotionally, everything else is a snap. What is most important is to find out what is right for yourself, find your own truth."[193]

Conclusion

The direction of the New School from 1967 to 1973 was shaped more by the period itself than by an ideological decision. Its leaders had little choice but to move in the direction of a Romantic school. This is borne out by the experience of other Progressive schools as disparate as the Friends School in Argenta or the Putney School in Vermont where the example of Summerhillian schools and the pervasive youth subculture of the sixties forced the adults to change with the times.[194] By the late 1960s both teachers and parents interested in alternative education subscribed to countercultural values and Romantic notions of freedom for children, and it would have been unlikely for the New School to have followed any other path.

Alternative schools were places of exploration and experimentation. As Daryl Sturdy suggests: "The New School was a place where we were not bound by a school board, ministry, or administrator. It was a place where we could work/play with kids in a way we felt was right. There was an overall philosophy–we wouldn't have wanted a traditional school classroom."[195] The individuals who initiated alternative schools were trying to create a new way to work with children and with each other. Because this approach was a radical departure from what it replaced, there were no rules. That allowed the innovators to push boundaries. In some cases they found they had pushed too far. For the participants the New School was more than a school. It celebrated values such as freedom, individualism, self-expression, and equality. It was a community of individuals reflecting the excitement and idealism of the times, an expression of powerful cultural movements during a turbulent period.

NOTES

1. Norman Levi, letter to Barry Promislow, March 20, 1967.
2. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," in Gross and Gross, eds., *Radical School Reform* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1969): p. 275.
3. This was confirmed by virtually all parents interviewed.
4. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," p. 275.
5. *Vancouver Sun*, August 17, 1967, p. 20.
6. Tom Durrie, personal interview, July, 1988.
7. Tom Durrie, personal interview, July, 1988.
8. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," pp.275-276.
9. Tom Durrie, "New School Director's Annual Report: 1967/68," February 29, 1968, p. 6.
10. Rita Cohn, personal interview, April, 1987.
11. Cal Shumiatcher, personal interview, April, 1987.
12. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," p. 276.
13. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," p. p. 278.
14. Laura Jamieson, personal interview, June, 1991.
15. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," pp. 278-279.
16. Tom Durrie, personal interview, July, 1988.
17. Tom Durrie, personal interview, July, 1988.
18. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," p. 278.
19. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," pp. 276-277.
20. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," p.277.
21. Tom Durrie, personal interview, July, 1988.
22. Rita Cohn, interview; Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," p. 279.
23. "Parents Split School, Disagree With Methods," *Vancouver Sun*, June 1, 1968, p. 7.
24. New School General Meeting, minutes, April 11, 1968.
25. *Vancouver Sun*, June 1, 1968, p. 7.
26. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," 280.
27. Board meeting minutes, March 21, 1968; general meeting minutes, April 11, 1968.
28. Norman Levi, letter to Barry Promislow, March 20, 1967.
29. General Meeting Minutes, May 16, 1968.
30. After spending time at Esalen Institute in California, Anne Long (Anna Banana) returned to Vancouver as a practising artist.
31. New School Teachers Society, constitution, June 21, 1968.
32. New School Teachers Society, Constitution and By-Laws, 1968, 1974.
33. New School Teachers Society, Annual Reports, 1968 to 1977.
34. Deed of Sale, June 24, 1969, Randall Collection.
35. Extensive legal correspondence, 1968-1973, Randall Collection.
36. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
37. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987; Daniel Wood, tape recorded interview, June, 1988.
38. Kathryn Chamberlain, telephone interview, May, 1991.

39. New School Prospectus, 1972/73.
40. Staff Meeting Minutes, September 6, 1973; Randall Collection.
41. Daniel Wood, Anne Long, tape recorded interviews, June, 1988, April, 1987.
42. New School Newsletter, May, 1971.
43. New School Newsletters, September, 1969; September, 1970; April, 1971.
44. These letters are in a file in the Van Volkingburgh collection.
45. New School Newsletter, May, 1971.
46. Barbara Shumiatcher, letter to the New School Society, April, 1971.
47. Daniel Wood, tape recorded interview, June, 1988.
48. Roy Kiyooka, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
49. Kiyo Kiyooka, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
50. Tape recording of the original broadcast. The teachers were Daniel Wood and Barbara Hansen and the students were Michael Shumiatcher and Scott Robinson.
51. New School Prospectus, 1972/73.
52. *Vancouver Province*, "Students do all the Talking at Vancouver's New School," October 4, 1972, p. 41; New School Prospectus, 1972/73; and Daniel Wood, "The New School," in the *Georgia Straight*, 1972.
53. Margaret Sigurgeirson, tape recorded interview, November, 1991.
54. Aurie Felde, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
55. For example, professor Ed Wickberg withdrew his children after only one year, and professors Fred and Kay Stockholder withdrew their son after two years. Interviews, October, 1987 and April, 1987.
56. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," p. 291.
57. Dewi Minden, Kiyo Kiyooka and Margo Hansen described several such students in tape recorded interviews, August, 1988, June, 1991 and July, 1991.
58. New School Newsletter, December, 1970.
59. *Vancouver Province*, "Students do all the Talking at Vancouver's New School," October 4, 1972, p. 41.
60. New School Newsletter, December, 1970.
61. Auction Accounting Sheet, November, 1968.
62. New School Newsletter, October, 1969, Randall Collection.
63. New School Newsletters, November and December, 1970.
64. New School Newsletter, April, 1971.
65. Financial Statements, 1967-1974, Registrar of Companies, Victoria.
66. Staff Meeting Minutes, October 2, 1973. The Free University offered informal non-credit courses (mainly by S.F.U. professors) in a variety of locations.
67. New School Prospectus and fee schedule, 1972/73.
68. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
69. Financial Statements, 1966-1972, Registrar of Companies, Victoria.
70. Staff Meeting Minutes, October 16, 1973.
71. U.B.C. Student Architects Report, May, 1970, 43 pages.
72. Annual Report, July 11, 1969, Registrar of Companies, Victoria.
73. New School Teachers' Society Meeting Minutes, March 27, 1970.

74. New School income tax records, 1973-1977, Randall Collection.
75. Joan Nemtin, tape recorded interview, December, 1987.
76. New School Newsletter, September, 1970.
77. Daphne Trivett, tape recorded interview, October, 1987.
78. Daphne Trivett, tape recorded interview, October, 1987.
79. Barbara Hanson and Barbara Shumiatcher, interviews, October, 1987 and April, 1987.
80. Kathryn Chamberlain, telephone interview, May, 1991.
81. Barbara Hansen, tape recorded interview, October, 1987.
82. Daniel Wood, tape recorded interview, June, 1988.
83. Daniel Wood, tape recorded interview, June, 1988.
84. Cara Felde, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
85. New School Newsletter, December, 1970.
86. New School Newsletter, December, 1970.
87. Rita Cohn taught French Immersion in the Vancouver School District for many years.
88. Roy Kiyooka, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
89. John Holt, quoted in the New School Newsletter, April, 1971.
90. U.B.C. Architecture Students Report, May, 1971, Page 3.
91. Tape recording of original CKLG interview, 1972.
92. Dan Wood and Michael Shumiatcher, CKLG interview, 1972.
93. Ted Heyes and Margot Hanson quoted in "Students do all the Talking at Vancouver's New School," *Vancouver Province,* October 4, 1972, p. 41.
94. Ed Wickberg, tape recorded interview, December, 1987.
95. Daryl Sturdy quoted in *Vancouver Province*, October 4, 1972, 41.
96. Kiyo Kiyooka, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
97. Scott Robinson, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
98. Cara Felde, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
99. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," 282-285.
100. Aimee Promislow, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
101. Daphne Trivett, Barbara Shumiatcher, interviews, October, 1987, April, 1987.
102. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
103. Robert Minden, tape recorded interview, August, 1988.
104. Daphne Trivett, tape recorded interview, October, 1977.
105. Joan Nemtin, tape recorded interview, December, 1987.
106. Incorporating play was consistent with neo-Froebelian views of education.
107. Daniel Wood, tape recorded interview, June, 1988.
108. New School Newsletter, early 1971, Randall Collection.
109. New School Student Newspaper, early 1971, Randall Collection.
110. Scott Robinson, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
111. Robert Minden, tape recorded interview, August, 1988.
112. New School Newsletters, November, 1970; December, 1970.
113. Cara Felde, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
114. New School Student Newspaper, 1971, Randall Collection.
115. New School Newsletter, September 2, 1970.

116. New School Student Newspaper, 1971, Randall Collection.
117. Cara Felde, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
118. Robert Minden, tape recorded interview, August, 1988.
119. Ron Hansen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
120. Bob Gilliland, Letter to the teachers, June 7, 1971.
121. Dana Long, tape recorded interview, June, 1987.
122. Scott Robinson, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
123. Staff Meeting Minutes, September 6, 1973, Randall Collection.
124. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," 286.
125. Eric Epstein, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
126. Robert Minden, tape recorded interview, August, 1988.
127. Dewi Minden, tape recorded interview, August, 1988.
128. Aimee Promislow, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
129. Cara Felde, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
130. Margot Hansen, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
131. Daniel Wood, tape recorded interview, June, 1988.
132. Barbara Hanson quoted in, "Students do all the Talking at Vancouver's New School," *Vancouver Province* October 4, 1972, p. 41.
133. Daniel Wood, tape recorded interview, June, 1988.
134. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
135. Daniel Wood, tape recorded interview, June, 1988.
136. Roy Kiyooka, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
137. New School Prospectus, 1972/73.
138. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
139. Dewi Minden, tape recorded interview, August, 1988.
140. Dana Long, tape recorded interview, June, 1987.
141. Mark James, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
142. Kay Stockholder, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
143. Sharon Burrows, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
144. Ron Hansen, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
145. Aimee Promislow, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
146. Margot Hansen, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
147. Kiyo Kiyooka, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
148. Cara Felde, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
149. Daniel Wood, tape recorded interview, June, 1988.
150. Kathryn Chamberlain, telephone interview, May, 1991.
151. Joan Nemtin, tape recorded interview, December, 1987.
152. Scott Robinson, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
153. Joan Nemtin, tape recorded interview, December, 1987.
154. Margaret Sigurgeirson, tape recorded interview, November, 1991.
155. Gerry Growe, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
156. Aimee Promislow, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
157. Cara Felde, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.

158. Dan Wood, CKLG interview, 1972; Daryl Sturdy, interview, 1987.
159. Margot Hansen, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
160. Total Education teachers Phil Knaiger, and Richard and Elizabeth Neil sent their own children to the New School.
161. Roy Kiyooka, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
162. The field trip programme resembled John Bremer's Parkway Programme in Philadelphia. See *The School Without Walls* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).
163. New School Newsletters, 1969-1971, Randall Collection.
164. New School Newsletter, February, 1971, Randall Collection.
165. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," 284-285.
166. New School Prospectus, 1972/73.
167. New School Student Newspaper, 1971, Randall Collection.
168. CKLG interview, 1972.
169. Scott Robinson, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
170. Daniel Wood, "The New School," *Georgia Straight*, 1972.
171. New School Student Newspaper, 1971, Randall Collection.
172. New School Newsletter, December, 1970.
173. New School Student Newsletter, 1971. Barbara Shumiatcher conducted cooking classes and Aurie and Max Felde, both professional classical musicians, performed at the school.
174. Anne Long, "The New School—Vancouver," 281-282.
175. New School Student Newspaper, 1971, Randall Collection.
176. Outward Bound sought to build character through adversity, unlike the New School.
177. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
178. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
179. New School Newsletter, June, 1971, Randall Collection.
180. Daniel Wood, "We took 24 kids 1,500 miles across B.C.," *Vancouver Sun*, July 6, 1972, p. 41.
181. Daniel Wood, *Vancouver Sun*, July 6, 1972, 41.
182. Daniel Wood, tape recorded interview, June, 1988.
183. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
184. Photograph collections of Scott Robinson and Margot Hansen.
185. Daniel Wood, tape recorded interview, June, 1988.
186. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
187. Photograph from the personal collection of Daphne Trivett.
188. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
189. Daryl Sturdy, tape recorded interview, April, 1987.
190. Daphne Trivett, tape recorded interview, October, 1987.
191. Cara Felde, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
192. Dan Wood, CKLG interview, 1972.
193. Scott Robinson, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
194. Susan Lloyd, *The Putney School* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987): 224-229.
195. Daryl Sturdy, written comments to the author, December 15, 1998.

CHAPTER 7: SATURNA ISLAND FREE SCHOOL

Beginnings

The Saturna Island Free School was the most extreme example of Romantic education to arise in British Columbia. Its founder, Tom Durrie, grew up in Portland, Oregon and attended Reed College, a liberal arts institution there, and the University of California at Santa Barbara where he majored in music history and graduated in 1956. He decided to go into teaching and received his general elementary certificate from U.C.L.A. He taught for three years in southern California and "like many idealistic young teachers was completely unprepared for the realities of classroom discipline, instructional problems, and school politics."[1] Although his teaching performance was successful, from the beginning Mr. Durrie disapproved of what he saw as the coerciveness of public schools. Active in the teachers' association, he eventually lost his job for speaking out against merit pay.[2] Looking for an idyllic rural life, he moved to British Columbia in 1960 and taught in Burnaby, Kitwanga, and Williams Lake. After a successful year teaching Grade Seven in Williams Lake, he taught an Intermediate Special Class (aged 11 to 15) of "slow learners" and students with emotional problems from 1964 to 1967.[3]

Mr. Durrie rejected traditional discipline early in his career after reading *Summerhill* and the writings of Paul Goodman and Eric Fromm. Teaching learning disabled children "threw a lot of the problems of education into very sharp focus for me."

> I became more and more permissive and things were really quite outrageous with kids running around screaming and yelling all day long. My acceptablility in the public system was deteriorating rapidly. But the changes that took place in the kids were astonishing to me and to everyone else in the school.[4]

Mr. Durrie observed his submissive students begin to take more control over their lives through practical activities around the school such as lawn mowing, and was amazed to see them become "somewhat civilized." Even the school principal was impressed and wrote in 1966:

> Mr. Durrie has taken an experimental approach to instruction with his Special Class. Very little conventional academic work is done. Pupils are free to do as they wish. The classroom is very noisy with pupils engaging in many activities—discussion, listening to records, making model cars, constructing articles with woodworking tools, and playing indoors or out. At the beginning of the year several pupils were quite aggressive and one disagreement followed another. Much damage to the building occurred. Gradually, however, they learned to live with one another in a much more harmonious group. Throughout the year there has been an observable change in the behaviour of the students. Aggressive and destructive impulses have worked themselves out. The withdrawn children have learned to assert themselves and to associate with others. They all seem happier than they were a year ago. Mr. Durrie has had to withstand opposition and criticism.. However, the benefits to his pupils have made it apparent that the programme should be continued.[5]

Drawing on this experience, Mr. Durrie, during his tenure as director of the New School, took it in a direction significantly different from the Progressive model of its first five years. He believed children should not be forced to study and should be allowed the freedom to solve their own problems. He envisioned no set curriculum and would take his cue from the students themselves. Presented with almost complete freedom, the older children engaged in destructive behaviour,"creating all kinds of mayhem," and almost no academic work was done. The other teachers and most parents were highly critical of his methods, objecting particularly to his apparent lack of control over the students. The New School finally split into two groups in March 1968 and Mr. Durrie left with the children of parents who supported his practices.[6]

In December the New School had hosted a high profile Free School Conference organized by Lynn Curtis of the Company of Young Canadians. Mr. Durrie saw the conference as an opportunity to make contacts with other free school teachers. Participants included Bob Davis of Everdale Place, Colin Thomson of Knowplace, and Bob Barker of the Barker Free School. The sessions generated a great deal of excitement and conviction among those attending. Anything to do with free schools was considered big news in Vancouver in 1967, and both major newspapers ran stories about the conference for three days.[7] The success of the conference convinced Mr. Durrie even more that free schools were the wave of the future.

After leaving the New School Mr. Durrie organized a "floating free school" for the ten children who remained with his group, meeting in homes and taking field trips to points of interest in the city for the remainder of the spring. He planned to open a "free school" the following September and formed a committee of several parents to begin searching for a suitable location. In April 1968 they inspected an old house on the Fraser River near Southeast Marine Drive. The caretakers were Bill and Kathy Sheffeld, recently arrived Americans who came to British Columbia in opposition to the Vietnam war. Bill Sheffeld grew up in upstate New York and studied political science and art at the University of East New Mexico. Although he was not an activist, Mr. Sheffeld had quietly supported the civil rights and anti-war movements. He was a "hands-on" practical person skilled in many trades including carpentry, mechanics, and electrical work. Kathy Sheffeld grew up in New Mexico and studied philosophy, literature, and music. Both were interested in education and Mr. Sheffeld had completed part of a teacher certification programme when his plans were interrupted by the United States draft board leading to his departure for Canada. The Sheffelds were drawn to Mr. Durrie's free school project and joined the group investigating potential properties.

Shortly afterwards, somebody saw a newspaper advertisement for a farm for sale on Saturna Island, in the southern Gulf Islands of British Columbia. These islands were isolated and often home to religious communities, artists' colonies, and people looking for a quiet lifestyle. Although the group had not been looking for property outside greater Vancouver, Mr. Durrie realized it would be advantageous to have "a school of this sort in a rural setting." He believed many of the problems at the New School would not have arisen "if there were room for children to carry out their activities outdoors or in separate buildings."[8] A dozen adults and children took the ferry to Saturna to inspect the site. The property was twenty-eight acres of rolling meadow and forest with sea cliffs and a private beach. The farm house had been built by one of the island's original settlers in 1890 but was now owned by the local teacher and her husband. Mr. Sheffeld advised the group not to buy it because the house was in such disrepair "it was beyond fixing up."

But most of the group "fell in love with it" immediately. They bought the property in June for $55,000 and began preparing to establish the Saturna Island Free School that September.

The group scrambled to raise the necessary cash for a down payment. Tom Durrie and his wife Gretel raised $8,000 through the sale of their Vancouver house. The Sheffelds contributed $7,000, and Jack and Betty Speers, whose two boys would attend the school, provided $5,000. Others contributed smaller amounts but it would always be a struggle to "keep the place together" and pay the mortgage. Mr. Sheffeld and Mr. Durrie made enough repairs on the house that summer to make it liveable and suitable for a group of children. They jacked the house up to repair the foundation and built two dormitory style bedrooms with two tiers of three bunkbeds to accommodate six students in each room. But the house was crowded and had no central heating, only two poorly functioning bathrooms, and an inadequate sewage disposal system. However, the fields and outbuildings provided unlimited places for kids to play and adjacent to the property was a large piece of Crown Zellerbach forest land suitable for hiking, nature study, building forts, or just being alone.

The property was registered in the Durries' name but in 1969 the group formed a company which has owned and directed the use of the property ever since. The original directors were: Tom and Gretel Durrie, Bill and Kathy Sheffeld, Jack and Betty Speers, and staff members Rini House and Lyn Bowman. As director, Mr. Durrie insisted on 51% of the shares and control of the school, not wishing to repeat his New School experience. The remaining shares were divided equally among the others. Tom Durrie and Bill Sheffeld, the principal partners, had great respect for each other but were very different in personality. Mr. Sheffeld was quiet, practical, and "down-to-earth" while Mr. Durrie was charismatic, cerebral, and Romantic. Their differing approaches would eventually lead to serious disagreements that would divide the community.

Educational and Moral Philosophy

Similar in outlook to Summerhill, the Saturna Island Free School offered students complete freedom to explore their own interests without pressure from adults.[9] The original school prospectus in August 1968 stated that the school "provides children with the opportunity for individual development in a non-directive, child-centred environment."[10] The prospectus goes on to explain the school's philosophy:

> At Saturna Island Free School children choose for themselves what they want to do. They discover their own potentialities and explore a variety of possibilities while seeking out their own directions. We believe it is by nature the function of the child to learn from all experiences. The responsibility of the staff is to respond to the expressed interests and desires of the child and to offer varied alternatives and ideas without coercion. The low student-staff ratio (5-1) allows each child to form close associations with enlightened and responsible adults chosen for their belief in human nature as a positive force. The school provides opportunities for expression and development of the child's intellectual, scientific, and artistic interests. A regular academic programme is available; however participation is completely voluntary.[11]

The "available academic programme" never materialized though, for Mr. Durrie's outlook was even more "Romantic" and laissez-faire than that of A.S. Neill. At Summerhill voluntary classes were held on a regular and ongoing basis; students were free to attend or stay away from classes as they wished. The Saturna Island School, however, offered no formal classes at all. Students were to pursue their own activities and if they wanted to learn something would ask a staff member to help them. The other major difference was the absence of regular Summerhill style staff/student meetings to regulate school behaviour.

In 1969 the school produced a more complete prospectus titled:

SATURNA ISLAND FREE SCHOOL
Learning how to live;
learning how to learn.

"Here is a place where children can learn about life by living, free from the artificial restrictions of classrooms, rules, autocratic teachers, and timetables; where children become part of an active,

child-centred community; where living and learning are one: a life of joy, participation, and freedom." The Romantic notion of freedom is discussed in the prospectus at length:

> Our philosophy is based upon the fundamental belief that human beings are constructive and growth-oriented. We believe that, if given the freedom to choose, every individual will direct himself with maximum efficiency toward optimum growth and learning. It is natural for children to explore and learn about their physical and cultural environments. But we believe that to operate in a fully human way one must be free from external pressures and artificial demands; free to respond to inner drives, integrate experiences, and interact with others. We do not believe that it is necessary to set limits, make rules, steer, or correct children as they grow and learn. Traditional education assumes children are lazy and destructive savages who require disciplining and guiding before they can become civilized and human. We reject these assumptions and believe that love, caring, approval, and self-direction will alone enable children to become fully-functioning individuals. Learning to handle freedom means taking responsibility for our own actions rather than simply learning to follow a set of rules determined by someone else. We learn to trust the human responses of sensitivity, intuition, and reason.[12]

Mr. Durrie and the staff assumed that academic learning would develop naturally out of a context of "daily living" and relationships.

> Children at Saturna Island Free School learn how to live and how to learn. There is little emphasis on textbooks, classes, and curricula. The world is full of so many fascinating and wonderful things to see, to do, to read and hear, that learning becomes an integral part of daily living. We do not set aside times for learning and times for playing. To the child play and work and learning are all the same thing. We dare not stifle or distort this; our job is to support real play rather than kill it with interference and external rewards.[13]

Mr. Durrie saw the flexible timetables and creative teaching methods of Progressive schools as mere tricks to get students to do what adults wanted them to do in the first place. He characterized "New School Progressivism" as an attempt to "foster the intellectual, emotional, and moral growth of children in certain pre-determined, though enlightened, directions, and to capture the interest of children in approved activities through the use of sophisticated and modern techniques and materials."[14] In an article written in 1969, Mr. Durrie questioned the assumption that children have to be taught anything at all and whether adults really know the best ways of growing up and living. He noted that children learn such complex skills as walking and talking

during the first few years of life without prodding or assistance. What schools do, he wrote, is "turn learning into a chore when it should be one of life's greatest delights." Accepting the positive and constructive nature of human drives as fundamental, Mr. Durrie concluded that "we need not direct learning and growth but simply allow them to happen." As he wrote to one parent:

> We believe that humans are basically constructive and growth-oriented and that education should be largely a process of letting rather than making growth happen. We feel that happiness is a creative state of mind and that being free of external pressures liberates one to respond to internal pressures to growth and self-enhancement.[15]

His message to children was: "You are free to be yourself and to do what you like. I trust that you know better than I do what is good for you." Responsibility for making decisions was left to each individual.[16]

Social growth would also be achieved without coercion. As he wrote to a parent, "we believe in the kind of incidental learning that springs naturally from daily living in a varied household, and that changes in behaviour result from understanding and allowing for the needs of other people rather than through force."[17] Mr. Durrie also believed a wide mix of ages was conducive to learning to get along and solve problems. As one staff member put it: "We wanted to teach kids to make their own decisions and take responsibility for their lives, to develop a decision-making impulse that had been destroyed by the culture. Then they could learn anything."[18]

This extreme Romantic view struck a responsive chord with those young adults and teenagers who spent the 1960s exploring personal freedom and actively questioning authority. Political activists saw freedom for the young as a natural extension of liberation movements, while artists, hippies, and spiritual seekers considered educational freedom a prerequisite for unleashing individual human potential. They all saw coercive education as an integral component of a repressive, violent, and joyless society.

Staff and Students

Tom Durrie, Gretel Durrie, Bill Sheffeld, and Kathy Sheffeld were joined by two other staff members for the first year. Lyn Bowman grew up in Vancouver and after a short stint in university managed a student co-operative housing venture in New Westminster.[19] He was a pacifist and, in the mid-1960s, trained at the Joan Baez Institute for Non-Violence in California after which he participated in draft resistance activities in the United States. Later he would become a strong advocate of the Gestalt therapy methods developed by Fritz Perls and becoming increasingly popular among counterculture individuals. Mr. Bowman helped organize the 1967 Free School Conference and assisted at the New School for several months.[20] The other staff member was Rini House, a single parent originally from Saskatchewan, who had read about alternative lifestyles. She met Mr. Durrie the previous spring and joined the group because of her belief in freedom and because some of her children were having difficulties in public school.[21] Mrs. House was remembered by many participants for maintaining a feeling of calm stability even "in the face of chaos."[22]

The school opened on September 10, 1968 with twenty-one students aged five to seventeen.[23] Students had a wide variety of backgrounds. Although most were local British Columbians during the first two years, one was from Quebec, one from Saskatchewan (the family originally from New York), one from Edmonton, two from Seattle, two from Wyoming, five from California, and one all the way from Mexico (parents were American officials).[24] The B.C. students included seven from Vancouver, ten from the greater Vancouver area (Richmond, West Vancouver, and the lower Fraser Valley), three from Victoria, two from Nanaimo, two from Powell River, and one from Chilliwack.[25] In addition the student body included the three Durrie children as well as two local Saturna Island boys who attended as "day students," one while finishing his grade twelve studies and another because his parents were dissatisfied with the local school. All the other students were boarders.

Although the school accepted children as young as five, most were teenagers. Of the forty-two students who attended the school between 1968 and 1970 twenty-five were thirteen and older.[26] In January 1970 there were twenty-one students: five aged 6-8, four aged 9-12, and twelve aged 13-16.[27] Despite Mr. Durrie's attempts to encourage younger children to enroll, there was always a preponderance of older students making life challenging for the largely inexperienced staff. However, the school was more successful in achieving a gender balance and in January, 1970 there were eleven girls and ten boys.

Students attended for a variety of reasons, but most fall into three categories. The first group consisted of children of parents who believed in the free school ideology and wanted their children educated outside the public school system. Some of these were countercultural types, others saw the school system as oppressive, and some simply wanted their children to grow up "naturally." One couple, a dentist and his wife, were Jewish intellectuals from New York who had spent several years in a socialist artists' colony in New Jersey where there was a Progressive school. They moved to Canada because of their opposition to the Vietnam war and were "desperate to place their children in a Summerhill-type school."[28] Another parent wrote on her son's application: "Ah! If only all schools were operated with your incomparable beliefs."[29] A Seattle parent wrote: "We are desperate for a Canadian Progressive Free School conducted upon the philosophy of A.S. Neill's Summerhill. The American public school system has put our twelve year old daughter on the defensive. We want her to be free to be herself again."[30] Another wrote about her daughter's boredom and frustration: "I have noticed a change in her original curiosity and creative interests since public school came into her life. I have read *Summerhill* and we feel a definite need for this type of influence."[31] Another parent says she was "enamoured with the Summerhill model"[32] and a former student says his parents were looking for "an ideal place where we could grow creatively."[33] This group constituted between one quarter and one third of the total.

But a majority of students (increasingly throughout the life of the school) were young

people having trouble in public school for a variety of reasons. Some had emotional or learning disabilities while others came from seriously dysfunctional or abusive families. Others were so caught up in the drug scene that they would not attend public school or, in some cases, no public school would take them. The parents of many of these students had exhausted all other avenues for help and the Saturna Island Free School was a last resort.

One sixteen year old student from the west side of Vancouver was so involved in the drug, music, and mystical subcultures that no high school would accept him.[34] His parents, desperate to get him out of Vancouver, sent him to Saturna Island, "a place that will take you." No member of his family ever came to investigate the school. In her inquiry in 1968 his mother wrote "at this juncture we are rather more concerned with Ron, the person, than with Ron, the student."[35] This student recalls the image of waiting for the ferry with his father: "I had no idea where the Gulf Islands were. The whole thing took place at night and there was a ferry change and I was sitting there waiting for it. A group of people from the school met me on the second ferry and took me up to the farm." Another student who was "kicked out of high school in grade nine," states simply that her parents "didn't know what to do with me."[36] Still another says: "My Mum and Dad figured I couldn't get into any trouble if they sent me to an island."[37] The mother of a thirteen year old Edmonton girl wrote:

> Valerie has never shown any interest in school, reading, or learning but does have the ability. We are sure that she has some sort of emotional block. We would like to have her away from here as this is where a great deal of her difficulty arises. From what I've heard this type of child is supposed to flourish at a free school.[38]

The third group consisted of students whose parents were looking for a place to "dump" their children either because they didn't care about them, or because they could not cope with their own life circumstances. The school enrolled the daughter of a Vancouver poet who was debilitated by drugs, ill health, and mental illness in the family. A five year old girl kidnapped by her father spent several months at the school until the authorities could locate her mother in California. Another parent "found housekeepers unsatisfactory during several stays in hospital."[39]

A Seattle parent dropped her thirteen year old son off at Saturna in September 1969 and disappeared for four months. In an attempt to find her Mr. Durrie wrote to the boy's grandmother: "It is winter here and the temperature will soon be below freezing. Mike has only light summer clothes, no sweater or coat, and is without shoes or boots. He would appreciate clothes or a clothing allowance from his mother." Finally Mr. Durrie received a letter from the mother explaining that "I'm in jail sentenced to one year for possession of marijuana. Michael is in protective custody in Juvenile Court."[40] Some of these children were so estranged from their families that they did not even go home for holidays. Such troubled children were a great challenge to a young and largely untrained staff.

Many parents were in financial difficulties due to irregular employment, dysfunctional personal lives, or "voluntary poverty." In some cases payments stopped coming within months after students were enrolled as their parents' financial circumstances changed. In a few exceptional hardship cases students were permitted to stay for reduced fees. Mr. Durrie wrote hundreds of letters asking parents to bring their fees up to date or to replace bounced cheques. One student wrote to explain why he could not return to Saturna: "I have to go to the stupid public school. My Mom is sorry she couldn't send the $100 but my Dad still has no job."[41] Another parent wrote: "I appreciate your patience in the matter of Jamie's school payments. As you know, my intentions are good but this summer I've had bad luck."[42] A single parent from California had to withdraw her son after just three months due to the loss of her job.[43] However, not all Saturna families were living month to month. One parent was a dentist, another was a lawyer, one was a Canada Manpower placement officer, one owned a Las Vegas casino, and one parent was an airline pilot (whose brother was the Mayor of Surrey).[44] Five parents were public school teachers and one was an elementary principal.

School finances were always precarious. Mr. Durrie wrote to one parent: "We run the school on a tiny budget. Our staff receives no salary. Our budget is kept in a precarious balance if our monthly income remains constant."[45] Initially, tuition fees were set at $1,000 per year

including room and board.[46] This was a modest fee for a boarding school; tuition was kept "as low as possible" because many parents had low incomes. In 1969/70 tuition was increased to $1,250 and the following year it rose to $1,500 for teenagers.[47] However, as the school's financial situation deteriorated and because many students were staying for short durations, the staff decided to institute a monthly fee of $160.[48] By January 1971 this was raised to $200 per month. The increase was justified by the offering of "sensitivity training groups" and the addition of a "qualified social worker."[49] Bill Sheffeld did most of the school's bookkeeping.

Staff members essentially worked for nothing receiving only room and board (a salary of $10 per month was added in January 1970 at the suggestion of a parent). The school received a $500 loan from one parent and a few modest donations. Others occasionally contributed such needed items as a freezer.[50] But the school remained in a state of month-to-month survival and was never in good financial health. Monthly mortgage payments, extensive repairs to the building, parental default on tuition fees, and an unstable enrollment all took their toll and making ends meet was always a struggle.

Staffing at Saturna was informal. Since staff members received no salary and had no specific duties it didn't really matter who was officially on staff and who wasn't. Any adults living on the property were, in a sense, staff members. Individuals would "drift in" and were interviewed informally by the group. Some would stay for a short time while others would remain for a year or more. A few individuals were considered to be freeloaders and were asked to leave, but the school community was exceptionally tolerant of dysfunctional or eccentric behaviour and most people who wanted to stay were allowed to do so.

At the end of the first year in June 1969, Lyn Bowman left the school to take a position at the Centre for Gestalt Learning founded by Fritz Perls at Cowichan on Vancouver Island. His place was taken by Colin Browne. Mr. Browne, in his early twenties, grew up in Victoria and attended Seven Oaks Military College there. He developed an interest in education through teaching grade eleven English in the navy. He was attracted to the folk music, poetry, and art of

the 1960s as well as opposition to Vietnam war–"it felt natural to oppose the military/industrial complex." He eventually left Seven Oaks, lived in a shack, grew his hair, and ended up on Saturna in 1969. Mr. Browne loved the "big family of people," liked the kids, and was more interested in the human relationships than in the Summerhill ideology.[51]

Lynn Curtis, another staff member, grew up in a family of teachers in North Vancouver and graduated from the University of Victoria with a degree in social work and a teaching certificate in the early 1960s. He was influenced by socialist ideas and the "Christian compassion" taught by the Baptist Church. His desire for "doing good" led him to join the Student Union for Peace Action (S.U.P.A.) and then the Company of Young Canadians in 1966. According to Ian Hamilton, author of a book about the C.Y.C., Mr. Curtis became a leader of the "radical/hippie" faction attempting to radicalize the largely middle class group of young volunteers.[52] He was often a subject of media attention and generated a good deal of unfortunate publicity for the C.Y.C.[53] He sought to encourage political and cultural change through working with middle class students and saw free schools as a vehicle for the "liberation of youth."[54] After leaving the C.Y.C. Mr. Curtis organized the Free School Conference at the New School in December 1967 where he met Tom Durrie. Following a visit to Saturna in 1969 Mr. Curtis spent the better part of two years there. His interests in politics, cultural change, and gestalt therapy overshadowed his work with children and most former students remember having minimal rapport with him.

Judy Pruss joined the staff in 1970. She came to British Columbia from California where she studied psychology and education at U.C.L.A. and had been active in the Vietnam war resistance movement. After meeting several individuals teaching in alternative schools she heard about Saturna through Lynn Curtis.[55] Dorothy Wheeler also joined the staff in 1970. Having grown up in New York, she moved to San Francisco where she was drawn to the "openness, possibility, and excitement" of the counterculture. She had a degree in psychology and looked forward to working with children and living communally.[56] According to Mr. Sheffeld, she was an effective staff member respected by many students. Other staff members remaining for shorter

periods included John Laing (a U.B.C. education student), Loren and Janet Miller (more traditional than most at Saturna), and Ian Rowe (a local islander).

Daily Activities

The school opened "in the middle of a construction zone" and renovations continued for over a year. Students slept in two main bedrooms, six to a room, but cabins and outbuildings on the property served as extra sleeping quarters. These were popular with the older students because they were free from any supervision. During the third year a dormitory cabin was built to relieve the crowding in the house. One student recalls that "it was pretty rough, a lot of people just sleeping wherever they could."[57] Another student remembers mud all winter and the feeling of camping out. Some staff lived in the house but the Durries and Sheffelds had their own cabins and one staff member slept in his truck. During the first year, before any central heating was installed, the house was very cold. The winter of 1968/69 was particularly severe and everyone kept themselves warm in front of one of several fireplaces in the house. During the bitter cold spell in January everyone slept in the kitchen near the fire and many remember it as quite an adventure. During the warmer months some students slept outside in the hay barn or even in the woods. Students looked after their own rooms, their own beds, and their own possessions and kept them as tidy or untidy as they wished.

Students played in small groups and generally separated themselves into older and younger groups, and into night people and morning people so the house was rarely quiet. The young children got up fairly early and breakfast, which lasted all morning, was usually prepared by one of the adults. During the second year Mr. Browne cooked large morning meals and became known as "Uncle Breakfast." Later, the cooking duties were taken up for several months by a visitor, Shane McGarrett.[58] The teenagers, having been up most of the night, slept late and fended for themselves as they straggled into the kitchen for breakfast. Dinner was usually a group

meal prepared by an adult although not everybody participated regularly. Lunch was sometimes eaten together, sometimes not, but there were large quantities of bread, peanut butter, honey, and jam available twenty-four hours a day and students made their own sandwiches. Food was low budget and at times repetitious, but was usually wholesome. During the third year Judy Pruss introduced the students to such healthy items as whole wheat bread and granola which they eventually accepted.

Domestic activities were irregular, chaotic, and "catch as catch can."[59] One parent who visited in December 1969 remembers the "mess, the squalor, and the cold."[60] Three square meals a day were usually provided on a regular basis, but during periods when the staff was preoccupied with problems meals became sporadic and students had to fend for themselves. This was also true of housekeeping—staff members sometimes spent long hours doing laundry while other times the children were on their own. Day-to-day living consumed most of the staff time. Groups of students frequently accompanied staff members on shopping trips to Victoria and occasionally to Vancouver to do bulk shopping at Famous Foods. Most children received an allowance of fifty cents per week which they spent at the local store or on trips to town.

Most students spent a great deal of time outside, and especially for the younger children, it was an "active healthy lifestyle."[61] They hiked and explored on the adjacent forest land, walked to the beach, observed tide pools, and spent many hours climbing trees, building forts, and playing in the hay barn. Some children helped out in the vegetable garden or looked after the chickens, cats, rabbits, and goats. Several girls had horses which they enjoyed riding on the farm. One student remembers "lots of wonderful junk, old machinery, and equipment" on the property.[62]

Some of the older boys became interested in carpentry, mechanics, or engineering and spent hours with Bill Sheffeld working on house and property improvement projects. One student helped build Mr. Sheffeld's cabin and several students credit him with teaching them life-long useful skills. Others learned engine mechanics or how to use hydraulic equipment to move boulders. But most of the teenagers spent the winter inside sitting around the fire talking,

smoking, and listening to music. After dinner, staff and students sat around the big dining room table playing cards or board games, doing artistic activities, or making music until late in the evening.

Music played an important role at Saturna. Mr. Durrie had a music degree and was a competent pianist, but is most remembered by staff and students for his love of opera. Listening to the Saturday afternoon opera production on C.B.C. radio became a weekly ritual. Mr. Durrie had a comprehensive collection of librettos so the students could follow along as they listened. Kathy Sheffeld was a guitarist and sang 1960s folk songs with groups of children. Several older students spent many hours playing guitar. Two former students now in Victoria have become professional musicians, one a guitarist, the other a vocalist.

Art activities were less prevalent at Saturna than at most other alternative schools. Mr. Sheffeld was an artist and had trained as an art teacher but he was so busy looking after the physical plant that he only had time to organize artistic ventures in the evenings. But art materials were always available and some students would paint or make collages in the evening. Occasionally a visitor would offer to teach such crafts as pottery, tie-dying, or making stained glass windows.

Unlike at Summerhill, Saturna had no scheduled classes or organized academic activities. Mr. Durrie and other staff believed that "informal learning" was more effective and in 1969 the *Vancouver Sun* carried a full page article on the school titled "Informal Learning Best Way to Knowledge."[63] Mr. Durrie cites examples of spontaneous learning: reading Chaucer due to a chance mention of the author's name, mathematics growing out of cooking from recipes, questions about anatomy arising from observing the animals outside, students learning English through participation in the school paper or writing letters "because they want to communicate, not because they are ordered to write an essay." The school received a full set of textbooks from the Department of Education but they were virtually never used. A few students "ploughed through" the school's large library and at times did a lot of reading. Occasionally a staff member

would interest a group of younger students in some reading or arithmetic but this was usually short-lived. The school organized an N.F.B. film series and invited the community at large to the showings.

A few students did pursue serious studies but they had to be extremely motivated and disciplined. Mr. Durrie wrote to one student:

> You can get your grade twelve here with full recognition from the department, although in all fairness, I must tell you that it is not easy. If you are really determined to do it you can cover the material a lot faster than in a classroom where you have to spend time waiting for other students to catch on and reviewing material you already know. You can tailor your studies exactly to your own needs and abilities. However, a lot of motivation is required.[64]

During the first year one local student completed his grade twelve requirements with the help of tutoring from Mr. Durrie, and one teenage girl made progress in her grade eleven English and mathematics.

But for the great majority of students life at Saturna Island was far removed from academic activity and few returned to formal schooling for any sustained length of time after their experience there. Most students do not remember any scholastic activity. One says "there wasn't any academic activity that I ever saw."[65] Another remembers "virtually no academics" other than some private reading,[66] and a third says there was "no teaching at all."[67] One staff member recalls that "every once in a while someone would ask to be taught something," but interest rarely lasted more than a few hours.[68] Another felt she was more a "caretaker than an educator."[69]

Mr. Durrie answered numerous inquiries from public schools about the academic standing of former students. Although the school did not keep "any kind of academic or attendance records," he did supply anecdotal comments regarding length of attendance, specific interests, and personal traits. For one student in grade twelve he attested to completion of graduation requirements and for another he ascribed letter grades for all grade eleven subjects. For another he wrote, "in my opinion Chris would be quite able to function at the grade eight level." However, he only did this in the few instances where students had actually done the work and in

most cases Mr. Durrie recommended that students repeat a grade. Regarding one student he wrote: "While Charles did some work in geography and biology while in attendance here it was not sufficient to constitute completed course work."[70] For another: "Jesse would be suited to a grade nine class in most subjects but I recommend he be given special remedial work or remain on the grade eight level in mathematics. I'm sure he will be found to be an interesting and co-operative student."[71] Still another: "D'arcy has done some academic work in grade ten subjects, particularly math. However, his work has been of a sporadic nature and I would not want to say that he has satisfactorily completed any of the course work for the grade. It would probably be best if he started grade ten over again in September."[72]

Decision making at Saturna Island Free School was very informal. Tom Durrie had ultimate control over the school operation, but only used it in rare cases such as when he asked a staff member to leave during a power struggle in 1971. Like many alternative organizations the group had difficulty agreeing about how to make decisions and how democratic they should be. Mr. Durrie encouraged individuals to act spontaneously believing "if you want to do something, go do it."[73] The shareholders only met twice in three years to resolve crises affecting the very existence of the school. But frequent and sometimes emotional meetings were held to discuss such serious issues as the school's policy on drug use, and informal discussions about practical questions occurred constantly. Summerhill style "self-government" meetings were not encouraged. Mr. Durrie believed such meetings only served the purpose of controlling "anti-social elements," and that issues between individuals were better resolved informally.

One of the most difficult issues for the staff was whether they should ever impose their wishes on students. As Mr. Durrie wrote to one parent about whether the adults should enforce a no drugs policy: "I suppose the problem which confounded us the most was do we, because we are the staff, the grown-ups, have the right to make such a decision about the lives of the kids here."[74] This extreme laissez-faire attitude led to numerous problems in areas of drug use, sexuality, and personal safety. Young children were left unsupervised in potentially dangerous

situations and on two occasions students took serious falls while playing on the cliffs. Teenagers were allowed to travel off the property, even off the island if they wished. A group of students was permitted to burn candles at night in the hay barn and another student set a field of grass on fire. Staff expected the children to settle their own disputes and, according to most students, rarely intervened even when students were violent or cruel towards others. If some adults wanted to prohibit a particular behaviour, others would disagree on the grounds that "it's a free school." It was difficult to implement discipline if the staff could not agree and the students soon learned that they could do anything. The adults' unwillingness to direct the lives of the children arose partly because staff members, mostly in their early twenties, were caught up in their own exploration of new values and the celebration of their own new-found freedom from traditional social standards.

Public Relations

Tom Durrie was a tireless and eloquent advocate for the free school movement. He was a prolific correspondent and wrote hundreds of letters to parents, prospective parents, visitors, supporters, and government officials. He published several articles. "Free Schools: threat to the system or harmless lunatic fringe?" appeared in *The B.C. Teacher* in 1969 and was later reprinted in an anthology of timely articles about education.[75] A second article, "Free Schools: The Answer or the Question," was published in 1972.[76]

Mr. Durrie appeared on television and radio talk shows and accepted numerous speaking engagements which included professional conferences. He was invited to address a district teachers' convention in Alberni in 1970 because "you have spoken out against traditional methods and have adopted an exciting, radical, and controversial approach to education. We, as fellow members of the teaching profession, regard your approach with avid interest."[77] The organizers hoped to provoke a "reassessment of educational goals in light of the unrest of the younger

generation." Social change was a timely subject in 1970 and Mr. Durrie spoke to large teacher gatherings at professional development sessions in Oliver and Saanich on "The Role of the School in a Changing Society."[78] He was no stranger to teacher organizations having served on the executive of the B.C. Association for Teachers of Special Education.

Free schools provoked interest in the university communities and Mr. Durrie spoke regularly on all three B.C. campuses. He addressed a Symposium on Education at U.B.C. in 1968 sponsored by the student society on "Schools and Free Schools," and another in 1970 sponsored by Arts I, an inter-disciplinary humanities programme.[79] At a talk to U.B.C. education students in 1971 Mr. Durrie was billed as the "founder of the most radical free school in North America."[80] He addressed a 1970 Future Teachers Conference at S.F.U. on "free schools," and spoke to over two hundred students in a second year education course in 1968. The S.F.U. professor wrote to Mr. Durrie that his "students have argued at some length about free schools along the lines of Summerhill and the Barker Free School but we need someone of your calibre."[81] Mr. Durrie took part in a Victoria Youth Conference in 1968[82] and gave several lectures at the University of Victoria in 1969. In 1971 he embarked on a cross-Canada tour organized by Lynn Curtis including appearances in Edmonton, the Universities of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto.[83]

Tom Durrie and Lynn Curtis believed it was part of the school's role to contribute to the growth and development of the "free school movement." In June 1970, Mr. Curtis published one hundred copies of *FREE SCHOOL: The Journal of Change in Education*, a package of articles written by Paul Goodman, Brian Carpendale (S.F.U. instructor), and Jim Harding (student activist and Knowplace staff member). Mr. Curtis also organized two successive summer conferences at Saturna, on one occasion hosting over two hundred people for ten days.[84]

Mr. Durrie had connections with many alternative organizations from the Summerhill Society in New York to the *Georgia Straight*, Vancouver's underground press. He corresponded with staff at other free schools, attended a free school conference in California, and listed Saturna

in several North American free school directories.[85] He also maintained liaison with social service agencies. He spoke to the Canadian Mental Health Association, hosted the director of the Maples, a treatment centre for emotionally troubled adolescents in Burnaby,[86] and communicated frequently with the Vancouver Children's Aid Society and the Victoria Family and Children's Service.

These prolific writing, speaking, and networking activities made Saturna Island Free School well known among alternative schools across North America. As a result the school received a constant stream of visitors. Some planned their visits in advance while others just drifted in. Whenever a "hippieish" looking young person walked off the ferry, local residents immediately directed him or her to the free school. Some visitors stayed for a weekend, some for a month or two, and others never left. There were "so many people wandering the roads in those days, such a parade of people coming through" that who could come and who could stay became a constant issue. By 1970 the staff decided to limit visits to two days per month. Some individuals were helpful, fit in well, and moved on after a short visit, but others were merely looking for a free place to stay. In a few cases unsavory visitors were asked to leave because of drugs, sexual exploitation, or because they were not contributing to the community.

Mr. Durrie was deluged with requests to visit. Some were from teachers at other alternative schools such as the Bellingham Community School, the Little School in Seattle, the Putney School in Vermont, and Peninsula School and Pacific High in California. Other requests came from free school students at Knowplace, the Victoria Free School,[87] and as far away as Everdale. A group of Craigdarroch students visited, one of whom later attended Saturna. Letters came from a disaffected public school student in Campbell River and a group of grade eleven Alberni students in an "experimental humanities programme." Four teachers from Pinel School near Berkeley, California brought nineteen students to camp at Saturna for five days in 1969. Requests also came from public school teachers, one teacher "naive enough to still believe in Summerhill," and a sociology student doing research on "how free schools are affecting the

traditional school system."[88]

The school also received numerous requests from education students at U.B.C. and Simon Fraser, and even one from Chicago's Northwestern University to study the "methods and techniques" of free schools. Although Mr. Durrie welcomed most prospective visitors, he disapproved of education programmes and strongly discouraged the education students. As he replied to one such request: "When people talk about methods and techniques I am at a loss to know how to answer because we simply do not think in those terms. Since we don't have classes here there would be little opportunity to observe teaching in progress."[89] To an S.F.U. student who wanted to bring her seminar group to Saturna he answered "since there are no regular planned activities or scheduled events other than mealtimes here, most visitors feel that nothing is happening; planning for a group of visitors necessarily brings to a halt all the usual things that might be going on."[90] In another reply he downplayed the "educational aspects of this place: the real learning that happens here involves assuming personal responsibility for one's own life and conduct."[91]

In many ways Saturna was more like a "commune" than a school and the group received many requests from young people "visiting communes around the country." Some of these individuals intended to start their own communes and wanted to learn from the experience of existing groups. Others were "former communards" or sociologists gathering data for books on the commune movement. Two students from Friends World College, a "Quaker experimental school" in Ohio, asked to visit because of their interest in "intentional communities, free schools, and liberating environments."[92] Mr. Durrie explained to all the writers that Saturna was a school but he did not discourage them from coming. However, he became less patient as the requests piled up. In refusing a visit to two college students he wrote: "Every so-called intentional community runs aground on pretty much the same problem—who's going to do the work. As the dishes pile up and the floor gets dirty, you can have endless meetings, discussions, and work-plans all as a way to stave off doing things."[93]

Parents occasionally visited and one recently separated parent actually moved onto the property for several months with his trailer and goats. But for the most part, parents played a minor role in the life of the school (other than paying fees) due to the isolation of the community, and, in the case of some parents, their general lack of interest. Some parents never visited the school once during their children's entire stay. This contrasts strikingly with the zealous parental involvement at some alternative schools such as the New School.

The lack of parent involvement led to some awkward situations. One California father arranged for his eight year old son to spend the Easter holidays with an aunt and uncle in Vancouver. His relatives were shocked by the boy's appearance and stories about the school and wrote to the boy's grandmother:

> Jamie's hair was long and dirty to the point where it actually smelled. His face and hands had not seen water in many days and his filthy clothing would have stood alone. He proceeded proudly to tell us fantastic stories about his school. "We don't have any grades or classes or books. If you want to know something you just ask. I'll teach myself to write some day. We go to bed and get up whenever we want to and sometimes we fix our own food. We only take a bath if we want to. I never clean my teeth anymore. I play down by the ocean early in the morning before anyone else is up. I smoke cigarettes every day. I buy the kind you make yourself." We decided to see the school for ourselves and everything Jamie had said was true. We were amazed to find the children at the dock preparing to go fishing on a school day. They had their faces painted with psychedelic designs. A boy of twelve was reading one of the filthiest sex paperbacks imaginable and another boy spoke to us in language that made us blush. The school building was run down and the floors were littered with filth. Jamie rarely sleeps in his room. The school is a breeding place for hippies and non-conformists. We feel that the school will be closed down within a short time. It is not a school, it is more like an animal farm.[94]

This description is typical of the general feeling among British Columbians about hippies, communes, and countercultural lifestyles. But although the cultural gap was great, relations between the school and the local community were cordial. Tom Durrie served as vice-president of the Saturna Island Community Club and was "a valuable asset at island meetings."[95] Bill Sheffeld was also well liked on the island and was valued for his practical skills. Mr. Durrie

described the local residents as "kind, friendly, and generous"[96] and even the local minister was friendly. However, many stories spread about the school among the local residents, some of them undoubtedly true, others probably exaggerations. Stories abounded about teenage girls riding horses around the island naked, and the *Gulf Islands Driftwood* reported in November 1968 that a Saturna resident "really popped both eyes when he saw a naked teenage female swimming and diving for starfish from the local float."[97] The staff's tolerance of almost any behaviour and the lack of a viable academic programme left the school vulnerable to criticism and harassment from public officials.

Drugs and Sex

As with many other 1960s non-mainstream ventures, drugs became a part of life at the Saturna Island Free School. During the first winter the use of marijuana and L.S.D. among the teenage students was frequent. This usually occurred in a cabin away from the main house and remained relatively discreet, "an open secret" as one student put it. Since the teenagers were permitted to travel at will, drugs were usually bought in Vancouver, and when the supply at the school was plentiful, individuals remained high for several days at a time. The staff was aware of the drug problem and consistently disapproved of their use but "the kids, sensing our ambivalence to imposing our desire upon them, went ahead and used the drugs covertly, because after all what would we do if we found out anyway?"[98]

In the spring of 1969 a parent informed Mr. Durrie about extensive drug use among students. Mr. Durrie's primary concern was "the ever-present danger of the illegality of their use" for the discovery of drugs on school property by the authorities would result in almost certain closure. He also perceived drug use to be "of questionable value in relation to the school's function."[99] Somewhat older than the other adults, Mr. Durrie told a parent: "I guess I'm just enough of the wrong generation to fail to see any need or use for drugs."[100]

Mr. Durrie wrote to one parent about the problem in April 1969:

> I am in the throes of what seems to be a recurring problem in free schools—drugs. We can't risk the safety of the little kids by tolerating drug use on the property. Those who don't agree have found it necessary to develop elaborate systems of deceit and subterfuge. People have to make a choice between the school and drugs, the two cannot coexist. Therefore, I am asking anyone who feels they cannot live here without drugs to leave.[101]

To a prospective parent he wrote: "It has to be understood that drugs are not used at the school at all. The youngsters who come here have to make a choice: either they live here without using drugs, or they do not live here."[102]

During June 1969 the staff had several meetings about drug use. The essential issue was "do we go on disapproving and being ignored or do we invoke sanctions?"[103] They decided to take a hard line—drug use at the school would not be tolerated. Any staff caught using drugs would be asked to leave and student drug-users would be suspended for four months (most feeling expulsion was too severe). Late one night in January 1970 Bill Sheffeld discovered nine of the older students using marijuana in one of the upstairs bedrooms. They were suspended and directed to leave the school immediately. When two students asked to be accepted back before the four month period expired, the staff held firm. In explaining the lack of leniency to one of the students Tom Durrie wrote, "It is necessary for all of us, once in a while, to say that we're going to do a thing, and then actually do it."[104] Since the nine teenagers accounted for almost half the student body, this was a devastating financial blow for the school as most did not return.

The student suspensions resulted in decreased drug use at Saturna and students began to take some responsibility for policing themselves. But the problem never disappeared. Some staff members continued to use drugs off the property and had stashes hidden on the adjacent forest land. Drugs brought on to the property by visitors were even more difficult to control and some students resented that drug use among visiting adults was tolerated.[105] Although Mr. Durrie and Mr. Sheffeld tried their best to control drug use at the school, they were not effective. As one former student puts it, "drugs screwed things up."[106]

Sexual relations proved to be an equally problematic but less clear issue for the school community. Mr. Durrie was far from a moralist about sex. He expressed his views in a letter to a parent:

> About sex, our attitude is that people must make their own choices and take responsibility for what they do. For anyone with repressed sexuality this place must seem like some kind of wild brothel. However there is a genuine and almost universal innocence, respect for individuals, and love here which rule out the possibility of lustful abandon and taking advantage of others, particularly the young.[107]

But most former students report that sexual activity was prevalent among the teenagers. One student recalls: "there was a lot of sexual experimentation. The attitude was 'don't get caught.' I don't think the staff quite knew where to stand. It was a fuzzier issue than drugs."[108] Another describes "a lot of promiscuity, lots of sexual activity among students."

There were occasional relationships between students and adults, particularly visitors or short-term staff who only stayed a few months. As with Knowplace, most of the adults at Saturna were only a few years older than the teenage students. Mr. Durrie wrote to a parent in 1971 that: "There are stories circulating regarding a male staff member and a female student, but I know quite a bit about the girl's background and I wouldn't be too surprised at anything."[109] In a response to school discussions about staff-student sexual contact, Mr. Durrie wrote the following memo to the staff:

> It should be apparent that, in a free school situation, the moral character and behaviour of staff members must be unimpeachable and beyond reproach. Since it is basic to our philosophy that we teach by example rather than by precept, the importance of staff performance in this area cannot be over-emphasized. Along with this must come an awareness of and respect for the law as it applies to questions of individual relationships where minors are concerned. The school will not tolerate any behaviour by staff which encourages or condones unlawful acts on the part of the students in the school. Any such conduct will result in immediate dismissal.[110]

Despite the strong language in this memo, the adults were not rigorous enough in ensuring appropriate standards of behaviour. It was not uncommon in the late 1960s for the emphasis on

personal and sexual freedom to be used as a justification for behaviour that would not be considered acceptable today.

During the winter of 1968/69 the school community was shocked when Mrs. Durrie, a woman in her mid-thirties, became romantically involved with a sixteen year old male student. This turned out to be far from a casual or short-lived affair and continued for the better part of a year. As the relationship dragged on the community alternated from pretending not to notice to talking about it incessantly. To make matters worse, the boy's parents were not told of the relationship and he and his younger brother re-enrolled the following September as if nothing unusual was taking place. Mr. Durrie explained later that he would not interfere in the "private life" of a student. Finally, in October 1969, Mr. Sheffeld asked the couple to end the relationship or leave the community. They moved to a nearby island and, after Mrs. Durrie's divorce, they married. The boy's family threatened legal action but eventually accepted a tuition rebate. These events were devastating to the young community and it was some time before the school recovered.

Political Difficulties

A major setback began when the Greater Victoria Metropolitan Board of Health entered into a long running battle with the school. Dr. John Whitbread, Senior Medical Health Officer, inspected the school in May 1969 and found an inoperative sewage system, no central heating system, and overcrowded bedrooms.[111] In a three-page report the inspector noted many other deficiencies including kitchen and bathrooms in need of cleaning and redecorating, furniture in poor state of repair, broken and dirty windows, poor lighting, scattered clothing and litter, unacceptable wall and floor coverings, insufficient bedding, and "dark, dingy, and dirty" conditions.[112] Dr. Whitbread described the kitchen as "filthy" and the school as "dirty, untidy, and unfit for students to live in and be taught in."[113] The school was given until August to rectify the

deficiencies or face eviction.

Some of Dr. Whitbread's concerns were justified, particularly those regarding the sewage system, heating system, and crowded conditions. However, many of his remarks had more to do with aesthetic taste and personal standards of tidyness than with objective health criteria. Dr. Whitbread objected to the educational philosophy and lifestyle represented by free schools. His political bias is indicated by statements he made to the *Victoria Times* suggesting that "the Saturna Island problem" exists throughout British Columbia. "It was operating as a boarding home for children; it is not, in our opinion, a school. It should be investigated by the health, education, and welfare departments. Unless the education department defines what a school is, somebody has to take action if these schools are going to operate in a proper way."[114] He was quoted again two weeks later: "I know what action we're taking. When we take it depends on when we get advice. This isn't just a matter of the Saturna Free School."[115]

The Health Board chairperson, an elected Victoria city counsellor, followed up Dr. Whitbread's report with letters to provincial Health Minister Ralph Loffmark, Education Minister Donald Brothers, and the Attorney-General. He urged the government to take control over private free schools and expressed judgements about educational and moral standards that he was not qualified to make. He wrote to Mr. Loffmark:

> One problem the Metropolitan Board of Health wishes to present to the Ministers is the lack of adequate supervision and control over free schools and private schools. There should be supervision of the qualifications and type of teachers. In the opinion of the Senior Medical Health Officer the Saturna Island Free School does not have a suitable type of teacher, although three have qualifications. The lack of a syllabus and the lack of any evidence of lessons leaves doubt as to whether or not these children are being given schooling. The Public Schools Act requires all children between the ages of seven and fifteen years to attend school. Action might be considered by the Department of Education or School Boards against the parents of children attending this free school. The problem exists in many of the free schools and private schools throughout the province. The lack of modern standards of sanitation together with the lack of control and discipline would lead one to question the moral standards in this school. Action will be taken to close this institution as soon as clarification is obtained.[116]

Over the next two years conditions at the school would be the subject of over forty articles in Victoria and Vancouver newspapers. Suspecting that the school was drawing so much attention because of its challenge to traditional schools, Mr. Durrie told reporters: "It is surprising to me that a small institution such as ours would receive so much publicity over a matter of this sort," and "The publicity in this case is so far out of line with reality it's ridiculous."[117] Mr. Durrie wrote a four-page letter to the Health Minister listing "Items found Inaccurate or Misleading" in the Health Board report. He wrote: "I question statements about matters which are outside their areas of competence and authority. I refer to those parts of the letter expressing their opinions about the teaching staff and educational situation at Saturna Island Free School."[118]

The Minister received a letter of support for the school signed by eight parents.[119] They took exception to inaccuracies, statements of personal opinion unrelated to health matters, and the overall tone of the Health Board report. They noted that none of their children had ever been ill at the free school.[120] Another parent, himself a dentist, reported that he was "rather fussy about cleanliness and had been completely satisfied when he visited the school."[121] According to Mr. Durrie a number of local islanders also expressed support for the school, as one student suggests "even if they didn't agree with us, they didn't like outside interference."

The Minister also received a letter from J.M. Campbell, President of the B.C. School Trustees Association, who happened to be a Saturna Island resident. As a public school trustee, Mr. Campbell would not be expected to come to the defence of a controversial private school. Nevertheless, his criticism of the Health Board report was scathing. After visiting the premises himself he reported that the buildings were shoddy but "very clean." He wrote the Health Minister:

> It is obvious to me since making my own inspection of the premises that Dr. Whitbread's report creates a grossly false impression of the real situation, so false indeed as to make me suspect serious bias if not outright malice. Alderman Elphick appears to have gone far beyond his terms of reference as Board of Health chairman. I consider his letter offensive to my personal concept of reasonable justice and objectivity.[122]

In the meantime, a second inspection in June 1969 showed "the same rather deplorable conditions as before," and the staff embarked upon a summer renovation programme to rectify the deficiencies.[123] A new septic tank was put in, the kitchen and bathrooms were remodelled, and the building was given a thorough cleaning. The Health Board was silent for the next five months until, finally, after a third visit by four inspectors in November 1969, Dr. Whitbread wrote to Mr. Durrie:

> Conditions of cleanliness, basic sanitation, and hygiene had improved and could be considered satisfactory. Our visit indicated that you have come up to the requirements outlined in our letter of June 1969. Certain requirements which cannot be met by you (overcrowding, additional bathroom) will not be enforced as long as rigid standards of cleanliness are maintained. Your efforts to bring your school up to the required standards are appreciated. We wish to express our thanks for your co-operation in improving the environmental conditions of your school.[124]

This about-face appears to have been a political decision. As with Knowplace, the provincial government did not consider direct action against the school worthwhile. The Health Board was advised that the school had a right to exist. But many officials and journalists were surprised that, at that time, private schools were not regulated by the Department of Education and did not have to meet any standards. Since Confederation, the Department of Education had adopted a "hands-off" attitude towards all private schools in British Columbia and private schools were not even required to register with the government. Religious or "elitist" private schools had never been perceived as a problem, but marginal alternative schools like Saturna or Knowplace were another story. In April 1970, a Social Credit M.L.A., Agnes Kripps, visited the school. Her comments were reported in the press generating more negative publicity. Mrs. Kripps described the living conditions as deplorable, and the building as a crowded fire hazard. She is quoted as saying: "Schools like this shouldn't be permitted. There is no curriculum, no discipline, and no rules. This is a loophole in the Public Schools Act which must be plugged."[125] Using the health regulations was one of the only ways the government could exert its authority over such schools. Several years later another free school in the Slocan Valley, the Whole School, would face a

similar challenge from municipal authorities.

The school continued to be in conflict with the authorities. In late 1970 B.C. Hydro built power lines across a corner of the property against the wishes of the school community. One teenage student set fire to the cables and severely damaged them. He was apprehended by the police and jailed for ten months.[126] Six months later, acting on rumours of drug use on the property, an undercover R.C.M.P. constable spent two nights at the school in the spring of 1971. The officer found "no evidence of drugs on the premises," but did report nude sunbathing and evidence of student sexual activity. The officer also reported bed linen on the floor, dirty washrooms, irregular meals, and "sanitary conditions so bad he refused to eat or drink there."[127]

There were scandals involving students, some true and others fabricated, and one teenager drew unwanted attention to the school by telling a series of false stories to the police. These were reported by the press and in 1971 a *Vancouver Sun* columnist severely criticized the school prompting Mr. Durrie to respond:

> Drugs, sex, lying, cheating, and swearing are common in every public high school and little notice is taken; however, our little school comes under the most critical scrutiny and if one of our students slips up and gets into trouble, even though there may be no history of previous problems, we are subject to immediate condemnation.[128]

Financial and Enrollment Difficulties

By the spring of 1970, the end of the school's second year, low enrollment had become a serious problem. This was partly due to the vacancies left by the students suspended for using drugs, few of whom returned. Furthermore, a one- to two-year stay at Saturna was enough for most students. Some parents became disenchanted with the lack of an academic programme and for a number of students, now in their later teens, it was time to move on.

But the most important cause of the enrollment drop was simply that the demand for

Romantic "free school" education was drying up, not only in British Columbia but across North America. As we have seen, this was a key factor in the closure of the Barker Free School. Some public school districts had begun to offer innovative programmes so that parents who wanted alternatives did not have to look outside the public system. Students who would have been high school dropouts just a few years earlier were being retained. If the Saturna Island Free School was to survive it would have to find another source of students.

Like most alternative schools during the 1960s, Saturna accepted more than its share of students with special needs. But by 1970 the school began actively recruiting students that no other institution would take. Mr. Durrie accepted several wards of the Vancouver Children's Aid Society and continued to seek out such children. In November 1970, he advised a Society placement officer that "we have a number of vacancies that we are eager to fill as soon as possible. If you should know of anyone needing the kind of facility we can provide we should be happy to hear from you."[129] Several students were also referred to the school by Dr. Bennett Wong, well-known in Vancouver during the 1960s for his work with seriously disturbed teenagers and those involved in the drug culture. The advantage of accepting such students was that the school could count on the agencies to keep the students' fees current. As Mr. Durrie wrote to one parent: "We're now beginning to get kids from Children's Aid which helps fill our enrollment and secure our income. They pay regularly and they pay well."[130] But some of these teenagers had serious problems far beyond the ability of the inexperienced staff to handle adequately. Nevertheless, the school "took every kid who was willing to come."[131]

Former students remember several teenage girls whose behaviour was "wild and violent." One girl of fourteen from Montreal, supported by the Quebec Social Allowance Commission, suffered from "intermittent depression." Nicknamed "Bambi," she was prone to violent behaviour towards other children and animals and threatened fellow students with knives, razor blades, a pitchfork, and broken glass. Most students were terrified of her. One student describes her as "right off the deep end" while another says "she was a terrifying person, the adults were afraid

of her as well."[132] Eventually she was involved in an altercation in Vancouver and Mr. Durrie refused to let her come back. Another girl of fifteen had been a Vancouver gang member and a "hard-core delinquent." Nicknamed "Tinkerbell" she had been convicted of several "break and enter" offences and had to go to Vancouver frequently for court appearances. Her application from the Catholic Children's Aid Society stated: "She has difficulty in controlling destructive behaviour. Has been sniffing glue and nail polish remover for six years. Good luck!"[133]

Another girl placed at Saturna by Children's Aid had quit public school at the end of grade five, had "sexual encounters with two adult males plus male teenagers" by the age of eleven, and was described as "quite seductive."[134] Another applicant had run away from home because of her "rejection of her mixed racial background and her concern about her mother's ability to stay off drugs." An eighteen-year-old boy was a ward of the Superintendent of Child Welfare.

Although such children temporarily brought in some needed money, their acceptance transformed the school into a therapeutic institution making it even more difficult to attract mainstream students. One former student remembers "a lot of violent acting out" stemming from these "social services" students. He recalls: "a lot of anger, lots of property damage, people smashing windows, confrontational destructive things that made me shudder. I had a glass mug smashed in my face. It was way beyond the testing of limits—there were people hurt."[135] Another former student remembers "angry children" and "a certain amount of violence and cruelty,"[136] while still another recalls how several female students "terrorized the other kids.""

The therapeutic orientation of the school coincided with another shift in direction taken in 1970 when several staff members developed a serious interest in gestalt therapy. Lynn Curtis, although he had no professional expertise, organized therapy groups and "sensitivity training" sessions. Participants talked about feelings, analyzed their dreams, and worked on emotional issues during these frequently confrontational sessions. There were regular evening meetings to share personal feelings but informal discussions and meetings about practical issues sometimes turned into spontaneous encounter groups. As one student recalls "in an informal way it was

happening all the time."[137] These sessions were mainly of interest to the adults and were seldom attended by students.

Former staff member Lyn Bowman had taken a position at Fritz Perls' Gestalt Institute of Canada founded by Fritz Perls. Beginning in the fall of 1970 Mr. Bowman was invited to the school every three months to provide weekend Gestalt workshops for staff and other interested people. Mr. Durrie supported these therapeutic activities and in 1971 described the workshops as "softer and warmer than ever." He wrote to a prospective parent: "Solving living and personal problems is a major part of what we do. Currently we have a meeting every evening to give everyone a chance to air their resentments and appreciations. We also have a young man trained in gestalt therapy who offers group therapy and sensitivity training."[138] Summing up his feelings to another parent he wrote: "In spite of the problems the school is better than ever. At least we don't have the usual formalities and procedures to cover up the way people feel."[139] This enthusiasm for encounter groups and expressing "what you feel" was widespread throughout the counterculture in 1970 and was shared by many alternative schools. But it removed Saturna even further from what most would regard as educational pursuits.

School Closure

By the fall of 1970 the school was receiving few applications and Mr. Durrie wrote: "we've lost numerous kids and our budget is at an all time low." The school was kept afloat by social services placements but most students stayed for short periods of time and the school was unable to establish any financial stability. By May 1971, when the school was down to only six paying students Mr. Durrie wrote to a friend: "We are so short of enrolments and prospects that we are in serious danger of having to shut down. We need at least ten paying students to break even."[140]

Tom Durrie and Lynn Curtis believed that since the clientele had transformed the school

into something akin to a treatment centre, the organization would be more financially viable as a conference or workshop centre specializing in gestalt therapy. But Bill Sheffeld and several other staff members opposed this plan and favoured continuing as a school. The matter came to a head in June 1971 when the eight shareholders met to decide the future of the school. The initial vote ended in a tie, but after more discussion, Lyn Bowman changed his position and voted in favour of remaining a school despite his own personal interest in gestalt.

Tom Durrie handed the directorship of the school over to Bill Sheffeld, sold his interest in the property to another shareholder, and in August 1971 left the school for good. Lynn Curtis and Judy Pruss also left to buy land in Nova Scotia. Mr. Durrie moved to Hornby Island where he directed the Hornby Island Music Festival for many years. He continued to write about education and even applied for a B.C. Teachers' Federation position, but he never returned to teaching.[141]

In the meantime, in the spring of 1971, the Health Department began making life difficult for the school again. Dr. Whitbread, accompanied by four R.C.M.P. officers, inspected the building in June but did not advise the staff of any deficient items. Six weeks later, without warning, an R.C.M.P. corporal citing the Health Act and Sanitary Regulations served an eviction notice "to each and every occupant to quit the premises" by August 30, 1971.[142] The local authorities used the Health Act to do what the Education Act could not. The police told Mr. Sheffeld privately that if he closed the school, the officers would not enforce the eviction order and the residents could remain on the property.[143] Since the school had come to a crossroads anyway and enrollment was low, Bill and Kathy Sheffeld agreed to the closure, hoping to reopen in the future. Tuition fees were refunded and the school did not open in September.

Even after the school closed, the Health Board refused to disclose their objections. In a front page article headlined "Wall of Silence Surrounds Closing of Free School," *The Colonist* reported that the school was "shackled by a court eviction order, undisclosed sanitary infractions, and a wall of silence from health authorities."[144] The school appealed the eviction order and the

case dragged on for over a year through several rounds of appeals. The story continued to attract high profile media coverage and in January 1972 *The Colonist* featured a front page story titled "Saturna Free School Wins Court Round."[145] The school won the right to a trial and the case was finally heard in September 1972. The school's lawyer argued that Dr. Whitbread "took too much account of surface untidiness" and was unable to recognize different life styles that did not include "three meals a day, dishes done three times a day, and people sleeping in traditional bed linen."[146] But in the end, on October 18, 1972, Judge Drake, citing "overwhelming evidence," ruled that the school closure had been justified and would not be overturned.[147]

Mr. Sheffeld was devastated by the ruling. He told a *Colonist* reporter: "I don't know what we'll do now but we will do whatever we can to keep on living here ourselves."[148] Twenty-five years later Bill Sheffeld, Betty Speers, Rini House, and two adult children continue to live on the farm and remain good friends. The property is held in common through Saturna Free School—Community Projects Ltd. and the house has been converted into a bed and breakfast resort. Mrs. House is an artist, and Mr. Sheffeld is an island electrician recently elected to the Gulf Islands Trust. In the years after the school closed former students returned from time to time to find work, friendship, or a roof over their heads.

Effects on Students

However genuinely Saturna parents may have supported Romantic principles in theory, some began to worry that their children were not doing any academic work. Inquiring about his son, one parent asked: "I do not intend to put any pressure on him but I am interested in whether he has begun any studies yet."[149] Another parent wrote: "We still have reservations. As long as he makes a serious effort for part of the day on his school work we shall be content. I feel the purpose of the school should be to create a useful member of our world."[150] Still another parent expressed his concern this way:

> I wonder how a girl is going to get along with only a grade nine education for the rest of her life. Do you believe that students will eventually want to pursue their studies of their own free will? I'm afraid I don't. Fifteen year olds are far too immature to realize that education is necessary for both their working and their leisure life until they leave school and cannot earn a living.[151]

Another parent wrote that her son "wanted to work on his grade eleven programme but according to him no one at the school seemed to want to take the time to help him with his studies. Either you do not have enough teachers or they are unwilling to teach."[152] Others wrote:

> We want Denise to have some scholastic work, an hour or two a day at least. We want her to have some obligations to herself, keeping herself clean, washing her clothes, tidying her own room, and some restrictions on the company she keeps. This is going to be a tough age for her if she has no guidance. We want her to stand on her own, but she has to be prepared before she can accomplish this.[153]

> I am not in full agreement with the educational policies of the school. Daphne still has hankerings for a more academic programme and a certificate. She admitted that she could get help with math at Saturna if she wanted to study by herself but none of the other pupils was likely to be interested.[154]

One parent cites a friend's visit to an English Progressive school:

> There was so much going on that the whole place was throbbing. I can picture students getting that excited about learning but I miss that at Saturna. I think they need more stimulation and motivation. Something should be going on all day. No kid is going to lie in bed when something interesting is going on.[155]

On the other hand some parents were pleased with the personal development they saw in their children. One parent who had initially expressed reservations had this to say:

> I should like to thank you and your staff for the remarkable change that seems to have come over Mary in the short time that she has been with you. When she came home she was a changed girl—it was the first time I have seen her really happy.[156]

Another parent wrote:

> I would like to thank you for what the school has done for Mike. We see many changes in him that make us happy for him. I'm sure he has become more tolerant and less self-centred than he was and he has a better feeling about his own worth. But it frightens me when I think of him as an adult discovering that the world doesn't work like Saturna.[157]

One parent, although critical of the academic programme, acknowledged: "Life at the school has made her more aware of her relationships with others. The best education she gains at Saturna is becoming a member of a family."[158] Similar to other alternative schools, the perceived benefits had more to do with personal traits such as independence, self-reliance, confidence, and co-operativeness than with academic achievement.

Student recollections and retrospective opinions of Saturna vary. The most common criticisms are inadequate supervision, lack of academic stimulation, and the failure to intervene in student relations to protect shy, insecure, or younger children. One former student says the "absolute lack of structure" was a "misguided" policy that made life difficult for many students, particularly given the number of troubled children at the school. Another believes the staff was too passive while still another says:

> Anybody who wasn't prepared to fight for things or who couldn't stand up for themselves had a rough time. Anybody who had chronic self-esteem problems didn't stay long. There was a lot of violence and mental cruelty among the kids. There was no trace of a stable atmosphere.[159]

Another student agrees saying: "You had to be able to look after yourself."[160] One student who experienced "a lot of violence" slept out in the bush with her dog. "It was not a happy place—you

just stayed out of the way."[161] Another says "people were left to their own devices to solve their problems."[162]

One student comments on the lack of adult supervision: "For several months dinner would be cooked and served every night. Then there would be several months when it wasn't. Us kids felt forgotten. We were pretty much left to run around on our own. The cliffs and water were dangerous. There should have been more supervision."[163] Another student believes some children were neglected: "I don't think Saturna was good for the younger kids. No one was looking after them or taking responsibility for them. It was too unstructured, there weren't specific staff responsibilities. It might have worked if there had been an overriding structure."[164]

Many former students believe the lack of academics was detrimental. One says: "It may have harmed me academically as I might have done more." Another says: "It would have been better for me if I had stayed in school. I wasn't harmed at Saturna but it was a waste of time. Some kids need discipline and I was one of them."[165] Still another says: "Further secondary education never played a big part in anybody's life. None of us went on to pursue an academic career. I used to feel intimidated by people with academic credentials that I didn't have."[166]

Most former students found it difficult to re-enter the public school system because they could no longer fit in. One student reports attending public school at age thirteen but: "I felt so out of place. I was too mature for the kids there. At fifteen I was going on twenty."[167] Another student says: "I left Saturna halfway through the second year because I wasn't happy there. I went back to high school but I could no longer relate to the kids. I had experienced things that the other kids hadn't."[168] Another says: "I tried high school back in Vancouver but it didn't work out. It was too hard after having all that freedom."[169]

Others found public school hard because of missed academic skills. One student reports: "It was the end of my formal education. I didn't even finish grade school."[170] Another says: "I started public school at age eight in grade one. My reading held me back. I went through four years of elementary school two years behind."[171] His brother was also at Saturna:

> I chose to return to public school. I was concerned about the lack of scholastic work. I missed a regular structure. I missed my friends. My scholastics suffered, it set me behind in English and math skills. I was in grade six but I had to go back to grade five. I finally caught up by grade nine. I regret that I didn't have a better scholastic education.[172]

One former student who already knew the basic skills when she began at Saturna and eventually took her general education certificate at a junior college found it easier to reintegrate:

> I went back to public school on Mayne Island, sixteen kids and one teacher. I loved having my own desk and pens and pencils. I caught up easily, two grades one year and two grades the next. I could read better than most kids and the studies were interesting. It would have been more scary in a big school.[173]

But she believes that at Saturna "some kids needed more structured education. If a kid wanted to learn how to read someone would teach him, but most kids didn't want to. There should have been more adult-directed activities such as reading with the kids."

Another student who never went back to school acquired his high school certificate at Camosun College, became a musician, and later earned two university degrees. He says: "I virtually dropped out of school in grade eight. I did my grade twelve equivalency in two months. I haven't been held back by my lack of high school." But despite his own success, this student believes Saturna should have provided students with more direction:

> Teenagers like to have structure, a series of accomplishments. If you leave them to their own devices they would never do anything. The younger kids were expected to be motivated to do things on their own. There were kids who didn't have a bath in two weeks. A lot of things happened that were irresponsible. The staff people were awfully young themselves.[174]

Less than one fourth of the students finished high school although several went back later to obtain adult basic education. Four have attended some university and one former student is presently pursuing a degree in social work. The few students who successfully completed high school did not find it easy. One writes: "A great part of my education was informal. It gave me an appreciation of the value of a formal education as I had to gain mine through correspondence which required perseverance and self-motivation."[175] This former student is now a school trustee

on the Gulf Islands.

Occupations are known for seventeen students who attended during the first two years. They include: two professional musicians, two small business proprietors, one physician, one child care worker, one journalist, two contractors, two truckers, one concrete finisher, one set designer, one gardener, one housewife/mother, and one unemployed single parent.[176] Almost all the tradespeople are independent and self-employed. Diverse family background precludes making any direct causal links to future career attainments, but academic or professional careers were out of the reach of most Saturna students.

Saturna was not a negative experience for everyone. One student who "felt frustration and pressure" in public school recalls: "Saturna was quite relaxed. I appreciated the lack of pressure, the quiet, being alone in the natural surroundings. My warts disappeared within four months. There is a strength that I gained from there, I can make decisions."[177] His brother says the school gave him "the freedom to choose for myself. It helped me in decision making. I came out with a lot of confidence."[178] For another, "the most important things were the things between people."[179] Another former student says the school taught her self-reliance, self-motivation, compassion, how to compromise, and how to work effectively in a group.[180] Some students enjoyed the freedom:

> For me it was a good experience. I knew how to look after myself. I knew how to make myself a sandwich or find my way home. It was a positive time in my life. I was free to experience the outdoors, the property, the old junk and machinery, being able to explore in a safe wilderness setting, touch history, get a 1930s tractor running again. I read the Greeks, Shakespeare, Chaucer on my own. I went back to school later. I don't regret missing public school, but I wish I'd pursued a university education.[181]

Several students, particularly male teenagers, while being critical of many aspects of the school's practice, nevertheless report that the school was a positive factor in their lives. In some cases it removed them from desperate personal situations and provided a reasonably safe place to work through emotional upheaval. One former student, who had become a heavy drug abuser

before going to Saturna, believes the school saved him from ending up in prison or worse.

> If I had remained in the situation I was in, in Vancouver as a teenager, I would have ended up in desperate circumstances. A lot of people in that scene went on to become heavy drug users, criminals. People I knew from that time are dead from drugs, in prison, killed in drug transactions, and women I knew became prostitutes and junkies. If I had stayed there I would have been swept along with it. Bill Sheffeld was a guiding figure, lots of support was really important right then. So for me it was a good experience. It made me appreciate good character. It gave me confidence that I could actually do something.[182]

Another student has a similar perspective:

> For me it was the best thing that could have happened at that time. I had chronic problems in the public school system. School was boring. I'm very physical, hands-on, creative, interested in projects. I went to St. George's for grades six and seven. It was stimulating but wearing a uniform was repugnant. Saturna was a last resort. I needed an environment where I would be free to explore what I was interested in. I learned by trial and error. The school allowed me to screw up and learn from that. You learned to hold your ground in a discussion. I learned basic engineering skills from Bill. Working on the farm taught me how to think on my feet and solve problems. It was a very physical environment. I took responsibility for my own life. It either worked for you or it was a waste of time. The school was a close community for me. I lived in a series of group homes but went back to Saturna later. It was like going back to a family, a lifeline."[183]

Another student says: "For me the school was great. It gave me some breathing room away from home. I was left alone, I got to relax and get back on my feet."[184] Still another says: "It was perfectly great for me. There weren't a lot of other options. The conventional system wasn't working for me. It gave me something to do."[185] Another student says: "It gave me a lot of life experience. It filled the time until adult life. My parents were happy I wasn't in jail."[186]

Bill Sheffeld took several of the older boys under his wing and served as a guiding influence, almost a father figure. He was a patient listener, taught them practical skills, and was a supportive and reliable friend. These students looked up to and admired him. One former student describes him as a "guiding light for a lot of the kids" and many former students look back on him as the "bedrock of the community."[187] One student remembers him this way: "Bill

was always available. He was the most stable. He had the clearest overview of what the school should be about. The teenagers were going through a lot. He had the clearest understanding of what motivates adolescents. He was rational in the face of a lot of emotionalism."[188]

Bill Sheffeld believes the school was beneficial for some students:

> I saw a lot of kids who were disturbed, distressed, out of control, develop purposefulness in their lives. It did some of those kids a lot of good. But it was irrelevant or destructive to other kids because it couldn't provide enough emotional support. A lot of the staff were dysfunctional or they were consumed with day-to-day activities. The constant acting out, smashing windows, was disruptive to the kids who didn't need that kind of experience. For them it could be a terrifying experience. But for the other kids it was a life saver.[189]

It is ironic that the students for whom the school was designed, the children of parents who believed in the free school ideology, had the most difficulty at Saturna, while those who were helped the most were the children who nobody else would take.

Conclusion

Tom Durrie was a central but enigmatic figure in British Columbia Romantic education. He was a talented teacher but used few of his skills to create an exciting educational community at Saturna. He wrote and spoke eloquently about how children should grow up "naturally," yet under his leadership he permitted an environment to develop that was not nurturing. Ultimately the day-to-day realities of a school did not suit him–his true goal was the end of compulsory education.[190]

The school's increasingly therapeutic orientation without the necessary staff training was a serious problem. Mr. Durrie wrote to a parent: "Our problem is choosing youngsters who have their parents' support in wanting a free school rather than those who have come to us as a last resort."[191] As Bill Sheffeld puts it: "About 25% of the parents had heard of free schools, knew what the concept meant, had read Summerhill, and wanted that for their kids. Another 50%

wanted a school that would take their kids away—they were willing to pay not to know anything."[192] The staff was not equipped to handle difficult children that came from "dysfunctional home environments." They ignored disturbing behaviour because they simply did not know what to do, thus making life difficult for "normal" children. One former student says: "Social services dumped some really disturbed people. There were students who should never have gone there. The responsible thing would have been to say we can't help this person and find a more appropriate situation. But the school took just about anybody. Nobody stepped in with a practical solution."[193]

However, the lack of a mature staff with educational expertise and a desire to use it was a more fundamental weakness. The adults were either too young, too caught up in the times, or had too many of their own problems to be effective teachers. One former student says: "The adults were seeking something. They were rudderless themselves. It was a time unique to itself."[194] Another student commenting on the questionable behaviour often overlooked at the school says: "For the most part the adults didn't know it was happening and when they did they allowed it. The adults were preoccupied with their own issues."[195] A former parent suggests: "People were working out their own problems. You need adults that have matured to be available for kids."[196] One staff member says: "I don't think I was going on anything but intuition during that period."[197] Another suggests: "It was a delusion that enthusiasm could substitute for competence. We didn't have the will to become competent."[198]

Nevertheless, some students saw what the staff was trying to do as admirable. One says: "Most of the staff were great people. The whole thing was from the heart–they believed in it. There were a few bad characters but every organization has its bad apples."[199] Another former student puts it this way:

> The adults were getting high on their own freedom. They were wrapped up in their own problems. They didn't inspire a lot of confidence. The idea was right—they wanted kids to grow into their own people rather than how society wants to mould them. If surrounded by the right people it might have worked.[200]

Over half of the staff were American and, as in other alternative schools, their influence was substantial. The Vietnam war exerted a profound effect on that generation, demanding courage, hard choices, and, for some, exile.[201] The young men and women who came to British Columbia were idealistic, educated, and liberal.[202] They were the embodiment of the idealism and optimism of the 1960s.

The Saturna Island Free School was the epitome of the Romantic movement in education in British Columbia. Its rural location and isolation, its extreme laissez-faire ideology, the type of students it attracted, and its emergence at the height of the 1960s counterculture combined to produce an unusual and at times outlandish school community. Whether or not we believe the theory that children always know what is best for them, the Saturna Island school could not have succeeded. First, the staff was immature and lacked the kind of teaching expertise that might have inspired the children to become excited about learning. Secondly, the troubled young people, often from troubled families, the school attracted, demanded skill and experience beyond what the staff could provide. Thirdly, the popularity of Progressive ideas among educators and parents by 1970 led many public schools to develop child-centred classrooms that satisfied liberal parents looking for less traditional teaching methods. Private alternative schools like Saturna had difficulty attracting any but the most marginal students and could not survive financially. Lastly, the popularity of countercultural lifestyles led to the indirect undoing of high profile communities like Saturna school. Conservative politicians, officials, and journalists found extreme Romantic ideas threatening and the demise of the school at the hands of bureaucrats and the police was probably inevitable. Although Saturna's educational legacy was minimal, it embodied ideals and values of the era which have subsequently endured.

NOTES

1. Tom Durrie, Application for a position with the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, September 18, 1971. Unless otherwise noted, all school documents are contained in the Saturna Island Free School archive, in the possession of the author. I wish to thank Tom Durrie for his generosity in granting me full access to this valuable material.
2. Tom Durrie, personal interview, July, 1987.
3. The district superintendent wrote: "Mr. Durrie's classes are informative and interesting. The pupils work in a relaxed atmosphere. The learning situation is very satisfactory to good." R.M. Hall, "Report on Teacher," April 15, 1964.
4. Tom Durrie, personal interview, July, 1988.
5. A.H. Gubbels, "Report on Teacher by Principal to Inspector," Williams Lake Elementary School, June 20, 1966.
6. New School General Meeting minutes, March 14, 1968.
7. *Vancouver Sun*, "Free School Surge Called Spontaneous Development," December 28, 1967, 16; "Boss System Hard to Shake Says Free School Teacher," December 29, 1967, 13; "Public Schools Turning Out Slaves or Rebels, Meet Told," December 30, 1967, 13. *Vancouver Province*, "Free Schools Swap Ideas," December 29, 1967, 6.
8. Tom Durrie, New School Director's Annual Report, February 29, 1968, p. 12.
9. Prospectus, Saturna Island Free School, August, 1968.
10. Saturna Island Free School brochure, August 1968.
11. Saturna Island Free School brochure, August 1968.
12. "Saturna Island Free School: Learning how to live, learning how to learn," prospectus, (Victoria: Social Science Research, 1969), 2-3.
13. Saturna Island Free School, prospectus, 1969 p. 3.
14. Tom Durrie, New School Director's Annual Report, February 29, 1968, p. 2.
15. Tom Durrie to Mr. Hunt, January 15, 1969.
16. Tom Durrie, "Free Schools: Threat to the System or Harmless Lunatic Fringe," in *The B. C. Teacher*, (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, May/June, 1969). Reprinted in Stevenson, Stamp, and Wilson eds., *The Best of Times/The Worst of Times*, (Toronto, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972).
17. Tom Durrie to Mrs. Kollander.
18. Colin Browne, personal interview, November 7, 1996.
19. Rob Watt of Knowplace was also involved in this project.
20. Lyn Bowman, personal interview, November 18, 1997.
21. Rini House, personal interview, October 31, 1996.
22. Ron Forbes-Roberts, personal interview, January 30., 1997.
23. *Victoria Colonist*, "Salt air, forest, seashore Saturna Free School riches," September 22, 1968, p. 25.
24. Student applications file, Saturna Island Free School.
25. Student applications file.
26. Application forms and school enrollment list, May 20, 1969.
27. Tom Durrie to Richard Bower, January 22, 1970.

28. Eugene and Rhoda Kaellis, letter to Tom Durrie, March 25, 1968, school archive; and personal interview, October, 1996.
29. Application from Jim Anderson.
30. Letter from Irene Jeffery to Tom Durrie, April 16, 1969.
31. Letter from Cielle Kollander to Tom Durrie, May 18, 1970.
32. Betty Speers, personal interview, April 1, 1997.
33. Ken Spears, personal interview, April 2, 1997.
34. Ron Forbes-Roberts, personal interview, January 30, 1997.
35. Letter from Dorothy Forbes-Roberts to Tom Durrie, November 28, 1968.
36. Mary Hunt, personal interview, December 1, 1997.
37. Peter Vogel, personal interview, April 16, 1997.
38. Letter from Joan Liknaitzky to Tom Durrie, October 8, 1969.
39. Letter from Marion Pelto to Tom Durrie, May 20, 1969.
40. Correspondence with the family of Michael Wolfe, 1969 to 1970.
41. Letter from Danny Pelto to Tom Durrie, January 15, 1970.
42. Letter from Richard Bower to Tom Durrie, October 13, 1970.
43. Letter from Penny Marlatt to Tom Durrie, October 7, 1968.
44. The student's grandfather had been a Social Credit M.L.A.
45. Tom Durrie to Ruth Wolfe, September 24, 1969.
46. Saturna Island Free School, Application Form, 1968/69.
47. Saturna Island Free School, Application/Registration Form, 1969/70.
48. Fee structure data from letters to parents.
49. Tom Durrie to Vancouver Children's Aid Society, November 26, 1970.
50. Correspondence with Dr. Kaellis and Mrs. Anderson.
51. Colin Browne, personal interview, November 7, 1996.
52. Ian Hamilton, *The Children's Crusade* (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1970) p. 14.
53. Ian Hamilton, *The Children's Crusade* (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1970) 14-37, 46-58.
54. Lynn Curtis, personal interview, November 10, 1997.
55. Judy Rogers, personal interview, December 10, 1997.
56. Dorothy Wheeler, personal interview, January 2, 1998.
57. Ron Forbes-Roberts, personal interview, January 30, 1997.
58. Peter Wheeler and Rosamonde Hunt also helped in the kitchen.
59. Ron Forbes-Roberts, personal interview, October 30, 1997.
60. Rhoda Kaellis, personal interview, October 2, 1996.
61. Tim Lucey, personal interview, November 12, 1997.
62. Miles Durrie, personal interview, April 22, 1997.
63. Robert Sarti, "Informal Learning Best Way to Knowledge" in the *Vancouver Sun* November 24, 1969, p. 16.
64. Letter from Tom Durrie to Cam Dodds, August 27, 1970.
65. Ken Speers, personal interview, April, 1997.
66. Tim Lucey, personal interview, November 12, 1997.
67. David Speers, personal interview, April 2, 1997.
68. Colin Browne, personal interview, November 7, 1997.

69. Dorothy Wheeler, personal interview, January 2, 1998.
70. Tom Durrie to Mark Twain Junior High School, Los Angeles, California, September 17, 1969.
71. Tom Durrie to E.D. Feehan Catholic School, February 14, 1970.
72. Tom Durrie to Point Grey High School, May 19, 1969.
73. Lyn Bowman, personal interview, November 18, 1997.
74. Tom Durrie to Daniel Elam, July 18, 1969.
75. Tom Durrie, "Free Schools: Threat to the System or Harmless Lunatic Fringe," in *The B. C. Teacher*, (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, May/June, 1969). Reprinted in Stevenson, Stamp, and Wilson eds., *The Best of Times/The Worst of Times*, (Toronto, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972).
76. Tom Durrie, "Free Schools: The Answer or the Question," in Byrne and Quarter, ed, *Must Schools Fail?* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972): 33-44.
77. Letter from J.R. Nelson (Alberni teacher) to Tom Durrie, November 10, 1969.
78. Correspondance and programme announcements from R.W. Lawson, Secondary Supervisor, Saanich and Gulf Islands School Districts, December 19, 1969. Another speaker at the Saanich conference was Dr. Charles Gregory, co-founder of Craigdarroch School.
79. Other participants were Jim Harding (Knowplace), Bob Rowan (U.B.C. philosopher), Martin Loney (student activist), and Alf Clinton (Vancouver School District assistant superintendent who was an enthusiastic supporter of alternative schools during the 1970s).
80. Saturna Island Free School publicity materials.
81. Letter from MacDonald Burbidge, S.F.U., to Tom Durrie, October 29, 1968. Mr. Burbidge was later a parent at the New School and a school trustee in North Vancouver.
82. The conference was organized by Lynn Curtis. An entire session was devoted to "The Status of Women," unusual as early as 1968.
83. "Free School Head Plans Nation Tour," *Victoria Times*, January 29, 1971, p. 35.
84. "School Workshop Marathon Set," *Victoria Times*, June 27, 1970, 12, and personal letter from Tom Durrie to "George," July 30, 1971. David Suzuki was a participant at this conference.
85. Saturna Island Free School was listed in the "Summerhill Bulletin" in New York, the "New Schools Exchange Newsletter" in California, the "Teacher Drop Out Centre in Massachusetts," and the "Carleton Collective Communities Clearinghouse" in Vermont.
86. Ongoing correspondance between Tom Durrie and Peter Lavelle, director of The Maples in Burnaby.
87. The Victoria Free School or "Bertrand Russell Academy" was founded in 1968 by a group of Victoria teenagers and lasted for one year. It was somewhat similar to Knowplace but had a stronger academic orientation.
88. Visitor Request File, Saturna Island Free School.
89. Tom Durrie to Miss Hoague, Fairhaven College, Bellingham, February 6, 1969.
90. Tom Durrie to Miss Soane, S.F.U., April 6, 1970.
91. Tom Durrie to Mr. Detzel, November 9, 1970, school archive.
92. Letters from Mr. Powell and Ms. McClure to Tom Durrie, October 18, 1969.

93. Tom Durrie to "Cindy and Marlin," Manchester College, Indiana, July 24, 1970.
94. Letter from Mrs. Ralls to Mrs. Bower, April 9, 1970.
95. R.W. Pillsbury, *Gulf Islands Driftwood*, September 2, 1971.
96. Tom Durrie to Mr. Pillsbury, Saturna Island Community Club President, August 25, 1971.
97. *Gulf Islands Driftwood*, November 28, 1968.
98. Correspondence between Tom Durrie and Daniel Elam, July 6, 1969 and July 18, 1969.
99. Tom Durrie to Daniel Elam, July 18, 1969.
100. Tom Durrie to Mrs. Griffin, July 16, 1969.
101. Tom Durrie to Mrs. Wolfe, April 19, 1969.
102. Tom Durrie to Mrs. Hansen, January 16, 1970.
103. Tom Durrie to Daniel Elam, July 18, 1969.
104. Tom Durrie to Jesse Kaellis, April 29, 1970.
105. Ron Forbes-Roberts, personal interview, January 30, 1997.
106. Miles Durrie, personal interview, April 22, 1997.
107. Tom Durrie to Mrs. Liknaitzky, April, 1971.
108. Ron Forbes-Roberts, personal interview, January 30, 1997.
109. Tom Durrie to Mrs. Liknaitzky, April 19, 1971.
110. Tom Durrie, "Memo to the Staff," April 12, 1971.
111. Dr. J.M. Whitbread, D.G. Anderson, Greater Victoria Metropolitan Board of Health, Inspection Report, May 27, 1969.
112. Dr. J.M. Whitbread, D.G. Anderson, Greater Victoria Metropolitan Board of Health, Inspection Report, May 27, 1969.
113. "Threat of Closure Haunts Free School," *The Province*, May 15, 1969, p. 22, and "Free School Warned About Health Threat," *Victoria Colonist*, May 14, 1969, p. 30.
114. "Meet Standards or Close Down" *Victoria Times*, May 14, 1969, p. 4.
115. "Health Chief Hints Free Schools Doomed," *Victoria Times*, May 29, 1969, p. 23.
116. Alderman R. Elphick, Chair, Greater Victoria Metropolitan Board of Health, to Ralph Loffmark, Minister of Health, May 29, 1969.
117. "Health Standards Now Met, Says Free School Head," *The Province*, May 23, 1969, p. 12; "Head Hints Persecution," *The Vancouver Sun*, May 23, 1969, p. 2.
118. Tom Durrie to the Greater Victoria Metropolitan Board of Health, "Items Found Inaccurate or Misleading," June 6, 1969.
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190. As early as 1969 his frustration with Saturna prompted him to apply for a job in a school districts and later with the B.C.T.F. (Applications, May 20, 1969, June 5, 1971.) In his distrust of formal education, he was influenced by the writings of Paul Goodman.
191. Tom Durrie to Mrs. Brunner, August 14, 1968, school archive.
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194. Jesse Kaellis, personal interview, February 18, 1997.
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199. Peter Schmidt, personal interview, March 3, 1997.
200. Miles Durrie, personal interview, April 22, 1997.
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CHAPTER 8: TOTAL EDUCATION

Beginnings

Free schools reached their peak in British Columbia between 1966 and 1969 and by 1970 were already in decline. The Barker Free School and Knowplace both closed in 1969, and the Saturna Island Free School would close in 1971. But the bored and alienated high school students who had been attracted to free schools were still dissatisfied and their numbers were growing. Many young people had been affected by the political and cultural mood of the 1960s and were no longer willing to automatically acquiesce to traditional school authority. Some left public school while others continued to attend but with little enthusiasm. The Vancouver School Board reported a rapid increase in the dropout rate which reached almost 6% in 1970/71.[1] Even as educational authorities wondered what to do about this problem, several private alternative high schools were established in Vancouver between 1970 and 1972 to address the needs of these teenagers. They were the forerunners of the therapeutic or "rehabilitation schools" that would proliferate during the 1970s to become the dominant form of alternative school as the decade progressed. The first such rehabilitation school in British Columbia was called Total Education.

In May 1970 Dan and Cathy Meakes, two Anglican Church youth workers in their early twenties, organized an educational programme for high school dropouts. The programme had grown out of a youth group, a kind of community "drop-in" centre held in the basement of St. Mary's Anglican Church in Vancouver's Kerrisdale neighbourhood. They spent two months working with the Inner City Service Project, a summer employment project paying subsistence wages to university students, organized by the Anglican Church and the Law Society. A "student think tank," the project sought to discuss societal values and organize social service initiatives such as medical clinics and legal aid centres. But the Meakes were interested in visible social change and, believing there had been too much talk and not enough action, decided to go it alone. They realized there were significant numbers of young people out of school and believed that to

be effective they had to reach out to teenagers, not only on the affluent West Side of Vancouver but on the poorer East Side as well. They began planning a hands-on practical educational programme to open in September.

May Gutteridge, a "social services matriarch" operating out of St. James Anglican Church on Cordova Street in Vancouver's "skid row," provided a large room on the second floor of an unheated and poorly lighted condemned warehouse, a former noodle factory. St. Mary's provided an empty house owned by the congregation directly behind the church. The Meakes decided to operate the school as two separate programmes, one for middle class dropouts on the West Side of the city, and the other for teenagers with serious social problems on the East Side. The school opened with thirty-six students, twenty-four in the West Side programme and twelve in the East. In order to qualify, a student had to have been out of school for a minimum of six months. Dan Meakes and several volunteers went out knocking on doors looking for kids who were disaffected from the mainstream schools and who had dropped out.[2] These students had "no feeling there was a place for them, no feeling of doing anything that was valued."[3]

Some were referred by Vancouver school counsellors while others learned of the programme by word-of-mouth. Still others were referred by Children's Aid Societies and by child psychiatrist Bennett Wong. Mr. Meakes visited potential students at their homes accompanied by a teenager on probation who had been assigned to his custody. Although the Meakes had little experience with this kind of work, Cathy Meakes had a teaching certificate and Dan Meakes had attended Arts I, an interdisciplinary integrated humanities programme at U.B.C. They had plenty of energy and enthusiasm and believe the teenagers "were attracted to us because of our youth. We were running on our commitment and our caring for these young people. We showed there was no way of failing. We provided a caring environment."[4]

Dan and Cathy Meakes were joined by Larry Haberlin, also in his early twenties, within a few months of establishing the programme. Mr. Haberlin had grown up in an active Anglican Church family and spent six formative months at the Sorrento Centre for Human Development, an Anglican retreat centre for young adults on Shuswap Lake which promoted alternative

religious ritual and personal development in a spiritual community. The Centre had been founded by Bishop Jim Cruikshank who, along with other liberal thinkers in the church during the 1960s and 1970s, sought to develop a more meaningful and joyous spirituality centred on how to become a "fully alive human being."[5] In the tradition of the "Social Gospel" of the 1920s and 1930s, he was also concerned about broader social issues and believed a caring Canadian society should protect its most vulnerable citizens. Bishop Cruikshank, as Dean of Christchurch Cathedral in Vancouver and a faculty member at the Vancouver School of Theology, gave his energy to many social causes including housing, working with refugees, gay rights, and food for street people. He was an important mentor to Dan and Cathy Meakes and Larry Haberlin, imbuing them with a strong sense of moral responsibility to address social problems. Mr. Haberlin, who left Sorrento with an enthusiasm for working with teenagers, assisted the Meakes during the summer of 1970 on a part-time basis and by the following spring had become a full time staff member.[6]

Although the West and East Side students had different backgrounds but similar problems. their needs were similar. Although there was a marked socio-economic difference between the two groups, family instability was a common denominator. The West Side kids were influenced by the 1960s counterculture and many smoked marijuana. Some were bright kids who had simply become bored by the way subject matter was presented in the mainstream high schools. One student remembers: "I quit Point Grey at fifteen years old. I was a good student but I hated being there. I heard about Total Education from a friend. It was right behind the church. Everybody was talking about it."[7] Other students had single parents, some were living in group homes, and a few were living on their own. Some were living through one crisis after another usually involving some kind of family trauma.

Most of the students in the East Side group were from the Raymur housing project near Main and Hastings Streets. Most were poor and had little parental direction, and some were involved in petty theft. Some had learning disabilities, others had emotional or mental health problems, and still others had abused alcohol and drugs. Mr. Haberlin recalls that although many

of these students had potential, they had not done well in mainstream schools which "didn't provide the personal support; kids would get lost in the crowd." They needed a "personal structure and daily monitoring." Mrs. Meakes recalls that "the school system wasn't flexible enough to find ways they could be successful." At that time there were few special programmes in the school system for students with learning disabilities, and social and emotional problems often got in the way of concentration. However, Mrs. Meakes recalls that the East Side students "may have grown up a little tougher but they were no more difficult to teach" than the West Side students.

Although the teaching in the West Side group was more "cerebral," with debates, discussion, and a good deal of writing, the East Side group was more physical, engaging in construction, wrestling, and kinesthetic activities. According to one staff member, the East Side students needed a highly structured programme. The young people "had a lot of needs and emotional baggage" and Mrs. Meakes describes that first year as "one of the toughest I've ever lived through." Total Education aimed to provide a rehabilitation programme that integrated a more interesting and relevant approach to academics with concern for the students' emotional needs such as developing self-confidence and forming meaningful relationships. This very concern for the whole person gave rise to the name "Total Education." The founders believed all students needed to be further educated in the curriculum, but personal work was necessary for them to be successful.[8]

Jim Carter, Vice Principal of Eric Hamber Secondary School in Vancouver, was a strong supporter of Total Education and provided the fledgling programme with teaching materials, regular advice, and the use of his farm on Bowen Island. Mrs. Meakes describes his sponsorship and support as "incredible." Mr. Carter was one of several young Vancouver administrators worried that too many capable high school students were either dropping out or remaining in school but feeling bored and alienated. Such individuals were to play a major role in helping to transform the Vancouver School District during the 1970s (see Chapter 13).[9]

The school subsisted throughout 1970/71 on a $2,500 grant from the Anglican Church

and a few private donations.[10] Part of the money came from the Anglican Foundation which at that time gave grants for social change projects. The three staff members earned less than $100 per month. In order to manage the funding coming from several different sources, the school was incorporated under the Societies Act in January 1971 with Dan Meakes and Jim Carter among its six founding directors. The founders stated their purpose clearly: "The Society exists in order that students might receive credit for their work as students, and encouragement in their struggle to become mature and responsible persons."[11]

The Meakes hired thirteen volunteers to work with the students. Some had a religious affiliation but most simply wanted to be of service to young people. One had cerebral palsy and had originally been deemed "uneducable," but most were university undergraduates who came in to teach one course to four to six students. One of these volunteers was Ron Eckert who lived in Kitsilano while finishing his last year of university. He had heard about Total Education while teaching about world religions in a youth programme at the liberal Unitarian Church. From a family who valued community service, he had read and been influenced by A.S. Neill's *Summerhill* in the 1960s and by his own experiences in high school. He had always wanted to be involved in education and believed Total Education was "doing something real."[12]

The volunteers taught what they were most skilled at; for example, two engineering students taught mathematics and physics. Most of the programme followed the British Columbia curriculum for grades eight to ten with some "funky stuff" thrown in: meditation, foods, environmental studies, and Zen Buddhism. Staff believed that almost any topic that interested the teenagers was valuable. Classes were small, numbering from four to ten, and most met twice a week. Some instructors were thorough, others inspiring. "We avoided homework since many students' personal lives were in disarray but students had to write an examination at the end of each course." Instructors provided extra help to students who needed it.

The academic curriculum was reasonably traditional. The major objective was the development of "basic skills" but the teachers also attempted to make the material more "integrated and holistic" than in mainstream schools.[13] Dan Meakes was responsible for the

mathematics component, and Cathy Meakes and Larry Haberlin taught English. Students did much writing and read widely at their level and interest. English class was run like a university course–students read such books as *Lord of the Flies* and *Catcher in the Rye,* and the class discussed them. Students were encouraged to express themselves in writing and verbally. The West Side group had a regular timetable with two-hour classes scheduled at various times throughout the day into the evening. The East Side group, more rigidly structured, met for four solid hours in the afternoon, working mainly on basic English and mathematics skills. There was a wide range of reading levels–the minimum grade level was grade nine although achievement was often lower. In general, the East Side groups worked on English 9 and 10, and the West Side on English 11 and 12. Class size was anywhere from four to ten students but much of the instruction was one-on-one. The staff did not have any professional expertise in dealing with learning problems but did attempt to provide firm guidance.

The school took field trips in the city, went to public lectures at U.B.C., and spent five days in Sorrento. Students and staff spent a weekend in the Fraser Valley experiencing life as early humans–living in clans, wearing war paint, and eating berries. Students also got involved in political issues such as the Amchitka nuclear test and the debate on freeways through Vancouver in the early 1970s, and students also enjoyed political speakers such as City Councillor Harry Rankin. The staff tried to connect the academic work to meaningful projects relevant to the surrounding community. Students learned photography and participated in a Metro-Media video project which contrasted life in the two neighbourhoods. Making use of learning opportunities in the community was a cornerstone of educational practice at Total Education as for other rehabilitation schools soon to follow.

The teachers aimed to accept only students who wanted to be there, and once students were accepted, the staff worked hard to get them to live up to their commitments. Students were expected to attend and, if they missed class, the teachers would telephone or go out and "track kids down at their homes or in the pool hall." The rules were straightforward: no drugs, no sex, no alcohol, no "bugging" others. Students spent a great deal of time at school after hours

drinking coffee, singing, and just "hanging out." One volunteer recalls that "the kids were rambunctious" and would also "sit around and blab away drinking, coffee, coffee, coffee..."[14] Some had challenging mental health problems and one student became so stressed by examinations, she would burn herself with cigarettes. However, all but two students finished the year and only one had to be asked to leave for selling drugs. One student from the West Side of Vancouver who attended the East Side group completed grade nine in three months.[15] Dan Meakes recalls that they did not have "a lot of philosophy" other than "reality therapy." Rather, the programme was "very pragmatic and thereby truly Canadian."[16] Their main concern was to make the curriculum interesting enough to keep the students in the programme and to teach them enough to pass grades eleven and twelve provincial examinations. Although building self-confidence was a major objective and "there was lots of communication around interpersonal relations," the teachers did not distinguish between academic and personal goals.

> We had a deep commitment that the school shouldn't waste students' time so they need to get something out of it, like grade twelve. It was pragmatic and the philosophy wasn't for creating an alternate world or for the school to be a tool of political change. All we knew was that in a caring Canadian society our role was to get a few students through. We were committed to students having self-esteem. We knew that students who felt good about themselves would achieve better. That was the extent of it.[17]

Dan Meakes made most of the administrative decisions during the early months, often spontaneously, but once the school was firmly established, all three teachers collaborated on the educational programme. From the beginning the whole student body participated in discussions about rules and the daily operation of the school. Mr. Meakes recalls that "there were no assumptions in 1970 and just hammering out three rules took two weeks. The school became a process for the staff to grow up in. Most of us were simply coming out of our adolescence. It entrenched high ideals. It had a huge impact on the staff."[18]

After a successful first year Mr. Meakes and Mr. Haberlin hoped to expand the programme but realized that a stable source of funding was essential. Furthermore, physical space was a growing problem. The noodle factory was run down and the school had already

outgrown the Kerrisdale house which included five foster children. In the spring of 1971 Total Education staff approached Vancouver School District officials, hoping for some financial assistance to the school. While negotiations were in progress, the Meakes were asked by the church to leave Total Education after just one year to go north and spearhead another pioneering venture, the Carcross School in the Yukon, a rehabilitative programme for aboriginal youth.[19] Mr. Meakes explains that they were "basically seen as too radical" by St. Mary's–the youth group was "too ragtag" and there had been complaints from neighbours about the house.[20] But the Meakes saw the Carcross project as a worthwhile challenge; besides, living their work twenty-four hours a day at Total Education had been very draining. Mr. Haberlin was asserting leadership and they were confident the school would continue in good hands when they left. Full of ideas, and committed Christian social activists, Dan and Cathy Meakes now live in Kamloops and have continued to be involved in spiritual, educational, and social service projects.

With their departure, Larry Haberlin continued to negotiate with the Vancouver School District. Supportive administrators such as Jim Carter helped convince district officials of the need for such a programme in the Vancouver system. There had also been considerable interest in Total Education from the community at large. The school asked for the services of one teacher, a suitable building and furniture, school supplies, and student access to mainstream high schools for courses requiring specialized equipment or expertise. After several months of discussion and visits to the school by school district officials the request was approved by the Vancouver School Board Education Committee.

Dr. Alf Clinton, assistant superintendent of Vancouver schools, was an enthusiastic supporter of Total Education.[21] Dr. Clinton, who began his career as a Vancouver high school teacher in the 1950s, believed the public school system should develop a wide variety of alternative programmes for high school dropouts or potential dropouts. He saw that many of these were capable students but, influenced by the turbulent 1960s, were unhappy with what they saw as authoritarian school administration. In June 1971 Dr. Clinton had been the guiding force behind the establishment of City School, an alternative programme developed within the

Vancouver school system (see Chapter 13). Speaking in support of the Total Education proposal, Dr. Clinton described the school:

> This organization has been operating with remarkable success, a school for teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19, who had dropped out of the Vancouver school system because of a feeling that they did not fit in, and assisting them to rehabilitate themselves into the educational sphere. Some of these students have been referred by welfare agencies, and others by Vancouver schools. Educational officials were most impressed with the work being done by this organization, which follows the curriculum of the Department of Education closely, and wherever possible encourages students to re-enter the Vancouver school system. A low pupil: teacher ratio is necessary (22 teachers, volunteer tutors, assistants for 35 full-time students) because a good number of the students need counselling and someone to take a personal interest in them.[22]

The proposal was approved by the full Board in September 1971. The Trustees agreed to appoint one teacher to the Total Education programme to be paid on the same scale as all Vancouver teaching staff. The Board also designated four "bungalows" or huts (later increased to five) on the grounds of the former Model School at Twelfth Avenue and Cambie Street.[23] This was the beginning of the formal relationship between Total Education and the Vancouver School District which would continue to grow over the next four years. Their partnership would become a model for the integration of alternative schools into the public school system throughout the province.

A year later the Board received a favourable report about the school from Dr. Clinton. The Trustees were "satisfied that this operation is being run by a responsible group, that it is serving an important segment of the student population not being reached by the schools of the system, and that the Society had met its commitment to the Vancouver School Board for the 1971/72 school year."[24] The Trustees renewed their support for the project in 1972/73 on the same basis as the previous year and one Trustee was so supportive as to suggest that the programme be expanded.[25]

The "huts"had been built for the Model School in 1912 as practice facilities for teachers destined for one-room schoolhouses.[26] The buildings were minimal but adequate. They didn't

leak, the toilets worked, and students helped to fix them up. Each hut consisted of one room larger than a regular classroom with a high ceiling. Staff, students, and volunteers built partitions made out of plywood, constructed lofts, and bought some old stuffed chairs and couches from the Salvation Army. Each September the new group would partially reconstruct the walls to suit their space needs and taste. The huts contained a kitchen, a darkroom, and a small amount of office space, but the facilities were cramped and private work area was at a premium. The run-down condition of the buildings suited the personal taste of most of the students, and staff "didn't have to worry if somebody kicked something." Eventually the buildings began to deteriorate but not before the school had occupied them for almost fifteen years. The huts were noisy and cold in the winter, but "the kids had fun decorating them and it was a place they made their own."[27] Having staff and students maintain the premises was one way in which the school helped to keep its costs down.

Staff and Students

The single Vancouver School Board salaried teaching position was filled by Phil Knaiger. Born in Los Angeles, Mr. Knaiger graduated from U.C.L.A. in 1965. During the mid-1960s he participated in both the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements and remembers the Watts civil rights riots and recalls how police broke up anti-war rallies. Mr. Knaiger decided he "didn't want to raise a family in Los Angeles or even in the United States" and came to Vancouver in 1967.[28] He registered in teacher training at Simon Fraser University and was hired by the Vancouver School District in 1969. He taught at Point Grey where he was part of a team of four staff members in the Integrated Programme, a pioneer alternative programme for students in grades eight and nine featuring integration of the academic subjects. Jim Carter and Alf Clinton knew and respected Mr. Knaiger through his participation in the Point Grey programme. In addition, Mr. Knaiger was a mathematics teacher, a subject that was not being covered by the largely untrained staff.

Total Education began the 1971/72 school year with a full-time staff of four, Larry Haberlin, Phil Knaiger, Ron Eckert, and Rick Bachman, assisted by a large group of volunteers. By the following year, 1972/73, the staff had expanded to ten and remained fairly stable at between ten and twelve throughout the 1970s. Most teachers began by volunteering at the school for at least three months before becoming recognized staff members. By 1972 the staff included Charles Hill, Virginia Maillard, Annie Paterson, Richard Neil, Liz Neil, Bonnie Picard, Tony Simmonds, and Crista Preus. Along with Mr. Haberlin, Mr. Eckert, and Mr. Knaiger these individuals formed the nucleus of a cohesive group that would stay together for several years. Volunteers and the extended staff community numbered well over twenty. Consistent with the egalitarian principles of the school, there were no major distinctions made between teachers, assistants, child care workers, and volunteers. In September1973, Doug Cochran and Glynn Weyler joined the staff as employment counsellors provided by Canada Manpower, and Barbara Knox joined the staff as well. New teachers in 1974/75 were Peter Seixas, Steve Nemtin, John Crouch, Gary Miller, Lynne Hyndman, Nancy Thomson and student teacher Tom Morton while the following year (1975/76) Joan Nemtin, Starla Anderson, and Ralph Miller joined the staff. Because Total Education students worked best with continuous interaction with one or two staff members, most staff worked full-time, but it was possible to work part-time and some did.

Most staff members were young adults in their twenties, had middle class backgrounds, were university educated, had a strong social conscience, and were profoundly influenced by the political and cultural movements of the 1960s. Each had his or her own reasons for ending up at Total Education. Charles Hill, for example, came to Vancouver from California because of the Vietnam war. He grew up in a teaching family and volunteered at the school while studying education at U.B.C. He had previously worked as a community health worker on an Opportunities for Youth grant in the free medical clinic, precursor to the Pine Street Clinic in Vancouver. A friend of Phil Knaiger's, he agreed to teach an astronomy course and volunteered for a year before becoming a staff member in 1972.

Virginia Maillard grew up in New Hampshire and left the United States in the wake of the

student deaths at Kent State University in 1970 and the stalling of the anti-war movement. She had a teaching certificate and taught for one year at Alert Bay but, due to the racism she observed there, decided to look for a job in an alternative school. She attended the Saturna Island Conference on Alternative Education during the summer of 1971 where she met Larry Haberlin, Phil Knaiger, and Ron Eckert and was offered a position at Total Education.[29] Richard Neil grew up in Montreal and earned a masters degree in biology from McGill. After enrolling in a Ph.D. programme at U.B.C. he began to spend most of his time engaged in countercultural pursuits and ended up at the Saturna Island conference where, like Ms. Maillard, he met the Total Education staff and began to volunteer almost immediately.

Annie Paterson grew up in Vancouver, left home at seventeen, and became politically active through trying to find daycare for her child. She began volunteering at Total Education in 1972 while on unemployment insurance.[30] Liz Neil had earned a teaching certificate in Montreal and later taught at Crofton House, a Vancouver private girl's school. She describes her world view as a combination of "politically left-wing and counterculture." She spent the summer of 1972 working at the Total Education farm on Bowen Island and joined the regular staff that fall. Because of her certification she became one of the staff members receiving a Vancouver School District teacher's salary.[31] Bonnie Picard, a young single mother on welfare, noticed Total Education one day in 1972 while taking her daughter to the fledgling Vancouver Montessori School which had just opened on the Model School site. She volunteered for several years before being formally recognized as a staff member in 1976. She became a teaching assistant and then a child care worker paid by the provincial Human Resources Department.[32] One American volunteer was a former member of the radical "Weathermen" and remained "underground" at Total Education.

Staff members favoured a non-coercive style in relating to teenagers and a fiercely democratic and collegial style in dealing with each other. No one cared about how much money they were making nor how many hours they had to put in. Almost everyone had to supplement their incomes and most had to find summer jobs in order to get by. One teacher taught at a small

private school in the mornings so she could spend the afternoons at Total Education, and another sold antiques in her spare time. Several staff members already on welfare or unemployment insurance did not even ask for a salary. The school's 1974 advertisement in the *Vancouver Sun* said it well: "Would you like to work in a co-operatively run programme with small classes, freedom to innovate and experiment? And would you like to work long hours for a low salary in inadequate facilities with difficult kids?"[33] All of these individuals were committed to what they considered to be a unique enterprise: an opportunity to make a difference for a group of young people, to work with each other in a spirit of teamwork, and to create an example of a different kind of politics. As one staff member recalls: "The school became our whole lives, everyone had a real commitment to it. We weren't in it for the money. We felt like we were doing good work."[34] Another says: "We were young and fired up and believed in what we were doing."[35] Still another suggests: "Everybody was passionately interested in what they were teaching–it was an exciting place to be."[36]

As in other alternative schools, staff members formed a close-knit community and developed intensive relationships. They were friends as well as colleagues and several lived together in a large communal house which became "almost another campus." Teachers ate dinner together once a week and staff meetings were usually followed by some kind of social time. The school also became a home for many students. A hot lunch programme of soup and sandwiches was provided. Music, guitars, and singing were always around. There were activities in the evening and the school became a kind of community centre.[37] As one former student recalls: "We felt like part of a community, we cared about each other."[38]

In 1971/72, Total Education enrolled seventy students with another seventy on the waiting list.[39] Many were referred by social workers, counsellors, probation officers, and children's aid societies. Each year the school accepted as many students as possible and during 1973/74 enrollment reached close to one hundred. But staff found that just over eighty was all they could handle and enrollment remained stable at between eighty and eighty-five students throughout the 1970s.[40] Enrollment was 88 in 1973/74, 84 in 1974/75,[41] and stood at just over eighty students

in September, 1975.[42] There was always a waiting list which varied from forty[43] to over 150 students in 1974.[44] In February 1976 the waiting list stood at 141 prospective students.[45] Fortunately for those on the list student turnover was fairly rapid. Students ranged in age from fourteen to nineteen with the majority between fifteen and eighteen years old.[46]

Students came to Total Education for many reasons but all had in common a feeling of being ignored by the system. They were dropouts, kids on probation, countercultural kids, kids with drug problems, kids in foster or group homes, "street kids," bored kids, kids who were rebelling against authority, kids making their own way. A 1974 school evaluation found that 40% of Total Education students attended the school because they "could not 'hack' the regular system." Almost 50% stated that they would have dropped out of school if they had not been accepted at Total Education.[47] Total Education provided a therapeutic place "to heal and to reconnect with human beings who cared."[48] The school was a source of stability keeping students safe and away from violence. The small classes helped to encourage some academic progress, but for many staff members the academics were never the most important priority. The primary aim was "integrating kids back into some sort of structure in their lives."[49]

There were several types of students at Total Education. Some were bright but had dropped out because they could not handle the authoritarian structure of mainstream schools. These students were mostly middle-class, intelligent and creative, often rebellious and free-spirited young people who hated regular schools. Many were influenced by the counterculture and had difficulty fitting into the mainstream.[50] Often they had "difficulties with parents, were bored and turned off school, and were looking for a freer atmosphere."[51]

Two other major groups were those severely lacking in academic skills, and "social misfits" with emotional problems or violent tendencies.[52] There was some overlap between these two groups. Some had problems at home or felt lost in secondary schools of up to two thousand students. Others lacked the basic academic and social skills needed to succeed in school, and some could barely read or write. These students had few qualifications for work and were often too young to be hired so, out of school, many ended up on the street. Others were in foster or

group homes, some were under the care of psychiatrists or social workers, and a few even had been in reform institutions. Some had histories of parental abuse, drug abuse, or prostitution. One teacher had four students in one class from group homes. Some students had concerned parents but many others did not get along with their families.[53] One typical group of twenty-three students was described by its two teachers as "enthusiastic, spontaneous, turned off to formal academia, unfocussed, cynical, and highly susceptible to peer group pressure." The teachers continued: "Four were failing because of lack of basic skills, four wanted a more creative learning environment, fifteen were failing due to lack of interest, non-conformity, or non-attendance. Nine were living with parents, ten on their own, and four in Children's Aid Society placements. Seventeen said they would not have attended school last year were Total Education not available."[54]

The teaching staff tried to ascertain the most pressing needs of each student. Some were bright and capable students who had come to Total Education because it offered them a chance to complete school on more acceptable conditions. Others were sorting out emotional troubles and learning to survive in the world. Others were students who do not react well under pressure with a history of failure in public school, who enjoyed the smallness, closeness, one-to-one tutoring, and constant support of Total Education. Still others were in limbo, uncertain of what to do next and needing a supportive environment in which to consider their future without anxiety.[55] In an information package for prospective teachers, the staff summarized the Total Education student body this way:

> The idea is to provide an opportunity to learn for those kids who cannot make it in the public school system. They are mostly between the ages of fourteen and seventeen, though some are older. Some have talents which have been frustrated by the public schools. A larger number are not interested in learning, they're poor attenders, often they can hardly read or write. They know they don't want to learn what they've been learning, but for the most part have no clue what they do want to learn. Some have come back to school because they want to, some because their parents want them to, and some because if they don't they'll go to jail.[56]

By 1976 most students came from the less affluent East Side: "The majority of our students are aged 15 to 19 and have special problems which make it difficult for them to learn in regular schools; all of them have dropped out. They come from all over Vancouver, though there has been a concentration in the last year of students from north- east Vancouver. Only 28% come from two-parent families, and no less than half come from unstable living situations."[57]

Applicants given the highest priority were those for whom no other school was possible: who had been out of school for more than a year, who had been institutionalized, whose family life had disintegrated, who had been expelled from school, who had a physical handicap or learning disability, who were unable to read, who were under psychiatric counselling, who were a year or more behind their age group, or who had been in trouble with the law. Then came the students who had chosen not to attend public school: they were bored, alienated from their school, looking for more responsibility or stimulation, unable to relate to authorities; they had a high rate of non-attendance, discipline problems, an unsupportive home life, conflicts with part-time work; or simply wanted to graduate more quickly.[58]

Almost all students on the waiting list were eventually accepted into the programme. They were referred by school counsellors and groups homes, or somehow found the school and "just wandered in." The staff tried to ensure that all applicants really wanted to come, and students, parents, and former teachers were asked to fill out lengthy questionnaires. Applicants were then interviewed by staff members, after which, in the parlance of the day, they were asked how they felt about the interview with the following choices: "up-tight, didn't mind it, or pretty good."[59] The only real criteria for acceptance were the student's verbal commitment to the programme and the willingness of at least one staff member to act as the student's personal counsellor. Students were basically self-selecting and even the few who were refused acceptance could eventually get in if they "hung around the school long enough."[60]

Enrollment was always in flux. Seventeen students (out of about eighty) left the programme during the first five months of the 1974/75 school year. Some left to look for work, others registered in other schools, and a few simply found the programme was not what they

wanted.[61] But some students took their schooling seriously and, although there were no examinations except for provincial examinations for senior students, there were standards of work and students had to earn their credits. A few students stayed right with the programme, attended class regularly, and worked hard while at class. Such students made rapid progress and received credit for courses, and a class of about fifteen students graduated every year.

Other students did not enjoy the work or could not concentrate; some would come and go, and some just drifted away. These students missed class frequently for reasons such as "working," "visiting a friend," or just plain "forgot," and others showed up "too late to participate." Daily attendance was sporadic and teachers had to count on at least 20% absence–"we didn't like it, it was always a struggle."[62] The 1974 school evaluation estimated the average attendance at 65%.[63] The fact that there was never a lack of students wanting to get in to the programme was sometimes used as a motivating factor: "It was either go there or regular school or reform school."[64] Many students needed more structure and discipline in their lives. The staff came to realize this but such an approach did not come naturally to children of the 1960s. As Larry Haberlin put it: "I think some of our beliefs got in the way of that."[65]

Governance

In 1971/72, the first year of the Total Education/Vancouver School District partnership, the Board contributed almost $7,000 (the salary of one teacher) to the operation's total budget of $31,000. The Society also received substantial funding from other sources including $4,000 from the Vancouver Foundation, $1,000 from the Junior League, $3,000 from the Children's Aid Society, and $8,000 from private donations. In addition, half of the funding came from a federal government Local Initiatives Programme (L.I.P.) grant which provided six subsistence salaries totaling just under $16,000.[66] Nevertheless, the school finished the year with a surplus of over $8,000. The following year, 1972/73, with a similar budget, the school again received funding from the Vancouver Foundation and the Children's Aid Society the school's budget was again

$31,000 but the L.I.P. grant had decreased. The difference was covered by an increase in donations.

Unlike many alternative schools, Total Education did manage to balance its budget during the first three years. It was able to do this by keeping teachers' salaries low, by employing more than a dozen volunteers, and through Larry Haberlin's resourcefulness in finding sources of government funding, Salaries were by far the largest expenditure totaling over $27,000 for the four full-time and several part-time staff. Total salaries were $28,000 in 1972/73,[67] each of the ten staff members received about $250 per month.[68] Although Mr. Knaiger's teacher's salary was more than double the others, he put his money into a general staff fund which was shared equally.

With the exception of the one teacher's salary provided by the school district, most of the funds for salaries during the first three years came from the school's L.I.P. grant. But by 1973 the federal government had begun to phase out these grants and the school's funding structure shifted towards the school district and the provincial government. Fearing that the L.I.P. grant would not be renewed, a delegation from Total Education approached the School Board in March 1973 with a request for more funding, an expansion of their premises, and increased school supplies. They pointed out that the school was serving a definite need for students who had dropped out of the regular school system and that many referrals to Total Education came from school counsellors. In making the case for more support the group pointed out that: "Some Total Education students have re-entered the regular school system without adjustment problems, others have left to find work, students feel better about themselves as individuals, and parents are enthusiastic about the positive effects of the programme."[69] District officials studied the request carefully in the context of district-wide needs for alternative programmes. Dr. Clinton and other Vancouver administrators continued to support the aims and operation of Total Education.[70] Consequently, the Board significantly increased the staff allocation for 1973/74 from one teacher and one teacher's aide to three teachers, two teacher's aides, and a part-time secretary.[71]

Beginning in 1974 the school found another important source of financial support, the provincial Department of Human Resources headed by minister Norman Levi. In 1974/75 Total

Education received $10,000 for three child care workers through the Department's Special Services for Children programme.[72] Human Resources would offer substantial support to alternative schools for the next several years as part of the N.D.P. governments's policy to provide increased services to children with social needs in their own homes, schools, and communities.[73] The Education and Human Resources Departments developed a funding formula based on "rehabilitation units" consisting of one teacher, one teaching assistant, and one child care worker. Total Education also received two job placement officers from the federal Department of Manpower and Immigration's Local Employment Assistance Programme (L.E.A.P.) bringing the number of paid staff to ten.[74]

By 1973 staff salaries had risen to just under $400 per month,[75] and in 1974/75 staff were earning $600 per month.[76] As the Vancouver School District took responsibility for more teachers' salaries the average for the staff as a whole continued to increase and by 1975/76 had reached $865 per month.[77] Although this was an improvement it was still far below what teachers were earning in the public school system. The average was pulled down by those being paid as child care workers and staff assistants. Staff members believed they should be earning salaries equal to mainstream professional salaries.

With this increased financial support, Vancouver district officials undertook regular evaluation reports on Total Education. In 1974 Dr. Clinton made a number of recommendations to improve the programme including a thorough examination of all courses, a reduction in the number of electives, in-service training for staff in remedial reading and Special Education, remedial mathematics for every student, more "efficient" decision-making, and funding for upgrading facilities and purchasing teaching materials.[78]

By 1974 school district policy was to bring all Vancouver alternative programmes under the control of the school board and district officials prepared lengthy recommendations regarding which programmes should be supported.[79] Finally, in July 1974, the Vancouver School Board passed a motion that the Board "assume total responsibility for the educational component of Total Education by providing up to four teachers, up to four teacher's aides, and related

services." The school would retain its separate facility on the Model School site but it would be administered by the principal of Eric Hamber Secondary School. The motion also addressed criteria for admissions and evaluation and the Board promised to provide increased funding for learning materials. Total Education would receive standard district support services and increased funding for learning materials, and students would have access to courses offered at other schools not provided at Total Education. The motion concluded by praising the school staff: "That those associated with Total Education from its inception be commended for their initiative in implementing and conducting this programme."[80]

The Society for Total Education, the school's original governing body, continued to exist and was the legal entity through which government money to the school was channeled. Although the salaries of the teachers and teacher's aides were now paid directly by the Vancouver School District, the Society distributed the funds received from the Human Resources Department for child care workers and from Canada Manpower for employment counsellors. In 1971/72 MacDonald Burbidge, a university instructor and chair of the North Vancouver School Board, became a director. Both he and Jim Carter had been parents at the New School several years earlier and were keenly interested in alternative education. Most Board members were professionals and included one public health physician, a social worker, two educators, and a volunteer co-ordinator for the Children's Aid Society.[81] As was often the case in alternative schools, the Board rarely met and governed in name only. In fact, the Board did not meet once between 1974 and 1977. For all intents and purposes the teachers ran the school and after 1977 all ten Board members were Total Education teachers.[82]

Although on paper Phil Knaiger was the Principal Teacher, in practice all staff members ran the school on principles of democratic equality. School decisions were made by the whole staff, all members having an equal voice in shaping the programme, whatever their professional status. The roles that each staff member fulfilled were indistinguishable in any case, whether they were formally hired as a teacher, staff assistant, or child care worker. Decision making had a "consensus flavour" but on rare occasions votes were taken requiring 50% for "simple" items and

75% for major issues. As in other alternative schools, this often resulted in long meetings. Hiring new staff was, as in most alternative schools, the most difficult of all decisions. Prospective new teachers were interviewed at length by the entire staff. For the most part, new staff members fit in well, but one or two were asked to leave.

Consistent with their strongly held egalitarian views, all staff members shared their salaries whether they were teachers, teacher's aides, child care workers, or employment counsellors. Since those receiving a Vancouver School District teacher's salary were the highest paid staff members, the teachers ended up subsidizing the salaries of the others. However, one former staff member recalls that "you had to fight for your position; you had to negotiate for your part of the salary sharing." Another teacher agrees saying "Salary sharing always had to be sorted out; it became quite heated at times." Some thought teachers with children should receive more but this was not endorsed. Salary sharing was deeply entrenched and continued until 1982 despite considerable pressure from the various funding bodies to make roles and salaries more distinct.

From the early days, staff developed a system of student participation in democratic decision making through weekly school-wide general meetings. Students and staff deliberated about school activities, policies, and interpersonal relations. Students and teachers had equal voice in these weekly meetings and one former student recalls that "students had a lot of say."[83] But staff members were disappointed that student attendance at general meetings was low and the teachers usually dominated.[84] In 1975 the system of input from students was formalized in an elected student committee which would act as a liason between staff and students and whose five members would attend and vote at staff meetings on such issues as school programmes and school evaluation.[85]

The staff held two meetings per week, one to discuss day-to-day business and one to debate political, ideological, philosophical, or personal matters. In addition teachers held several marathon meetings per year to evaluate the school programme and the students. Staff meetings were often "long and tortuous,""endless," and exhausting. Although all staff members were committed to alternative education, there were significant disagreements and the school attracted

strong personalities. In 1972 the staff hired a therapist, Ruth McCarthy (one of the founders of the New School ten years earlier), to lead the staff in group therapy, sensory awareness, respectful staff relations, and tolerance of different points of view.[86]

Leadership was an ongoing issue. Larry Haberlin was a highly skilled organizer and had been responsible for arranging much of the school's funding and its negotiations with school district administrators and outside agencies. He often referred to himself as "managing director" but the staff never endorsed that title. Although staff members respected his work on behalf of the school and appreciated his dealing with school district and government administrators, some resented his leadership style which they considered not sufficiently collegial. Mr. Haberlin left the school in 1974 to take a position with the Human Resources Department and Doug Cochran took over most of the organizational duties. Ron Eckert and Virginia Maillard also left at the end of the 1973/74 year. In assessing Mr. Haberlin's role, one long-time staff member says: "Larry was the leader. There were a lot of countercultural types who didn't want any organization at all. Larry had a problem with that. Some staff were unreasonable with him."[87] Larry Haberlin was responsible for much of Total Education's early organizational success.

Larry Haberlin's departure led the staff to rethink its organizational structure. The growing volume of administrative business allowed some tasks to fall through the cracks and school record keeping had become inadequate. At a series of meetings in June 1974 the staff reaffirmed its commitment to democratic decision making and the autonomy of the programme. But to facilitate the completion of administrative tasks an Internal Staff Co-ordinator would be elected each year to chair staff meetings, centralize school and student records, oversee and integrate school office work, and co-ordinate academic decisions. The staff also created another new position, the External Co-ordinator, to represent the school's interests with outside agencies and to run the school's work experience programme.[88] These positions were taken by Annie Paterson and Doug Cochran respectively. Phil Knaiger continued to act as school principal.[89] The staff confirmed that: "We will strive for consensus in decision-making. Where, after debate, it is clear that consensus cannot be achieved we will abide by the decision of 75% of the staff."[90]

In accordance with a school district request to develop more clearly defined criteria for student admissions, the school formed a Screening Committee which included staff members, the Principal of Eric Hamber, and representatives from the School Board, Human Resources, Canada Manpower, and the Metropolitan Health Unit. This later became the School Advisory Committee which provided the staff with advice about policy and bureaucratic procedure.[91]

Total Education was influenced by the growing feminist movement of the early 1970s and the increasing political consciousness of the women on the Total Education staff. Female staff members were aware of the fact that the school had been founded and led through its first two years by four men. The women worked hard to ensure equality in staff deliberations and to empower the female students with a feminist perspective. Virginia Maillard and Liz Neil organized a Women's Studies course in 1972 to examine traditional female roles and present experiences and to form a support group for female students.

A serious issue dividing staff members concerned how much time should be spent teaching basic academic skills, and how much time on personal development, life skills, and counselling. This disagreement went to the core of staff beliefs about the purpose of the school. Staff were equally divided about where they thought the emphasis should fall. For some teachers the academic component was most important while for others the counselling and personal growth component was central. This issue caused "terrible battles." Some staff members were particularly concerned about the marginal students lacking academic skills and thought it was their responsibility to teach them basic literacy. Others thought they should be helping students develop self-confidence and meaningful relationships. Some staff wanted to make it as easy as possible for kids to get through Total Education while others saw no reason not to challenge the students. In reality, two different types of staff were attracted to Total Education, educators and counsellors/social workers. Later in the school's history the re-introduction of provincial examinations in British Columbia sparked several years of debate before the school finally decided to offer examinable courses. Ultimately the school had to decide whether it was a treatment programme or a school and decided to focus on being a "school completion programme."

A related debate was about how directive staff members should be regarding attendance, behaviour, and academic performance. Some teachers were fairly relaxed about students showing up late or not at all, while others were more demanding. Although staff encouraged attendance and punctuality there were no sanctions for non-attendance. Attendance was always a struggle and tremendous energy went into getting kids to attend. One teacher wrote in 1973: "Regular attendance is expected at Total Ed. Every effort is made by the staff to help students sort out their decisions and actions concerning attendance."[92] The general agreement was that if a student wanted credit for a course he or she had to fulfill the minimum requirements and if a student wanted to remain enrolled in the school he or she had to attend a reasonable number of days. Eventually the staff agreed to clarify attendance expectations and established a general rule that students were expected to attend 80% of the time. Students who came rarely or regularly skipped school for no good reason would be asked to leave.

Even the policy on drugs and alcohol gave rise to different points of view. In the end drugs were prohibited at any school activity or trip but staff knew that most students used marijuana on a regular basis and drugs were present on almost every school trip. Drugs and alcohol were also a problem at the school's Bowen Island farm. In early 1974 a meeting of the whole school community decided: "That no person possess dope while at the school or on a school function. Anyone found with dope at the farm will be asked to leave on the next ferry."[93] There were constant debates about how strict to be and what to do about individual violators. Finally in 1974 the staff passed the following motion: "No illegal drugs are permitted at the school or on school functions or activities. The consequence is a two week suspension."[94] Eventually some students were asked to leave the school because of drug use.

The staff also had to give the appearance of disapproving of sexual relations among the students although in reality most did not object and sexuality, birth control, and sexual health were frequent topics of discussion. As might be expected in such a close-knit community, relationships occurred among staff members; three couples eventually married and two marriages broke up in the late 1970s. Due to the general ambiance of the times sexual behaviour sometimes

crossed boundaries of what would today be considered appropriate.

Relations between the staff and Vancouver School District administrators were mixed. A few staff members distrusted the authority figures. But many administrators understood what the staff was trying to do and were grateful that Total Education "was working with kids they were unable to handle."[95] According to Mr. Knaiger, area supervisor Charlie Etchell was helpful and kind, and Harold McAllister, principal of Eric Hamber, and Jim Carter, vice-principal, were "great to work with." Another staff member says Mr. McAllister "understood what we were trying to accomplish."[96] Alf Clinton remained the school's "best liaison to the school board." Although some administrators left the school alone in a kind of "benign neglect," former teachers acknowledge that most district officials were well meaning and saw the value in the programme.[97]

The staff valued their independence and resisted outside influence and attempts to make the school more "mainstream," and rarely initiated contact with the administration. According to one staff member "we never asked for anything." When a new principal arrived at Hamber in 1975 and wanted to take a more active role in school affairs, the teachers objected to his presumption that he was in charge. Meanwhile, staff were frustrated by school board bureaucracy, paperwork, complex ordering procedures, and how long it took to receive supplies. The school district supplied a part-time secretary. There was no money for extras–field trips, the school lunch programme, or the school library and even basic materials were in short supply. The Department of Human Resources childcare workers' co-ordinator worked closely with the school, and support from Canada Manpower was "invaluable" in developing the vocational programme. Parents were supportive and the school held regular open houses, but in general the parent group was not a major factor in the school.

By1975 there were enough alternative school teachers in Greater Vancouver to establish an organization to promote their common interests. The society sent representatives to the British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the Vancouver Teachers' Association to enlist their support in lobbying the school board for higher wages for teaching assistants and for permanent status for all alternative programmes within the Vancouver School District. On a lighter note,

the association organized an alternative school Sports Day complete with Moon Ball.[98]

Like other alternative schools, Total Education tried to limit the number of students with difficult behavioural or emotional problems. But once the school's relationship with the school district had become formalized, many school principals and counsellors referred difficult students to Total Education since there were few other programmes available to help such students in the early 1970s. Furthermore, Total Education staff were idealistic and were reluctant to turn anyone away. Some students had experienced various forms of abuse or severe family problems and others had learning disabilities. Several students were bordering on mental illness and a few were violent. One boy referred by the Children's Aid Society broke all the windows one day. One former staff member recalls that "we took some severe mental health problems and behaviour problems,"[99] and another says "we had kids who were mentally ill that we couldn't handle."[100] Although the school did have access to some psychiatric services, without the expertise on staff to help such students, working conditions were stressful.

Staff brought all the political and cultural expressions of the late sixties/early seventies with them to Total Education. The school was almost entirely rooted in the counterculture in its early years.[101] Staff members lived communally, were involved with food co-ops, the Kosmic baseball league, free clinics, the N.D.P, the unions, and Marxist study groups. Although most did not see Total Education as overtly promoting social change, it was certainly a place where the teachers could express their commitment to social change. Several were influenced by the Human Potential Movement and the staff brought in individuals to do Gestalt Therapy, encounter groups, transactional analysis, reality therapy, "I'm Okay, You're Okay," blindfolded trust exercises, sensitivity training, communication skills, "group processing," and talking about feelings. Total Education staff did not see their professional lives at the school as separate from their political, cultural, or personal lives and consequently the boundaries between school and "life" became blurred. The teachers organized meetings about socialist education, the school had a subscription to Ms. magazine, the school vans carried Greenpeace bumper stickers, and the school sold "Save the Whales" tee-shirts.

Curriculum

The Vancouver School Board, in its 1973/74 annual report, described the Total Education programme as: "a combination of upgrading basic skills, field trips, improving decision-making and social skills, with the overall objective of proceeding to further education or training or employment."[102] But the Total Education staff had far more ambitious goals for their students. These goals were academic (to develop literacy, communication, calculation, and critical thinking), social (to cope with social problems and to apply the social skills necessary for community co-operation), personal (to develop a positive self-concept), vocational (to develop employment skills and to make meaningful vocational choices), and to develop attitudes conducive to good health:[103]

> Total Education reaffirms the right of every individual to education. It is a school where young people can learn without the stress of competition; where, in a co-operative and self-critical environment, students are encouraged not only to fulfill the academic requirements of grade twelve, but to develop all areas of potential: the intellectual and the physical, the personal and the social.[104]

Several principles underlay all learning at Total Education. The staff believed it was essential that each student find a natural style and rate of learning to build self-esteem, without the competition "which is over-emphasized in all areas of our society." Teachers also sought to make all activity at Total Education relevant to the lives of their students and to address rather than ignore emotional problems that got in the way of learning. Staff also saw as an essential part of their job to facilitate students in making appropriate decisions about their learning and about their lives. Above all the Total Education staff believed that no learning could take place without a quality relationship between teacher and learner:

> One of the most important requirements for learning, particularly with our students who have weak self-images, is the quality of the interpersonal relationships between the student and teacher. The teacher must come across as a real person with trust and respect for the learner, or very little of value occurs in class.[105]

Total Education offered close to a complete high school curriculum from grades eight to twelve. The majority of students were enrolled in grade ten and eleven courses, but several completed grade twelve courses.[106] Academic courses offered between 1972 and 1975 included English 11 and 12, International Literature, Mathematics, Social Studies, World History, Military History, Canadian History, Geography, Classical Philosophy, Science, Biological Life, Biological Consciousness, Introductory and Advanced Psychology, Anthropology, Economics, Business, and a French Laboratory Workshop. Because the staff considered non-academic courses to be important in developing student interests, the school offered a wide variety of electives including Going to College, Women's Studies, Male Studies, Current Problems, Yoga, Basic Guitar, Jazz Studies, Chorus, Music and Musicianship, Flute, Plays and Drama, Crafts, Arts and Crafts, Film, Life Rhythm, Nutrition and Natural Foods, Physical Education, Guidance, Child Care, Woodworking, Mechanics, Chemistry and Photography, Typing, Sensitivity and Awareness, Human Sexuality, Astronomy, Study Skills, Workshop, Life Skills, the Third Eye, Go, and the Art of Flying.[107]

The school's offerings portrayed an excitement and a feeling of innocence, providing an effective window through which to perceive the expansive and exploratory nature of the post-counterculture period. Each staff member had his or her own particular interests which were reflected in the course offerings. The Third Eye Workshop was an global study of comparative physiology, behaviour, and psychology exploring states of consciousness, drug effects, dreaming, memory and learning, history of psychology, brain function, religious experience, and therapy. A science course planned to highlight "myths, magic, and reality." Crafts would include batik, macrame, candle-making, crochet, sewing, and embroidery. The Psychology course planned to study works by Fritz Perls, R.D. Laing, Eric Fromm, and Eldridge Cleaver. The military history course was somewhat of an anomaly in a school largely staffed by anti-war activists, but the social studies teacher believed this was an effective way to interest students in history and his re-enactments of historical battles sometimes lasted all evening. Most importantly, teachers at Total Education wanted to teach in a different way that encouraged students to discover rather than to

be told. As one teacher wrote in his journal in 1973:

> In mathematics we have spent years being conditioned in an atmosphere that stifled rather than stimulated. Doing what the teacher wants and expects has meant success in school. Mathematics is not "getting the answers" but rather discovering patterns, relationships, the beauties of symmetry. No one can make your discovery for you and no one knows what you will discover.[108]

Some courses had rather ambitious objectives. The Plays and Drama course hoped that reading several plays together would lead to "a greater and deeper understanding of the nature of being." The art teacher expected to cover the following: papier mache, silk screening, painting, ceramics, films, slides, sound pieces, puppets, costumes, music, embroidery, drawing, murals, mobiles, balance, found art, carving, body awareness, art fundamentals, city resources, and "much, much more." The aim of the Jazz Studies course was "to break the individual's reliance on commercialized music by presenting alternative forms." Perhaps the most ambitious of all was the mathematics course which aimed, through a "creative approach," to "free the individual to think for himself, to provide opportunities to discover the basic pattern, order, and relationships both in the natural world and within our minds, and to help students learn the skills which they find are necessary for survival in the modern age."[109] Although with hindsight such objectives appear overly optimistic, they are indicative of the perspective of the teachers in 1973. Despite the fact that the 1960s were over, these young adults continued to carry the hopes and dreams of that period. They wanted to remake the world.

The Women's Studies and Male Studies courses were typical of the growing awareness of how traditional gender expectations affected people's lives, and first women and then men formed discussion and support groups. The objectives of the Women's Studies course were "to put in perspective and understand our past and present experiences being brought up female, to examine women's roles, to do a cross-cultural study of women in other societies, and to develop a trust group in which we can share feelings, problems, and co-operation." The course was primarily a discussion group intended to build confidence and empower the girls to discover their identity as women. Other topics studied were the family, sexuality, and birth control. Eventually

Women's Studies evolved into a course called Women's Literature which studied women's writing and the portrayal of women in literature. The Male Studies course was less thoroughly planned, the course prospectus stating: "We will look at what it means to each of us to be a male animal in a complicated society." The course included discussion of sexual behaviour, sexual roles, communication and sensitivity, and "male liberation."

The mathematics courses, taught by Phil Knaiger throughout most of the 1970s, were among the most consistent courses at Total Education. Mr. Knaiger provided for all students to work at their own levels. Some worked individually through textbooks, calling on the teacher's help when necessary, while others worked through a self-pacing individual programme. Other students explored mathematical concepts and operations through group activities. They investigated geometric relationships through constructing string figures or using geoboards, and reinforced arithmetical concepts with Cuisinaire Rods. The mathematics programme was divided into academic math and general math. General mathematics was conducted through an individualized programme helping students work through the basic skills while academic math made use of textbooks and standard exercises. In either case classes were "small, relaxed, and informal" with "no examinations or schedules to meet, and no harmful competition with each other." There was also a "creative math laboratory" which contained tools, materials, puzzles, games, and books to be used for special projects such as making domes, geometric models, string figures, spirographs, and "soma blocks." The class also visited the Mathematics Museum at the Seattle Science Centre.[110] Mr. Knaiger reported that most students progressed and were successful. The few students who were proficient at mathematics progressed quickly at their own pace, but "those that were slower were getting it too."

The school offered several upper-level English courses. One was a survey of international literature which included Middle Eastern cuneiform writing, Egyptian hieroglyphics, North American picture writing, traditional and contemporary ballads, folk music and anti-war writing. Another year, the senior Literature course covered myths, theatre, Canadian literature, films and literature, and sexuality and literature. A creative writing workshop presented open-

ended writing projects some stimulated by field trips to such diverse locations as the railway station and the United States border. The lower level English class emphasized basic writing skills and grammar ("Brute English" one teacher called it) in a highly prescribed format and, according to the teacher, was "too rigid and monotonous" to interest the students.[111]

World history, geography, and philosophy covered traditional material but used a seminar style class whenever possible and field trips. The geography course emphasized environmental education and covered such topics as climate, pollution, erosion, land forms, glaciers, precipitation, waves and currents, and earth materials. Student activities included hiking, mapping, exploring the city, and trips to Brothers Creek, Allouette Lake, and Wreck Beach. Introductory psychology included behaviour theory, the nervous system, animal behaviour, needs and emotions, consciousness, and social behaviour. In Current Problems the class would "watch the news, talk, do a special project, and see films." The biology course covered everything from molecular theory to evolution, genetics to ecology, diversity of life to the philosophy of science, and physiology to science and social responsibility. The school was limited in its science offerings by a lack of equipment but students did have the option of using the laboratory at a neighbouring high school. Two French courses offered a traditional format as well as an informal conversation group. The Life Rhythm Project was a kind of anthropology course in which students graphed the history of early human life and even simulated early human activities.

Drama courses offered a variety of topics over the years including improvisation, play production and performance, personal awareness and concentration techniques, relaxation, voice, and movement exercises, mime skits, theatre games, literature of the theatre, and one act plays. The dance class was a combination of improvisation activities and exercises for co-ordination, release of tension, and self-expression.

Total Education teachers developed most of their own courses and the curriculum depended on the expertise and interests of the teachers any given year. For example, two staff members designed a psychology course emphasizing the concerns and interests of teenagers featuring readings and discussion of adolescent behaviour, identity, communication, perception,

self-confidence, inadequacy, the family, and sexuality. The teachers attempted to teach in a "holistic" manner integrating academic subjects as well as the academic and counselling components of the curriculum. Teachers purposely related the academic courses to the students' personal lives and also tried to incorporate popular topics of the day into their courses. If a particular course was not working with a group of students the teacher changed the format. Few teachers at Total Education had teaching certificates and even those who did were relatively new to the profession so such courses as literature, mathematics, and psychology required a great deal of preparation.

Total Education offered students a variety of practical courses intended to promote success in school and everyday life. A course called Going to College featured field trips to university and college campuses. In Study Skills students learned outlining, skimming, researching, spelling, reading graphs and charts, using an index, note taking, filling out forms and applications, writing letters, and using the dictionary.[112] In a course called Life Skills students were taught how to find a place to live, how to get a job, how to handle money, how to set goals, and how to practise good health and nutrition. Each topic integrated a wide variety of activities, information, and skills. One year the activities included exploring different neighbourhoods, meeting with landlords, visiting food outlets, writing application letters, role playing job interviews, and preparing a school luncheon. Students received lectures on anatomy, medical clinic services, and cooking techniques, and debated the merits of various diets. In addition, outside resource people gave presentations on housing policy, tenants' rights, job training programmes, labour history, and social class. Another practical course called How To Survive In Your Native Land presented activities designed to help students learn basic everyday skills. Some of these were: "Open a bank account; visit the law courts, be an apprentice for a day, find out what Canada Manpower can do for you, plan a trip to a foreign country, involve yourself in an election, learn a new craft or art, list the city's social agencies, write to your M.P., investigate renting living accommodations." A course in "living on your own" and "co-operative living" was designed for independent students.

A course developed in 1974 called Workshop was open to any student "who wants work experience or who wants to improve his/her job skills." Students were placed in volunteer positions in the community. Course topics included "creative job search," unions, employers' and employees' rights, job creation, "living on and off the land," and "living on your own." Field trips were also a major component of the programme as well as films, discussions, and compiling a "working world information book."[113]

The school also offered several courses in sensitivity training, relationships, and sexuality. The sensitivity and awareness group engaged in trust exercises, bio-energetics, movement, focusing and concentration, massage, chanting, communication games, self-expression, sensory exercises, exploration of fears, fantasy, self-awareness, and expression of emotion. Total Education took sex education seriously and supplied students with information on sexuality and birth control as well as "principles of sexual well-being." Teachers and students also discussed relationships, self-confidence, motivation, and personal problems. For example, the Art of Flying course description stated: "In this course we will investigate the idea that we often make life a lot more difficult for ourselves than it has to be. We will consider how we tend to undervalue ourselves and , consequently, accept relationships in our work, family, and friends that are a lot less enjoyable and creative than they could be."[114]

Total Education had a political commitment to social change. Many staff members wanted to do more than merely help students adjust to a society they believed required radical change. As the staff saw it, the school system their students were escaping was symptomatic of wider problems in Canadian society. This political component was built in to several courses and in 1975/76 a course called "Living in a Capitalist Society" was offered. Topics included the nature of capitalism, class and inequality, alienation and work, alienation and the schools, alienation and the family, commodity fetishism (consumerism), international capitalism, and alternatives.

What made Total Education and subsequent alternative schools distinct was the strong rehabilitation objective. Skill levels varied widely and almost half of the students had significant

reading problems. Teachers structured their courses to accommodate a wide range of abilities. The often untrained English teachers had to be flexible and imaginative. One teacher remembers a student in grade nine English who could not read or write. "I started him on comic books, then went to word recognition and whole language. Then I tried phonics which I learned from my own child's teacher!"[115] Teachers tried to interest the students in literature by making it personal: "What does it mean to you?" Students had the option of registering in an individual English tutorial working with a teacher for one to two hours per week, and a team of four teachers provided Reading and Writing Special Assistance to any student who needed it.

But by 1974 some staff members began to worry about students achieving acceptable writing standards and an English Committee was formed to think of solutions to the "English problem."[116] Committee members believed that two hours of English instruction per week was not enough. As well, the school's Standards Committee recommended that a compulsory English writing course be established at the grade eleven level as a prerequisite for grade twelve. By the mid-1970s several teachers took the lead in developing a more systematic remedial programme, somewhat like a learning assistance centre in today's mainstream schools. There was a great deal of one-to-one instruction in both English and mathematics. But remedial success continued to be slow due to sporadic attendance and inconsistent motivation, and concern about how to best meet the students' remedial needs continued to be a frequent topic of discussion. Due to the teachers' lack of expertise there was no systematic diagnosis of reading problems so students often did not receive the help they needed.

Because almost all Total Education students had been high school dropouts and many had developed a negative attitude towards learning, the teachers tried to plan courses with clear objectives and content but without making students feel frightened or overwhelmed. The mathematics course description assured students that although "regular attendance is necessary," no homework would be required and guaranteed "success to every person who participates." The Basic Guitar course description promised that "a limited amount of instruction will be given and a good time will be had by all."[117]

Total Education courses were scheduled as at any high school. School opened at 10:00 in the morning with Group meetings (see below), but even then some students were often late. Classes met one to two times per week except for mathematics which was held four times weekly. Most were scheduled for afternoons between 1:00 and 4:30 Monday to Thursday, although a few courses met in the morning and during the evening.[118] Evening classes were often held at the instructor's house. Classes were small (ten to fifteen students) and informal with a good deal of discussion, and the environment did not give rise to the kind of behavioural difficulties one might find in a regular classroom. Teachers were free to use whatever methods worked and employed a wide variety of approaches. Some teachers planned their lessons carefully while others wanted their classes to be spontaneous. As the years passed teachers became more thorough in their planning and courses were more organized and structured. One long-time staff member commented in his course evaluation in June 1976: "I greatly enjoyed attempting this approach to more structured learning at Total Ed. Having a detailed plan of activity and study, prepared in advance, had an unexpected benefit: less sleepless nights wondering what will happen the next day."[119]

Mornings were reserved for the major activity of each day which was called "Group." Each year the student body was divided into either five or six groups of approximately fifteen students each. Most Groups were led by a team of two teachers, one male and one female, and had a home base in one of the school huts. But unlike a homeroom at traditional high schools, Group meetings at Total Education formed the core of the programme and were considered the "main motivational force in the school."[120] The Group was intended to provide "a smaller unit within the school for which the student comes to feel the sense of familiarity and belonging which he has lacked in the large impersonal atmosphere of the public school."[121] Group met for two hours each morning during which a number of different activities took place including reading, writing, discussion, instruction for the upgrading of basic academic skills, physical education, and group counselling. Through their participation in Group, students received credit for English, Social Studies, Physical Education, and Guidance. English and Social Studies were taught as

integrated subjects and a good deal of attention was directed towards correcting learning disabilities. Group activities might include writing exercises, silent reading, writing poetry, current events, yoga, history or geography, playing music, and discussing personal issues. One Group leader initiated a carpentry project, and each group had weekly physical education at a Mount Pleasant Boys' Club gymnasium where they played floor hockey, volleyball, and other sports. However, because of the travelling required, motivation for physical education was low.

The Group was also the main organizing vehicle for field trips and there were numerous trips to factories, parks, the library, the art gallery, the Vancouver museum, the Children's Hospital, plays, concerts, or the White Spot for lunch. There were Group breakfasts and dinners, shopping trips, and parties. There were so many trips around the community that the school's two vans were in constant use and had to be reserved in advance. Some groups went hiking or camping and one group spent a snowy week camping in the Black Tusk meadows during November.[122] As well, each group spent several weekends per year at the school's rented farm on Bowen Island providing the students an opportunity "to get to know each other through the experience of living together for a short time."[123]

Organization of the student body into core groups began during the second year when enrollment had increased to seventy students. It was a way to retain the personal contact between student and teacher that the staff believed was so essential to student success. Group was the foundation of the counselling programme. Students in each group were assigned to one of the two staff members for individual counselling sessions. Each counsellor had eight to ten students and met with them once a week for a one hour session. Staff also made home visits and, where possible, worked with the families of students to teach conflict resolution and problem solving.

Each group had a different character which reflected the needs and interests of the students and the teachers. Students were placed in groups according to a combination of age, academic skill level, and personal growth needs. In 1973/74 one group concentrated on basic reading and writing skills while in a second group, designed for students who needed less "structure" and less "intensive study of English," writing was approached as a "tool for the

expression of ideas arising from their studies in other areas." A third group emphasized "experiential learning" and personal growth in such areas as decision making, responsibility for actions, and awareness of emotional needs. In this group students evaluated their own progress. Another group was composed of students completing grade twelve who were older, more self-directed, and often living on their own with part-time jobs. This group attempted to encourage a sense of "independence, responsibility, and self-confidence." A fifth group was composed of students on a work experience programme, and concentrated on "interaction skills" such as listening to others, focus and concentration, sensitivity to others, and fulfilling commitments.[124] The following year the five Groups emphasized Basic Skills, Motivation, Graduating Skills, Social Skills, and Work Experience.

Topics covered in Group sessions were a mix of academic and practical. Some examples are: prehistory, mythology, racism, employment, personality, history of Vancouver, adolescence, newspapers, ecology, poetry, the family, films, sociological surveys, comparative religion, the individual and society, government and war, logic, art and crafts, growing up male and female, personal experience in literature and psychology, resources, survival skills, nutrition, leisure, organic gardening, and the limits of science.[125] Students discussed aboriginal history, labour movements, the depression, automobile repair, utopias, pollution and pesticides, the report of the LeDain Commission on drug use, Eastern religious works, guerilla warfare, student protest, social issues, contemporary therapy and sexuality, and the lives of rich and poor people. The English and Social Studies components emphasized the literature and history of British Columbia and students researched assignments at the Vancouver Archives. Each group also covered a unit on education in which students read many of the popular books of the day on alternative schooling by such authors as Jonathan Kozol, James Herndon, John Holt, Paul Goodman, Herbert Kohl, A.S. Neill, and George Leonard. Group topics often had a different focus than would have been found in the public school system, emphasizing relevance, practicality, political content, and organization around themes. All the teachers tried to integrate academic and personal growth activities during Group sessions and leaders chose curriculum content they thought would interest

the students. Some groups worked on special projects such as creating a school newspaper.

One of the major aims of Group sessions was to improve the students' English skills through regular reading and writing assignments. Students read and discussed works from *Canterbury Tales* to *The Ecstacy of Rita Joe*, short stories, novels, essays, newspaper articles, Pauline Johnson's legends, and practical books such as *Edible Plants of B.C.* or *How to Build a Log Cabin.* Even more time was spent on improving writing skills through short assignments, journal writing, letters, book reports, occasional research papers, creative stories, and short practical subjects such as "Describe your Job Interview." Students also did a good deal of writing about personal problems, feelings, identity, and sexuality. Because of the wide range of student dispositions and abilities, teachers could not use the same methods with everybody. Some covered such basic writing skills as sentence structure, paragraph outlines, and using the dictionary. After 1974 the reading teacher would join each group for several weeks to do assessments. The goal was functional literacy for everyone. The effectiveness of the writing projects varied widely but most teachers reported an improvement in students' writing and some students expressed more enthusiasm for reading.

Personal growth was achieved through discussion of personal issues, sensitivity and awareness exercises, movement, and discussion of life skills including health and nutrition, how to find and maintain a place to live, and how to find a job and keep it. There was in-depth discussion about personal emotional issues such as dating and sexuality, gender roles, family relationships, and drug use. Students were asked to comment on such questions as: "What do you feel a member of the opposite sex notices about you? What do they expect of you on a date? How would you discourage someone who wanted to make it with you? What would parents say if you were pregnant?"[126] Therapeutic activities included Gestalt Therapy, sensitivity and awareness exercises, communication games, sharing feelings, group journals, breathing and body exercises, and peer group feedback.. The aim of these sessions was to facilitate growth in confidence, trust, tolerance, communication, conflict resolution, expression of emotion, awareness of how others feel, ability to make decisions, and the ability to work and plan independently.

Group sessions also sought to discuss relevant issues such as commitment, how to criticize and compliment others, self-defeating behaviour, interpersonal skills, punctuality, developing a positive self-image, and realistic long-range personal and vocational goals.

Most teachers believed the Group organization to be a success. Some students reported that they liked coming to school, others found a new enthusiasm for reading, and some expressed increased confidence in learning. Some teachers reported that students did more reading and writing than they expected. On the other hand, some students did as little as possible and attendance was always a struggle. Group leaders were disappointed when students did not show up consistently or failed to follow through on their agreements due to being wrapped up in their own problems. Some teachers felt limited by their lack of skill or experience in counselling or remedial work.[127] Others believed that an unrealistic workload, too few staff for effective counselling, a lack of adequate curriculum resources, and little in the way of outside support services hampered their ability. The school received little help from outside agencies during the 1970s except for the Metropolitan Public Health Service which regularly sent staff to assist with health needs, and physician Dr. Danica Holt (a member of the original Board of Directors) who volunteered at the school from time to time. Some students were so needy that Group leaders allowed them to stay at their own homes when they had nowhere else to go. Teachers worked long hours due to the nature of the students and many found their dual role as teachers and counsellors a strain.[128]

Work Experience

From the earliest days, a major aim of Total Education was to provide students with work experience and the development of skills for engaging in meaningful work. In June 1973 the school, under Larry Haberlin's leadership, initiated the Local Employment Assistance Programme (L.E.A.P) in conjunction with the federal Canada Manpower department which provided a grant of $71,000 to place students in part time jobs. The Special Programmes Division (later the Job

Creation Branch) provided two L.E.A.P. co-ordinators, Doug Cochran and Glynn Weyler, who worked with the school staff to place students in appropriate part-time jobs. When Mr. Haberlin left Total Education in 1974, Mr. Cochran took his place as a regular member of the staff. He was born in Alberta, grew up in North Vancouver, earned a teaching certificate from Simon Fraser University and considered himself both a "political person and a countercultural person."[129]

This programme was particularly significant to Total Education because a substantial number of students were living on their own and needed employment. Furthermore, the staff believed that holding down a job would be highly beneficial to young people with low self-esteem. Finally, the social service projects which made up the bulk of the programme fit perfectly with the school's philosophy of contributing to a better world. The goals of the programme were: to employ young people who are presently unemployed; to help students develop a sense of self-esteem through involvement in worthwhile and productive projects; to provide students with work experience, job training, skill development, and employment references; to aid young people in setting realistic and rewarding vocational and life goals for the future, to develop responsibility and reliability in the participants, and to assist students in the completion of their grade twelve educational programme through a work-study approach. In addition, the programme hoped to "aid in the development of the community surrounding the school in co-operation with existing groups and agencies in an effort to make the area a more liveable and satisfying place to be."[130]

The programme organizers hoped students would develop positive attitudes towards work and themselves through helping others. Accordingly, most of the work experience positions were with "community oriented" projects and service agencies such as daycare centres, youth projects, and neighbourhood houses. Students could provide a real service to understaffed programmes such as daycare centres and several organizations asked for replacement workers when students' terms were over. However, students were also placed in private businesses, particularly those of an "alternative" nature. Students were placed according to their financial need, their school schedule, their interests, future goals, and personal qualities, and the needs of the organization.

Eighteen students were placed in the first four months of the programme. All enjoyed the

work, fifteen had a positive attitude on the job, fourteen improved their self-concept, fifteen grew from the experience, sixteen learned useful skills, most were clearer about their vocational goals, and all improved their academic performance, according to an interim evaluation.[131] Only two left their positions. By June 1974 forty-one students had worked on the L.E.A.P. project, from five to twenty-five hours per week. The next year the programme placed twenty-three students, aged sixteen to nineteen, in jobs throughout the community. Students were expected to carry a full load of academic courses in addition to their L.E.A.P. placement. The school's flexible scheduling, tutoring sessions, and academic and personal counselling helped to facilitate the work programme. In addition, teachers encouraged L.E.A.P. students to explore topics in their courses that might be more relevant to their work experience.

The list of participating organizations and businesses was extensive. It included: Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, Greenpeace, Nature's Path Health Foods, People's Garage, Riley Park Youth Project, Co-op Radio, Urban Design Centre, Fairview Information Centre, Children's Aid Home Care Service, Society for Pollution and Environmental Control (S.P.E.C.), Fed-Up Food Co-operative, Kits House Adult Drop-In, Intermedia Press, Canadian Ceramics, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Taped Books, Vancouver City Savings, Credit Union, Kitsilano Information Centre, Kitsilano Community Centre, Crisis Centre, Women's Centre, a housing registry, an all women's repair garage, Vancouver Resources Board, Bayview Community School Learning Assistance Centre, Selkirk Elementary School, Step-Up Alternative School, and six daycare centres. Most of these were alternative service agencies or businesses but some mainstream organizations also participated including the Y.M.C.A., the U.B.C. Agriculture Department, Sunnyhill Children's Hospital, Richmond Animal Hospital, North Shore Cable Television, North Shore Shopper newspaper, the Video Inn, two florists, a hair stylist, Richard Pender Books, and even the Vancouver School Board office.

Most participating agencies considered the student workers valuable assests. At the Fairview Information Centre two students helped build an adventure playground in an empty lot, conduct a survey of residents, plan community services, and produce a community newsletter.

The co-ordinators of the centre wrote of the students: "Their energies enriched and gave direction to many of our efforts concerning community planning and developing much needed community services." The student with the Children's Aid Home Care Service helped needy families with housework and looking after children. Her supervisor wrote: "She has been very reliable and does a super job; there is a good possibility that we will hire her." The supervisor at St. Michael's Daycare wrote that the student workers showed maturity and dependability. At Intermedia the student learned a variety of publishing and graphic arts skills and was "really an asset" to the company.[132]

Students learned a great variety of skills in their placements. At S.P.E.C. the student workers learned many skills while doing office work and helping with research and other projects. At the Kitsilano Information Centre the student provided information on housing and medical clinics, while the student at the Crisis Centre worked on the telephone line. A student worker with an interest in mechanics learned a great deal as a mechanic's helper at the People's Garage and three students worked at the Fed-Up Food Co-op. The student worker in the Riley Park Youth Project helped to develop a recreational programme for directionless neighbourhood kids. One student worked in the bakery of Nature's Path Health Food Store. Several students learned office and public relations skills at the Greenpeace and Kitsilano Neighbourhood House offices and students working in small private business learned a great deal about business management and the operation of a retail store. One student taught basic skills to children on probation at Step-Up School, a student interested in botany worked at the U.B.C. Greenhouse, one student learned drafting and design at the Urban Design Centre, and a student at the Sunnyhill Children's Hospital provided occupational therapy, play therapy, and tutoring to children.

Most placements were successful and students found the work experience a valuable programme. The student/workers were paid a regular, though low, salary. The experience gave them an opportunity to be self supporting, to serve a valuable function in the community, and to receive training and job experience. Having meaningful work gave them an incentive to "better" themselves and one student commented that the job "helped me feel good about myself."[133]

Students also cited personal gains from the work experience such as the development of a capability to relate to people of different ages and backgrounds and the ability to seek out jobs. For many students working motivated them to study, particularly in areas related to their job.[134] One of several students at Co-op Radio, considering a career in broadcasting, wrote that she was "grateful for the opportunity to explore broadcasting, to develop existing skills as well as acquire new ones."[135] Several students were so successful that they were eventually offered permanent employment by these organizations.

Teachers found the programme "particularly useful for students who live on their own and need the money in order to complete their schooling, as well as beneficial and educational for all students, preparing them for the difficult task of working and living on their own." Staff members also noted growth in the students' responsibility, consistency, enthusiasm, and sense of usefulness as well as the beneficial effect of "real life experience in expanding students' awareness of their society."[136] Mr. Haberlin believed the programme's main strengths were "the involvement of young people in creative and interesting work situations and the development of independence and control over their own lives." The supportive job situations resulted in increased motivation, confidence, and a better grasp of their abilities.[137] The few unsuccessful placements were usually caused by the student's unsuitability for, or lack of interest in, a particular kind of work, and some students would have benefitted from a greater variety of employers, particularly in the trades.[138] The programme evaluation indicated that the great majority of L.E.A.P. graduates were working or attending training programmes or colleges. It cited many successes:

> "David" had many problems at home and in the regular school system before attending Total Education. He moved out of his home and became involved in the drug and night-time scene in Vancouver. Beginning at Total Education he was frequently late or absent and was not completing assignments or living up to commitments. David's involvement with L.E.A.P. marked the beginning of a change in attitude for him. He began to take school more seriously, to attend more frequently, and to complete assignments. The counsellor noticed him moving away from his night-life involvement and taking an interest in developing the skill he was training at. He responded to the job positively, being punctual, responsible, and energetic. The job is of great value to David, bringing more depth to his relations with others and school.

> "Lois" has attended Total Education for two years. She has always been a bright student. However, she has seldom worked to her potential. She seemed to be bored with school prior to her involvement with L.E.A.P. and had little direction or conception of her capabilities. She is working with children in a professional capacity and thoroughly enjoys it. Her supervisor is enthusiastic about her work and her counsellor feels that her job is "the most exciting thing in her life." The job has provided a realistic focus for her studies as she now intends to go on to university and train further in the field she now works in.[139]

In addition to arranging work experience for Total Education students, the L.E.A.P. organizers initiated an "Outreach Programme" which served other unemployed youth referred by Canada Manpower or youth workers with other agencies. Some of these young people were on the school's waiting list. The outreach staff provided vocational and educational counselling, helped the young people upgrade basic employment and job application skills, and in many cases found appropriate volunteer, training, or employment positions.

After three years the funding for the L.E.A.P. programme expired in 1976. The staff believed that if a comparable replacement was not found "a major component of our educational programme would be deleted" resulting in "a blow to the school." Students who supported themselves would drop out of school, and the counselling, life skills, and community relations programmes would all suffer. One teacher feared an increase in drug use and police contact.[140] In order to continue the work experience programme, the school opened a restaurant on Fourth Avenue near Burrard Street called "Theodora's." Doug Cochran mortgaged his house in order to raise the necessary capital of $20,000. The operation was staffed by part-time student workers, a few full-time non-student staff, and several co-ordinators from the Total Education staff. Having their own business gave the school more flexibility in placing students, and a labour intensive restaurant was ideal. It also provided students with experience in real life workplace situations. For example, although the project organizers wanted the restaurant to run as a democratic co-operative with all staff having control over their working conditions, it was also essential that the business be run efficiently and not lose money since any losses would have a direct impact on school programmes.[141] The staff also considered the restaurant project

appropriate because it provided a vehicle by which students could learn about nutritious food. During the late seventies a large percentage of Total Education students gained valuable work experience at the restaurant and Theodora's continued to operate for six years.[142] The work experience programme was one of the most successful aspects of Total Education and was years ahead of its time.

Outdoor and environmental education was another significant component of the Total Education programme. In 1971 the school rented a twenty acre farm on Bowen Island from Jim Carter for a nominal fee. The staff engaged two caretakers, Peter Frinton (environmentalist, biologist, and outdoor educator) and Carol Robb. The farm provided an opportunity for personal retreats and for students to learn building skills, gardening, chopping wood, and making fires. The "rustic" facilities were also conducive to survival education.[143] The school also used the farm for regular weekend trips for group bonding–a place "for staff and students to get to know each other through the experience of living together for a short time in an informal setting."[144] Individual students or small groups were permitted to stay at the farm for periods of up to one week and the farm also took in a few students with more serious mental health problems from time to time. The farm hosted a conference on alternative education in 1973. Farm visits were popular and teachers and students had to reserve their times well in advance. In addition to trips to the farm, the school took numerous groups of students on hiking and camping adventures to nearby recreational areas. These included skiing and snowshoeing excursions, hikes on Black Tusk, camping trips to Alice Lake, and in 1975 forty-five students spent a week in a winter lodge near Whistler Mountain.[145]

When the Bowen Island farm became unavailable to Total Education in early 1975, the school decided to look for a rural base with more property and farther away from the city, where students would stay for longer periods of time. In early 1975 the school rented an eighty acre farm near Powell Lake on the Sunshine Coast. The farm had been the site of one of the better known 1960s-style communes in British Columbia formed by a group of Americans who had come to Canada to escape Vietnam, pollution, and materialism. A principal member of the group

was Mark Vonnegut, whose father was a well-known writer. In *The Eden Express* the younger Vonnegut described his personal voyage through commune and "hippie" life in rural British Columbia.[146] When the commune disbanded, another of its members, Peter Seixas, went to Vancouver and after a year as a child care worker with the Children's Aid Society joined the staff of Total Education in September 1974. Mr. Seixas had grown up in New York and graduated from Swarthmore, a small liberal arts college with a tradition of political activist students. He taught for a year in a black neighbourhood of Philadelphia before deciding to leave the United States for the forests of British Columbia. His original idea had been to establish an integrated city-based and country-based educational programme. He believed the Powell Lake farm would suit the school's needs well, and arranged for the school to lease the property. Mr. Seixas was a strong supporter of the farm programme and visited whenever he could with his school group or during the summers. He remained at Total Education until 1979.

The school hired Peter and Linda Scheiber in the spring of 1975 to run the farm programme. Mr. Scheiber, originally from the United States, had spent several years in Argenta during the 1950s and knew John and Helen Stevenson during the years when they were preparing to launch the Argenta Friends School. The Scheibers had extensive experience in teaching and in rural/wilderness living. Under their leadership the old farmhouse was renovated and students built a large log house to serve as the boys' dormitory and a cabin which became the girls' residence. Other building projects included a kiln, a sauna and bathhouse, fencing, a solar-heated kitchen and greenhouse, a waterwheel, two beehives, and a log house to serve as the Scheibers' residence. In addition to the strenuous building work, students looked after goats, chickens, geese, and ponies, and worked in the vegetable garden, orchard, and pastures. Students also had time to do academic work, particularly literature, writing, drama, and ecology.[147]

The Powell Lake farm complemented the regular programme at Total Education by providing students with an opportunity for an intensive personal and group experience. The farm programme had three major objectives for visiting students: the acquisition of practical rural and wilderness skills including food production, construction, caring for animals, and maintenance of

tools and machinery; the completion of remedial school work without the distractions present in the city; and personal growth in such areas as responsibility, self-reliance, decision-making, perseverance, and self-esteem. In addition the farm accepted a limited number of students for long-term stays who needed a "more intense environment" than the school could offer, as an alternative to "institutionalization."[148] The wilderness and personal growth goals of this outdoor programme had elements in common with earlier Progressive and Romantic schools.

Student and Teacher Evaluation

The therapeutic schools of the 1970s were subject to a great deal more scrutiny and accountability than the Progressive or Romantic schools of the 1960s. Because Total Education received public funding it was expected to evaluate and report on its performance regularly. This was complicated by the fact that funding was provided by a number of different agencies, each desiring a different kind of evaluation. Planning for and carrying out programme evaluation was time consuming for staff members. In the spring of 1973 the school produced an annual report for the Vancouver School Board reporting on all aspects of the 1972/73 year. When Human Resources began funding the school in 1973/74, the Department (in a joint project with the Education Department) financed a thorough evaluation of the Total Education programme under the auspices of the Educational Research Institute of British Columbia. The result was a massive document of over three hundred pages completed in 1974. The same year the school completed a seventy page internal evaluation of the L.E.A.P. programme that had begun the previous fall.

Although the teachers were committed to regular staff evaluation, they could not agree on how it should be done. Staff members attended many meetings and workshops generating and assessing goals and outcomes, analyzing hard data regarding attendance and academic achievement as well as "soft" data about student attitudes and personal growth, and producing many reports about how best to carry out ongoing evaluation. In general, the staff preferred anecdotal and "self-evaluation" to outside reports and statistical surveys. The teachers tried

different forms of staff evaluation from evaluating each other to lengthy self-evaluations of every course at the end of the year. By 1973/74 teachers wrote lengthy self-evaluations of every course and Group they taught. Still, how to evaluate the programme remained an ongoing discussion item and in 1974 the teachers agreed that "we require criteria for evaluation of staff."[149]

Although school district officials encouraged Total Education staff to keep more detailed records and to spend more time in concrete assessment of student abilities and academic needs, the teachers during the school's early years preferred informal student assessment and evaluation. These individual assessments occupied staff for many hours. "Initially each student was evaluated by one staff member who was that student's counsellor. Then, each reporting period the entire staff discussed the academic and personal progress of every student in the school. There were three or four days of very long meetings at which each student would be discussed in detail."[150] Students and courses were evaluated as many as five times per year since most courses were organized in seven week blocks. Many staff found the evaluations excessive.[151]

Staff were divided about how formal student evaluation ought to be. In a small school setting where an attitude of trust prevailed, informal feedback could be effective. As Phil Knaiger wrote in the school's Annual Report in 1973: "Evaluation occurs on an almost daily basis. When class size is small and contact between student and teacher is informal, evaluation can be honest, direct, and prompt."[152] But, although detailed record keeping was not a priority for most Total Education staff, some teachers did try to keep an account of individual student participation and progress through a particular programme. For example, Mr. Knaiger kept records on each student in his mathematics classes including attendance, the student's achievement in each class session, a comment on attitude or work habits, and a comment on future needs. This data was then used to ascertain whether the student would receive credit for the course.[153] But by 1976 one staff member argued that the school's goals and objectives for students were too obscure to prevent any meaningful evaluation of whether the goals had been met: "This lack of clarity leads to many undesirable effects such as staff doubts concerning whether they have done enough for student A. Not the least of these horrid side effects are the long, complex, and exhausting staff

meetings where one or two 'problem' students are discussed ad nauseum most often to little constructive use."[154]

The amount of work required for credit in particular courses varied widely from simple attendance or participation in class, to the completion of a journal, notebook, book report, term paper, or major project, to the completion of weekly assignments or all daily assignments (such as in math class). At the end of the year students would negotiate with teachers about exactly what they would have to do to make up missed assignments in order to receive credit for courses and eventually for graduation.[155] Some students signed contracts for work to be done. Students received report cards indicating credit or no credit for courses and occasional short comments. For the most part credit for courses was at the discretion of the teacher and, as one teacher expressed it, "If a student is working at apparent capacity, I give credit."[156] Another teacher suggests that "flexibility was the key to meeting students' needs."[157] But by 1974 some staff members expressed concern about the ambiguous requirements in some courses, and teachers agreed to write out clear requirements necessary for obtaining credit in their courses.[158]

Students also did regular self-assessment. They evaluated their progress in day-to-day tasks such as "come to group on time, complete my assignments, speak during discussions, respect the rights of others." Students also wrote detailed responses to such personal growth questions as "Do you find it easier to speak to people in small groups? Do you get along better with your family? Are you more honest in your feelings? Do you find reasons to like yourself?" and wrote short essays about their development in a variety of areas from sexuality to appreciation of other people's points of view. Students also evaluated their courses and the entire programme regularly.

Conclusion

Total Education changed over the years to become, by the 1980s, more structured, "a little more like a regular school,"[159] and catering mostly to remedial students lacking in basic academic skills. The middle class dropouts who populated the school in its first few years had long since found their way back to the regular school system as mainstream schools became less authoritarian. Total Education continues to limit the number of students with emotional problems, but accepts some with behavioual difficulties. A number of former "free school" students from the Barker School, Saturna Island, and Vallican Whole School attended Total Education and other rehabilitation high schools during the late 1970s. But the school's counterculture and political activist days are long past and the staff collective began to break down by the end of the 1970s. The school district wanted all staff members in defined roles with distinct salaries, and salary sharing came to an end in 1982. Although some former staff and students are still friends, the all-encompassing community is now a memory.

In 1984 Total Education was finally offered a new facility in a former school annex just east of Main Street. The school is now designated as a senior alternative school offering grades eleven and twelve. Most students graduate and the school continues to provide a service considered valuable by the school district. Most of the original staff have long since moved on to mainstream schools or other professions. Phil Knaiger, considered by many to be a staff leader for much of the 1970s, left the school in 1976 but still teaches in the alternative school system at Ideal School. Charles Hill and Bonnie Picard remain at Total Education to this day.

Because so many students came and went through Total Education, some for short periods of time, it is difficult to form more than an impressionistic idea of how successful the school was in enhancing the educational, vocational, and personal prospects of its students. There is little doubt that most students appreciated the school's informal non-threatening atmosphere. One student commented to a *Province* reporter: "I like it here because there's a more friendly relationship with the teachers than you can have when there's someone standing

at the front of a classroom telling people what to do."[160] The reporter continued: "Students said they like the school's warm and relaxed atmosphere and felt they learn more by not being told they must accomplish certain goals within specific times."[161] Typical student replies to a 1974 evaluation questionnaire mentioned the "relaxed atmosphere," the "comfortable environment," and "learning without pressure." Others noted that the school helped them "learn to survive on their own," while others simply appreciated the opportunity to complete school. As one student expressed it: "Total Ed is trying to give students a second chance at a high school education."[162]

Almost without exception, former staff members believe students benefitted from their Total Education experience. The following are some of their comments:

> Most of the students are leading normal productive lives. We had some enormous successes. Total Education provided an environment that was safe. Students I meet say "people listened to us, we mattered."
>
> We worked intensively with a small number of kids; we really had a positive effect on those kids. We made a difference in some people's lives.
>
> The school's success was due to small groups, the counselling, relevant courses, an integrated curriculum, a co-operative committed staff.
>
> Emotional and social progress was the main goal. The academic component was available to those kids who wanted it. Other kids were fragile; they just needed a place of acceptance. We held students until they got over hurdles in their lives.
>
> It was good for many students and allowed them to graduate. Many would have had difficulty bouncing around mainstream schools.[163]

Most of the teachers would have had difficulty teaching in the regular system at that time. They found their Total Education experience enormously significant:

> Most enjoyable work experience that I've had. The most important formative experience of my life.
>
> A great experience, great friends, a satisfying communal work situation. I was in my twenties. They were exciting times, you could really make a change.
>
> Everybody was passionately interested in what they were teaching. It was an exciting place to be.

> I can't tell you how many kids I meet who come up to me who tell me how well their lives are going, all these functional adults. We had some really committed staff who were able to exercise their own power and gifts. I got an experience that is a gift of a lifetime. In many ways it was the best experience of my life.[164]

A problem common to most alternative schools was the difficulty in sustaining the personal energy and commitment to keep them going. It was many years before teachers were earning equitable professional salaries. They were working with demanding students, with few resources at their disposal, and with little counselling or remedial expertise. One former teacher refers to working at Total Education as "a young person's job" and another describes it as a "recipe for burnout with that kind of intensity."[165]

The number of students enrolled in grade twelve was small during the early years but a significant number of Total Education students graduated. Two students received their grade twelve graduation in 1971[166] with that number rising to six in 1972, sixteen in 1973, and thirteen students in 1974.[167] A minority of 20% to 30% of these graduates went on to higher education while most of the rest found employment. In 1973, for example, three of sixteen graduates enrolled in post-secondary programmes (college, art school), while eleven found jobs. Of thirty-four non-graduating students who did not return to Total Education after the 1972/73 year, two found their way to post-secondary programmes, nineteen found employment, and three returned to mainstream public schools.[168] Students ended up in all walks of life and circumstances. A few went to university, one earning a Ph.D., many became artists and musicians, one a nationally successful female vocalist, one is the director of the Vancouver Film Festival, another an administrator with a social service agency, another hosts a television programme on computers, another a successful newspaper journalist specializing in environmental issues. Some students were "free spirits" and some endured ongoing problems with drugs. As one former teacher puts it: "There were some failures, some casualties, but most kids have made out pretty well, and have decent jobs and families."[169]

The major shortcoming of Total Education was that the academic programme was not sufficiently challenging. As two teachers reported in their 1974 Group evaluation: "In an attempt

to not over-pressure students our expectations were sometimes too low; many of the kids were capable of far more than they did."[170] One former teacher acknowledges that he would emphasize "more of a concentration on basics if I had to do over again"[171] and another says "we didn't do a great job with the lower income kids."[172] For students who had the ability or the desire to do challenging academic work it was a difficult environment. Several Total Education students from the late 1970s recall the work being too easy.[173] One student who attended the school in 1971 remembers: "I went to Total Ed. because I wasn't happy in public school. I worked through math and science on my own after setting the programme with the teacher. There was lots of one-to-one but you really had to be self-motivated. Most kids didn't have that. I think it was too informal."[174] Another student at Total Education from 1971 to 1973 reflects on her experience:

> I have mixed feelings about it. I stuck it out but I wasn't really happy. At first it was a great thing for me. But it lacked focus. People were there because they were vulnerable. People's lives were already in chaos, they didn't need chaos in school. Academics and exams should have been highly stressed. It was a great idea to allow people that freedom but there was no way for learning to occur.[175]

The 1974 school evaluation concluded that academic goals were not emphasized as much as they could have been. The staff belief in the close relationship between student self-image and student attitude towards learning led the school to offer many courses "directed towards increasing self-awareness and self-confidence." The report observes that such courses were very successful in "developing positive attitudes toward learning by offering topics and materials that interest students." But, the report concludes:

> The development of academic skills is sometimes hampered by the lack of pressure placed on students, and by the strong orientation in many courses toward the discussion of personal experiences. Total Education courses are more effective in promoting personal growth than in preparing students for future academic work.[176]

Nevertheless, students rated the skill and effectiveness of their teachers highly and 60% of the students evaluated their experience at Total Education as "very much a success."[177] The trusting relationship between students and staff remained the biggest strength of the programme

and students were "confident that staff were aware of their educational and social needs."[178] Some students even found the school academically inspiring. According to the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood newspaper, one student who had recently decided to go to university said the "close informal communication fostered by the school has been instrumental to her feeling of success and new interest in education."[179]

A common difficulty for alternative schools was the tendency for students with learning and emotional problems to gravitate there. There simply were not enough resources in the mainstream educational system to meet their needs. Some Total Education teachers were aware of this problem, as Larry Haberlin expressed it to a journalist in 1974:

> Alternative schools can too easily become dumping grounds for the kids who can't make it in the regular school system. [Alternative schools] can be regarded as solutions to the system's problems because they effectively remove the kids who don't fit in and make things seem to run smoothly. But they're really short-term stop-gap solutions because the problems don't lie in the kids that fail but in the schools that let them fail. Alternative schools won't solve the system's problems until the regular schools start applying the lessons we learn here. That's a lot of what we're here for."[180]

Total Education School marked a turning point in the alternative schools movement. Whereas the Romantic schools of the late 1960s had been almost entirely a product of the counterculture, therapeutic or rehabilitation schools like Total Education served a wide cross-section of alienated youth. It was followed within two years by several similar schools that were addressing an undeniable social need. Within five years of Total Education's founding both the public school system and the provincial welfare system had entered into the alternative schools arena in a major way. Public education in British Columbia would not be the same thereafter. As one Total Education teacher commented in 1974: "Everyone should have the right to pass. No one at all should ever be allowed to fail. But they do, and they shouldn't."[181] Students once ignored or feared by the system were invited back and offered opportunities to succeed. Total Education, "The One True School," designed to educate anyone, played a significant role in encouraging this change.[182]

NOTES

1. Dan Mullen, "Dropout school just too popular," *The Province*, February 5, 1972, p. 15. According to the article 1,582 students left Vancouver schools during 1970/71.
2. Ron Eckert, personal interview, October 28, 1996.
3. Larry Haberlin, personal interview, November 12, 1996.
4. Dan and Cathy Meakes, personal interviews, April 23 and April 28, 1997.
5. Bishop Jim Cruikshank, personal interview, April 25, 1999.
6. Larry Haberlin, personal interview, November 12, 1996.
7. Valerie Hodge, personal interview, March 8, 1998.
8. Cathy Meakes, personal interview, April 28, 1997.
9. Jim Carter was an early supporter of innovative programmes within the Vancouver School District. For more on his role see Chapter 12.
10. Vancouver Society for Total Education, Financial Statement, August 1971, Registrar of Companies, Victoria..
11. Susan Leslie, Jane Rosettis, and David Kaufman, *Total Education: An Evaluation* (Department of Education, Department of Human Resources, Educational Research Institute of British Columbia, May 1974) p. 4.
12. Ron Eckert, personal interview, October 28, 1996.
13. Dan Meakes had been a students in Arts I, an innovative interdisciplinary programme at U.B.C.
14. Ron Eckert, personal interview, October 28, 1996.
15. Valerie Hodge, personal interview, March 8, 1998.
16. Dan Meakes, personal interview, April 23, 1997.
17. Dan Meakes, personal interview, April 23, 1997.
18. Dan Meakes, personal interview, April 23, 1997.
19. The Carcross community was created on the site of an abandoned residential school. See J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 144.
20. Dan Meakes, personal interview, April 23, 1997.
21. For more on Alf Clinton, see Chapter 12.
22. Vancouver School Board, Education Committee, minutes, August 24, 1971.
23. Vancouver School Board, Trustees Meeting, minutes, September 13, 1971.
24. Vancouver School Board, Education Committee, minutes, August 15, 1971.
25. The school shared the Twelfth and Cambie site with the Vancouver Music School and the "Rainbow City Hall," an alternative shadow city government.
26. Leslie, Rosettis, and Kaufman, *Total Education: An Evaluation*, May 1974, p. 8.
27. Charles Hill, personal interview, January 8, 1997.
28. Phil Knaiger, personal interview, October 24, 1996.
29. Virginia Eckert, personal interview, April 15, 1999.
30. Annie Simmons, personal interview, April 16, 1997.
31. Liz Cochran, personal interview, April 11, 1997.

32. Bonnie Picard, personal interview, April 25, 1997.
33. *Vancouver Sun*, May 16, 1974, p. 72.
34. Phil Knaiger, personal interview, October 24, 1996.
35. Doug Cochran, personal interview, April 11, 1997.
36. Ron Eckert, personal interview, October 28, 1996.
37. Ron Eckert, personal interview, October 28, 1997.
38. Valerie Hodge, personal interview March 8, 1998.
39. Dan Mullen, "Dropout school just too popular," *The Province*, February 5, 1972, p. 15.
40. School enrollment list, September 1973.
41. Department of Education, Teacher's Report of Enrollment, June 1975.
42. Total Education Student and Staff List, September, 1975.
43. The waiting list stood at 41 in January 1973 (Journal of Phil Knaiger) and 37 on October 31, 1974, (Staff Meeting, minutes.).
44. Lesley Krueger, "Some alternatives to a world of endless defeat," *Vancouver Sun*, June 20, 1974, p. 47.
45. Vancouver Society for Total Education, "Evaluation 1975/76," p. 14.
46. Vancouver School District, Annual Report, 1973/74.
47. Leslie, Rosettis, and Kaufman, *Total Education: An Evaluation*, May 1974, pp. 83-84.
48. Phil Knaiger, personal interview, October 24, 1996.
49. Phil Knaiger, personal interview, October 24, 1996.
50. Charles Hill, personal interview, January 8, 1997.
51. Journal of Phil Knaiger, September, 1972.
52. Doug Cochran, personal interview, April 11, 1997.
53. Ginger Eckert, Bonnie Picard, Liz Cochran, personal interviews 1997.
54. Richard Neil and Liz Neil, Group Evaluation, 1973/74.
55. Total Education, Student Type Descriptions, undated.
56. Total Education, Information for Staff Applicants, undated.
57. Vancouver Society For Total Education, "Evaluation, 1975/76," p. 28.
58. Total Education, Criteria for Admission, undated.
59. Student application package, 1974/75.
60. Richard Neil, personal interview, April 20, 1999.
61. Total Education Student Withdrawals, September through January 1975.
62. Annie Simmonds, personal interview, April 16, 1997.
63. Leslie, Rosettis, and Kaufman, *Total Education: An Evaluation*, May 1974, p. xv.
64. Valerie Hodge, personal interview, March 8, 1998.
65. Larry Haberlin, personal interview, November 12, 1996.
66. Vancouver Society for Total Education, Financial Statement, August, 1972.
67. Vancouver Society for Total Education, Financial Statement, August, 1972.
68. Dan Mullen, "Dropout school just too popular," *The Province*, February 5, 1972, p.15.
69. Vancouver School Board, Education Committee, minutes, March 19, 1973.
70. "Report from the Advisory Committee to the Administrative Co-ordinating Team re Alternative Education," Education Committee, minutes, June 5, 1973.
71. Vancouver School Board, Trustees Meeting, minutes, June 18, 1973.

72. This programme was headed by Marilyn Epstein, a founder of the New School. See Chapter 12.
73. Vancouver Society for Total Education, Financial Statement, 1975.
74. Vancouver School District, Annual Report, 1973/74.
75. Journal of Phil Knaiger, November, 1973.
76. Vancouver Society for Total Education, Information for Applicants, September 1974.
77. Staff Meeting, minutes, December 1975.
78. Administrative Co-ordinating Team, "Recommendations to Education Committee," 1974.
79. Vancouver School Board, Education Committee, minutes, July 10, 1974.
80. Vancouver School Board, Trustees Meeting, minutes, July 15, 1974.
81. Society for Total Education, Annual Report, January, 1972.
82. Society for Total Education, Annual Reports, 1977-1981.
83. Valerie Hodge, personal interview, March 8, 1998.
84. Leslie, Rosettis, and Kaufman, *Total Education: An Evaluation*, May 1974, p. xiii.
85. Society for Total Education, Student Committee, Constitution, October 17, 1975.
86. Journal of Phil Knaiger, April, 1972.
87. Charles Hill, personal interview, January 8, 1997.
88. Staff Meeting, minutes, June 3, 1974.
89. Phil Knaiger was the only certified teacher on staff with a permanent V.S.B. contract.
90. Staff Meeting, minutes, June 5, 1974.
91. Staff Meeting, minutes, May, 1974.
92. Journal of Phil Knaiger, 1973.
93. School Meeting, as reported in the journal of Phil Knaiger, January, 1974.
94. Staff Meeting, minutes, November 15, 1974.
95. Doug Cochran, personal interview, April 11, 1997.
96. Annie Simmonds, personal interview, April 16, 1997.
97. Charles Hill, personal interview, January 8, 1997.
98. Society for Learning Alternatives of Greater Vancouver, Constitution and By-Laws, April, 1975; Meeting Minutes, February 2, 1976.
99. Annie Simmonds, personal interview, April 16, 1997.
100. Liz Cochran, personal interview, April 11, 1997.
101. Annie Simmonds, personal interview, April 11, 1997.
102. Vancouver School District, Annual Report, 1973/74.
103. Total Education, "Goals and Objectives," undated.
104. Vancouver Society For Total Education, "Evaluation 1975/76," p. 3.
105. Larry Haberlin, "Educational Philosophy," in "Vancouver Society For Total Education," Annual Report, 1972/73, pp. 8-11.
106. Vancouver Society for Total Education, Annual Report, 1972/73, p. 4.
107. Total Education, Course List, Fall 1973.
108. Journal of Phil Knaiger, January, 1973.
109. Total Education, Course List, Fall 1973, p. 1.
110. Total Education, Course Descriptions, September, 1974.
111. Course Evaluations, June 1974.

112. Total Education, Course Descriptions, September, 1974.
113. Total Education, Course Descriptions, September, 1974.
114. Total Education, Course List, Fall 1973, p. 7.
115. Annie Simmonds, personal interview, April 15, 1997.
116. Staff Meeting, minutes, May 22, 1974.
117. Total Education, Course List, Fall 1973, p. 3.
118. Total Education, Timetables, November 1973 and September 1974.
119. Charles Hill, Course Evaluation, June 1976.
120. Total Education, Curriculum Report, June 1974, p. 2.
121. Total Education, Curriculum Report, January 1974, p. 1.
122. Richard Neil, personal interview, April, 20, 1999.
123. Total Education, Curriculum Report, January 1974, p. 1.
124. Total Education, Curriculum Report, January 1974, pp. 2-6.
125. Total Education, Curriculum Report, June 1974, pp. 3-27.
126. Journal of Phil Knaiger, October, 1973.
127. Charles Hill, Group Evaluation, June 1975.
128. Bonnie Picard, personal interview, April 25, 1997.
129. Doug Cochran, personal interview, April 11, 1997.
130. Doug Cochran, Glynn Weyler, "The Energy of Youth: An Evaluation Report on the Local Employment Assistance Programme at Total Education School," 1975, p. 1.
131. L.E.A.P., Interim Report, December 1973, pp. 7-12. Although there is no reason to doubt the validity of this data, the report was written by the school as a funding brief.
132. Vancouver Society for Total Education, "L.E.A.P. Evaluation, December 1974," pp. 3-6.
133. Doug Cochran and Glynn Weyler, "The Energy of Youth," 1975, p. 13.
134. Interim L.E.A.P. Report, June 1974.
135. S.T.E.P. 1975, Total Education, Project Report.
136. Doug Cochran and Glynn Weyler, "The Energy of Youth," 1975, p. 15.
137. Doug Cochran and Glynn Weyler, "The Energy of Youth," 1975, p. 18.
138. Doug Cochran and Glynn Weyler, "The Energy of Youth," 1975, p. 14.
139. Doug Cochran and Glynn Weyler, "The Energy of Youth," 1975, pp. 19-20.
140. Doug Cochran and Glynn Weyler, "The Energy of Youth," 1975, p. 17.
141. Doug Cochran, "Theodora's: Not Just Grist for the Mill," in *Working Teacher* 2:3 (1979) pp.16-19.
142. Charles Hill, "A Short History of Total Education School," in *Total Education, 1980* (Yearbook), p. 3.
143. Vancouver Society for Total Education, Annual Report, 1973.
144. Leslie, Rosettis, and Kaufman, *Total Education: An Evaluation*, May 1974, p. 17.
145. Total Education, Yearbooks, 1972, 1975.
146. See Mark Vonnegut, *The Eden Express* (New York: Praeger, 1976) and Jean Barman, *The West Beyond The West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) p. 315.
147. Moira Farrow, "Everything's an adventure," *Vancouver Sun*, November 27, 1976, p. 43.
148. "A New Learning Community: Powell Lake Proposal," funding brief, pp. 2-3.
149. Staff Meeting, Minutes, June 25, 1974.

150. Peter Seixas, personal interview, April 5, 1987.
151. Staff Meeting, minutes, February, 1974.
152. Vancouver Society For Total Education, Annual Report, 1972/73, p. 12.
153. Journal of Phil Knaiger, 1973/74.
154. Charles Hill, "Total Education Goals and Objectives: Some Thoughts, June, 1976.
155. Peter Seixas, personal interview, April 5, 1987.
156. Phil Knaiger, course evaluation, 1973/74.
157. Bonnie Picard, personal interview, April 25, 1997.
158. Staff Meeting, minutes, February 1974.
159. Ron Eckert, personal interview, October 28, 1996.
160. Dan Mullen quoting student Pat Kennedy, "Dropout school just too popular," *The Province*, February 5, 1972, p. 15.
161. Dan Mullen, "Dropout school just too popular," *The Province*, February 5, 1972, p. 15.
162. Student replies to evaluation questionnaire, 1974.
163. Larry Haberlin, Ron Eckert, Virginia Eckert, Bonnie Picard, personal interviews.
164. Doug Cochran, Liz Cochran, Ron Eckert, Virginia Eckert, Richard Neil, personal interviews.
165. Ron Eckert, personal interview, October 28, 1996.
166. Linda James, "Students and teachers plan alternative education," *Mount Pleasant Mouthpiece*, March 12, 1975, p. 6.
167. Graduation statistics from school document "Present Activity of Former Total Education Students (1972-1974)." This document cites the 1974 graduation figure at 13 students but Staff Meeting Minutes of June 3, 1974 cite a higher figure of 19 graduating students.
168. "Present Activity of Former Total Education Students (1972-1974)."
169. Liz Cochran, personal interview, April 11, 1997.
170. Richard Neil and Liz Neil, Group Evaluation, June, 1974.
171. Doug Cochran, personal interview, April 11, 1997.
172. Ron Eckert, personal interview, October 28, 1996.
173. David Eaton, Steven Pratt, Scott Campbell, personal interviews, 1997.
174. Jane Sheppard, personal interview, April 2, 1997.
175. Valerie Hodge, personal interview, March 8, 1998.
176. Leslie, Rosettis, and Kaufman, *Total Education: An Evaluation*, May 1974, p. xviii.
177. Leslie, Rosettis, and Kaufman, *Total Education: An Evaluation*, May 1974, p. 98. The great majority of the rest rated the programme as "pretty good."
178. Vancouver Society For Total Education, "Evaluation 1975/76," p. 31.
179. Linda James, "Students and teachers plan alternative education," *Mount Pleasant Mouthpiece*, March 12, 1975, p. 6.
180. Larry Haberlin quoted in Lesley Krueger, "Some alternatives to a world of endless defeat" *Vancouver Sun*, June 20, 1974, p. 47.
181. Richard Neil quoted in Lesley Krueger, "Some alternatives to a world of endless defeat" *Vancouver Sun*, June 20, 1974, p. 47.
182. Teacher Richard Neil coined this phrase to refer to Total Education. Departing teachers were presented with a piece of the building inscribed with "The One True School."

CHAPTER 9: WINDSOR HOUSE

Beginnings

By 1971 more than half of the alternative schools founded during the 1960s had closed due to bankruptcy, fatigue, or for want of a clear educational vision. Although the initial excitement generated by the "free school movement" had waned, there was still popular interest in alternative forms of education, and growing numbers of parents who felt their children were not well served by the public schools. Some public school districts had taken cautious first steps to establish innovative programmes, but a significant group of parents still saw the public system as overly rigid and authoritarian, and saddled with an unimaginative curriculum. Besides, the public schools still offered few programmes for students requiring academic or emotional help, or for those who simply did not "fit in." Stopping short of the unlimited freedom advocated by the Romantic schools of the 1960s, the alternative schools of the 1970s aimed to offer a "child-centred" education like their predecessors, but were also more openly therapeutic, attracting students who had experienced a variety of problems in public school. Windsor House in North Vancouver appealed to parents who wanted a more humanistic education for their children. It went beyond Total Education in providing a therapeutic educational community not only for its students but also for those parents who were attempting to solve personal problems or make sense of new ideas, particularly those of the "Human Potential" psychotherapeutic movement. Unlike the alternative schools of the 1960s, the later schools were the object of considerable interest from administrators and teachers in the public schools. Pressed by parents to offer more choice in the public system, some school districts began to look for ways to accommodate them. It was into this environment that Windsor House came into existence in 1971.

In the fall of 1970 a group of North Vancouver parents approached the School Board to ask the district to set up a multi-grade parent-participation class for primary children. Distrusting

what they saw as an impersonal and bureaucratic system, these parents wanted to be more closely involved in their children's education and sought a flexible and enriched school environment. Some of these parents had worked together in a local co-operative pre-school, while several merely lived on the same block. The only alternative elementary school in Greater Vancouver at the time, the New School, was too "radical" for these parents. When the school trustees had made no decision by June 1971, the group simply decided to start their own programme in September.

One member of the group was Helen Hughes, an experienced teacher. Ms. Hughes began teaching at age nineteen and taught elementary public school for five years, followed by three years in a parent-participation pre-school. At the pre-school she developed an "experiential learning programme," based on play, that would pique the curiosity and eagerness of her young students. Ms. Hughes was already experiencing many doubts about how children were taught in the public schools:

> When I had been teaching grade five long enough to look around a bit, I noticed that the children in my classes did very little real thinking while in school. One day I experimented by writing some information on one blackboard that was contradictory to the information on the next board. The children copied it into their books and regurgitated it the next day on a quiz. It confirmed my suspicions.[1]

Ms. Hughes read *Summerhill* and several books by Maria Montessori and visited the New School and the nascent Waldorf school as she began to formulate a new way of thinking about education. She was eclectic and "stole from everything."[2]

Meanwhile, Ms. Hughes was impressed with the inquisitiveness of her own children, then in pre-school, and their refusal to accept pat answers:

> I rubbed a balloon in my hair and it stuck to the wall. 'What makes it stick there?' asked Meghan. 'Static electricity,' I replied. That response had always been accepted by my intermediate students. Meghan was not satisfied however, and said, 'What is static electricity?' I realized that I didn't really know.[3]

What ultimately convinced Ms. Hughes to help start a venture as daunting as a new school was

that her daughter was in grade two and, though a good student, was bored by public school.[4]

There was a good deal of interest in the neighbourhood especially from, as Ms. Hughes says, "middle-class young women who were making careers out of being good mothers and good women. The wanted the joys of 'hippiedom' (such as freedom from role restraints, joy of living, respect for nature) without the drawbacks of unpalatable food and lack of cleanliness."[5] The women were convinced of the importance of childrearing They believed they should stay home with their young children and were committed participants in parent co-operative pre-schools, of which there were several in North Vancouver. But they had also read *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Frieden and wanted to be more than mothers and wives. Most of all, Ms. Hughes says, they were influenced by the Human Potential Movement, and they tried "everything that came down the pipe."[6] Many parents were reading works by Fritz Perls on gestalt therapy. A number of marriages were breaking up and two parents were living in communal groups. As one parent recalls: "we were all very influenced by the times and the ideas. People were living in different ways."[7] Windsor House was different from most other alternative schools in that it was developed and run by women. With the exception of two fathers who played a significant role, the men had little or nothing to do with the school.

One member of the group was Susan Foley, who lived in the neighbourhood and ran a parent participation pre-school. Having worked in a Montessori school in Massachusetts before coming to Vancouver, she had helped found a day-care centre at Simon Fraser University while completing her teacher training.[8] Local parents were attracted to her view that: "When you take down the barrier between school and home, it takes over your life." In many ways Windsor House was to become an experiment in group home-schooling.

Parents joined the group for different reasons. Some agreed with the theory that children learn best in a humane supportive environment. They had read John Holt's *How Children Fail*, A.S. Neill's *Summerhill,* and Sylvia-Ashton Warner's *Teacher* and were suspicious of what they saw as the repressive rules of the public school system. They wanted their children to be free to

learn naturally without pressure. Some other parents joined because their lively children had been unhappy in grades one and two.

Three major principles of the Windsor House educational philosophy were established from the start. The first was direct parent involvement. Parents spent many hours with the students assisting with their learning and play activities. As a later parents' manual stated: "Parent and community involvement is the greatest strength of the school. In many cases the children and parents together learn things about themselves in a supportive environment and so are able to let go of the old patterns that have made learning difficult for the child."[9]

The second major element of Windsor House was its problem-solving technique. "With decisions made by consensus it is not only an educational and humane way of resolving matters of discipline, but also a vehicle for encouraging children to assume responsibility for their own education." The school's goal was to develop "internal discipline" and to connect "decision making with accountability. When the children have participated in the making of rules that cut down disruptions, then their attitude is far more positive and supportive of the rules."[10] Each parent, student, and teacher was considered "an equal and important member of the school" and each was to assume responsibility for the decisions made.[11]

The third major principle was individualized academic work, that students learn at their own pace based on one-to-one contact with an adult. Each child was encouraged to set his or her own goals within "a truly non-competitive and non-coercive school situation."[12] The founders wanted their children to be allowed to grow and learn by their own volition, at their own speed, and in the types of activities the children chose.[13]

The school was organized as a parent co-operative with Helen Hughes as the teacher and everyone else serving as volunteers. Each family was to pay $40 per month and parents would spend as much time at the school as they could, with a minimum of one half day per week. Ms. Hughes would be paid $70 per month for teaching full-time, her children were to attend for free, and the Hughes family would receive $50 per month for rent. The school could be run on a shoe-

string, and the monthly budget was as little as $320.

Decisions were made by the group informally and at monthly meetings.[14] However, decision making would later be complicated by their lack of agreed upon expectations about how much formal learning there should be. As Helen Hughes wrote in 1973: "Windsor House started originally as a desperate alternative to the public school system. Several of us had children that would have been, or already had been, badly demoralized in the public schools. We were united in what we didn't want (grades, group lessons, competition, discipline, punishment, and compulsory attendance) but had little clear idea of what we did want."[15]

School Opening

Ms. Hughes and her husband offered their large house on Windsor Road for the school headquarters. That summer of 1971 they transformed their house into a school. The dining room became a craft centre, the study a tutoring room, and the living room was set up for music and books. Even the main hall was converted into a stage through the aid of a curtain. The group painted and carpeted the basement to serve as an indoor play area and built a large tree fort and swing in the spacious back yard.

The school opened in September with fifteen children, almost all in the primary grades. Pre-school siblings spent a good deal of time at the school, but were not officially enrolled. According to one parent the first day was "thrilling and exciting."[16] The group believed that learning should be individualized and Ms. Hughes scheduled daily twenty minute individual lessons with each child for reading, writing, and arithmetic. Parents also read aloud to the children such popular books as *The Hobbit, A Wrinkle in Time*, and *Charlotte's Web.* The rest of the day was spent on learning crafts such as batik and weaving, nature activities, and field trips. A woman from the neighbourhood came to teach conversational French, and a local architect helped the children build a geodesic dome out of cardboard and taught mathematics with

Cuisenaire rods. Short mini-courses were offered by parents during the spring which included: dance, animal care, first aid, multiplication tables, singing, batik, beading, braiding, candle-making, witchcraft, cursive writing, and touch typing. There were no rules and the many parents present cleaned up after the students and helped the children solve disagreements. A portion of the main floor of the house was designated for quiet activity but this was difficult to maintain. They spent much time out in the community at beaches, parks, and the skating rink. Adults took groups of children to the library to borrow books, to Chinatown, shopping for food and supplies, and to the Vancouver Community Music School for lesson in Kodaly.[17] The group also travelled to Cheakamus north of Squamish on the B.C. Railway. Parents spent a great deal of time driving children from place to place, arranging learning opportunities, and organizing dinners.

Despite all these organized activities, what the children really wanted to do was spend their time playing in the back yard or the basement. Ms. Hughes had expected that, in addition to the twenty minute lessons, the children would voluntarily engage in learning activities throughout the day. Although some students did a good deal of reading, most remember little academic learning. Part way through the year, most parents began to worry that their children were not learning anything and believed Ms. Hughes should have been more directive about the students' activities.[18] But she continued to maintain that play would open the door to meaningful education. Not that she believed academic work was unimportant; rather she was convinced that children learn most effectively when they choose to do so. Parents also debated for weeks about whether the children should be permitted to watch television. Ms. Hughes believed the children could regulate their own television watching but the other parents were strongly opposed.

The disagreements could not be resolved and the school broke up at the end of the first year. Some children went back into regular classrooms in the school system whereas others enrolled in a new co-operative classroom which the school district had finally opened. One former parent explains: "In theory we thought it would be great but when we watched our own kids do nothing but play we didn't like it. We agreed they were having a marvelous time but we

were worried about the curriculum."[19] These parents did not want their children to be coerced but they did want them to learn the three R's.

One group of parents decided to start their own school down the street the following September. Susan Lawton, Susan Foley, and Sylvia Cepeliauskas were the principal members of this group which met in the Lawson home. Their dining room was turned into a classroom with a blackboard and table borrowed from the school district. Ms. Lawson reports that no one from the authorities ever questioned the tiny school's existence. They offered small formal classes in the morning, with less structured activities in the afternoon. There were just under ten children ages six to ten. The group continued meeting for two years, after which the parents grew tired and "the kids were eager to get back to school; they wanted to be with other kids."

Renewal

Having lost all her students after the first year, Helen Hughes expected Windsor House to close. This would have not been unusual; many small alternative schools conceived in the early 1970s were short-lived.[20] But one Coquitlam family (the Heikoops), on hearing about Windsor House, had decided to move to North Vancouver in the summer of 1972 so their daughter could attend the school. Not having "the nerve to tell them that the school had folded," Ms. Hughes decided to reopen in September despite the fact that the only other students registered in the school were her own children. She placed an advertisement in the North Vancouver community newspaper, and a few parents began to show up with their children.[21]

Ms. Hughes now had a clearer idea that Windsor House would have limited academic expectations and would instead provide a nonstressful environment in which the children could develop such traits as co-operation and self-confidence. The parents who were attracted to the renewed Windsor House agreed with these goals. Diane Elderton was committed to "health food" and non-traditional healing practices. She had studied sociology of education at U.B.C.

and read widely in Montessori. She wanted to "home school" her children but knew they needed to be with other young people. Sharon Priestley was a former teacher and actor. Sharon Dawson, a teacher and artist, was recently divorced. Judy Stone, also recently divorced, was mainly there for social support for herself. Ian McNaughton, one of the few fathers to be actively involved in the school, had left the business world to become a therapist and wanted a "humanistic" school for his son. Mr. McNaughton studied human relations, encounter groups, and psychodrama with Fritz Perls at Esalen Institute in California in the late 1960s.[22] Almost all the parents were Canadians. Several of these parents, having had private school backgrounds themselves (one at St. George's, another at Crofton House), were amenable to the idea of sending their children to an independent school. They distrusted the public school system and wanted to have more impact on their children's education. Three parents had dyslexic children in the days when such students were usually just labelled "slow." Although not overtly countercultural, most of these parents were enthusiastic about many of the popular ideas of the day especially the psychotherapeutic Human Potential Movement. Almost half of the group were single mothers and few parents could afford to pay more than minimal fees.

Before long Windsor House had eighteen students and enrollment remained between fifteen and nineteen from 1972/73 to 1974/75, most students under ten years of age. In 1974/75 sixteen students were enrolled of whom fourteen were nine years old or younger.[23] Student turnover was low during those three years and former students remember that everyone in the school community generally got along well.

As in the first year, Ms. Hughes planned to give each child one twenty-minute individualized lesson per day. These sessons consisted of work with flash cards in English and mathematics, and reading aloud to Helen. But the lessons were voluntary and, although some children enjoyed the personal contact, within a few weeks most students stopped coming and did little academic work. Students spent their time dressing up, performing skits for whomever would watch, playing "Alligators" in the basement, and taking care of the many school pets.

Some students built a fort in the attic and explored the adventure playground, tree forts, and cargo nets in the large back yard.

Parents would announce an activity they wanted to lead, such as singing or reading aloud, and children would come if they were interested. Sharon Priestley taught drama lessons, Sharon Dawson offered art activities and sang folk songs with the students. Other parents introduced a variety of crafts and read to groups of children or individuals. One student remembers that she "loved the reading time." Adults and children went on frequent camping trips to Alice Lake and other destinations and visited Sundance School, a new alternative school in Victoria. Students had to organize their own food on camping trips and live with the consequences of their mistakes. After several days some students could be seen desperately trying to trade a chocolate bar for some "real food." Like other alternative schools, the group took many field trips to parks, the planetarium, and the Lynn Valley Ecology Centre.[24] The school also invited members of the general community "to offer some kind of learning opportunity to the students."[25]

Parental attitudes to behaviour were permissive, and there were no sanctions for swearing, smoking, or nudity. One parent remembers "a lot of wildness" as the group struggled to achieve a balance between order and freedom.[26] One year the school bought foam bats which the students used in the basement to hit each other, a psychotherapeutic practice at the time. However, both children and adults were expected to respect each other and refrain from rudeness or physical violence. Several of the students during that fourth year had been asked to leave public schools because of "social problems." A few were "hyperactive" and a few others were aggressive, and Ms. Hughes spent a good deal of her time trying to get the children to co-operate. Although difficult children took up a great deal of the adults' attention, the students learned to be tolerant of each other and there were never so many difficult children, nor were they so severe, that they took over the school.

When not interacting with the children, parents spent most of their time in the kitchen having philosophical discussions, drinking coffee substitute, and preparing elaborate healthy

lunches for the entire group. It was not uncommon to have twelve children, three or four parents, and several visitors around the communal lunch table eating soup, sandwiches, and casseroles. The school community provided companionship and the company of other adults for otherwise isolated single mothers. One parent calls Windsor House "a therapeutic community." Another says "We were a motley lot. We were unusual individuals. We had to learn to get along too." Helen Hughes provided an environment where parents could feel supported in working on their own problems and many former parents cite the "warm, accepting" environment as the most important aspect of the school for them. Some were in financial difficulty and one single mother was taken into the family and given a room in the basement. At one point there were eleven people living in the house.[27] There was a great deal of talk about "empowerment" and as one parent describes "the school was all about how to stop being a victim."[28] With this primarily therapeutic emphasis the school became "very personal." One parent says: "I was needy myself. It was a wonderful environment for me. It provided as much for the parents as it did for the children"[29] Another says the school helped him work out a better relationship with his ex-wife. According to one parent: "Windsor House gave some women the courage to leave bad marriages. It offered safety and support."[30] Discussions about traditional behaviour of the men sowed the "seeds of feminism" for many.

One of the innovations at Windsor House was "problem solving," Helen Hughes' self-developed method for achieving consensus. Whenever there was a disagreement one of the participants or a bystander, either child or adult, could call a "problem solving session." All other activity would stop immediately and those involved, sometimes the entire school group, would try to brainstorm a solution. If a student refused to attend a problem solving session called by someone else, or obstructed problem-solving proceedings by being unwilling to consider reasonable solutions, that student was considered to be "going on power," which usually called for adult intervention.[31] Rules for problem solving developed in 1974 stipulated that:

> The person with the "problem" calls all those concerned to a certain place at a certain time; if the other persons do not come they must be "on power;"during a problem solving session all parties must be genuinely interested in solving the problem; everyone must stay until a solution agreeable to everyone is reached.

At times it seemed the school was engaged in problem solving sessions all day long. Sometimes weighty issues were discussed–Ms. Hughes once called a session because "not very many people come to lessons anymore." More typical problems were: "telephone calls not being handled satisfactorily"; "people jumping on the bed and wrecking the record player"; "Helen is tired of doing all the odds and ends of cleaning up"; "Christopher doesn't let anybody use the transformer his Dad bought for the school"; "people keep running around screaming upstairs, although downstairs is the place for it"; "the guests were taking far too big a helping of the casserole dish"; "people are leaving orange peels and apple cores downstairs"; and "too many problem solving sessions." Some students found problem solving tedious which provided incentive to find a solution so they could end the session.[32] "Finally people would just get tired of sitting there and would just finally agree."[33] Another student says she learned through problem solving that "there is always a solution. I felt in control, that I could change things."[34] One parent describes the problem solving approach as a "human-centred consensus-based experiment that worked out pretty well."[35]

Becoming a Public School

By the middle of the 1974/75 school year, Helen Hughes was exhausted and the school was close to bankrupt. With the majority of parents barely able to make ends meet themselves, they could contribute little financial support to the school. Parent meetings discussed ways to reduce expenses. Part way through the school year parents were asked to increase their $70 per month fees by an extra $20 per month if they were able.[36] Ms. Hughes discovered the day care subsidies recently established by the N.D.P. government and received subsidies for several pre-

school children and for several older children who qualified for after-school care.[37] For all this she took a salary of only $100 per month, particularly problematic since, having divorced the previous year, she was now the major source of her family's income. Ms. Hughes kept the school afloat by teaching pre-school education two nights a week after a full day of demanding teaching. The other parents were also tired. As one describes: "We ran out of resources. We had reservations [about the public school district] but we thought it was inevitable." Ms. Hughes and several parents decided to petition the North Vancouver School District to take over the school.

With the assistance of Dr. Ray Williams, an educational consultant and alternative school advocate, the parent group presented a brief to the school trustees in April 1975.[38] They argued that the school district had a responsibility to offer parents and their children more choice of educational practices in the public school system. The parents cited the example of the Vancouver School District which had recently incorporated both Total Education and Ideal School into its system in addition to creating over a dozen other alternative programmes. The report also referred to the S.E.E.D. and Alpha programmes in the Toronto School District. The parents' brief quoted from the Vancouver School District Advisory Committee on Alternative Education:

> There is a significant number of students, whose educational requirements are not being satisfied by the present system. The school system must become more adaptive and flexible in order to deal with the diversified demands of the community. The primary goal should be to legitimize alternative learning experiences so that parents and students can select the educational approaches best suited to their interests, needs, and learning styles. This means opening up learning alternatives within the public schools.[39]

It made sense, the parent group suggested, for the school board to accommodate district needs by incorporating existing programmes such as Windsor House. Led by school board trustee Don Burbidge, himself a former New School parent, the board agreed to accept Windsor House as a district programme for a two year trial period. The trustees assigned Windsor House to a room in an elementary school building and hired Helen Hughes as the programme's teacher. Enrollment

for 1975/76 would be twenty-five students aged five to twelve.

The parent group had developed a skillful brief complete with letters from parents and had effectively enlisted allies within the community. One parent says: "We were a gadfly effect on the whole system. Windsor House became very well known with parents who were disenchanted. I think we shook a lot of people up. We broadened people's minds to what was possible." More important, however, the timing was right. In 1975 many districts were considering offering alternatives in response to parental demand and professional interest. As one parent says: "What moves the school board is public pressure. The whole society was swinging to the left."

After a positive evaluation by North Vancouver School District officials Windsor House was accepted as a permanent district programme. However, during the first two years under the board's jurisdiction Windsor House was disrupted by having to move locations four different times, to Brooksbank School, St. Catherine's Church, Keith Lynn School and North Star School. None of these were completely satisfactory since having one or two rooms within a larger school operating on different rules and behaviour expectations was difficult. The school district administration left the school free to pursue its aims with little interference. The programme became somewhat more academic after 1975 but retained its emphasis on individualized work. Former students from that period remember their "folders" of individual academic assignments in language, mathematics, or social studies to be completed that day.

Joining the North Vancouver School District allowed Windsor House to survive. However, it also led to an increase in what would today be called special needs students. According to the North Vancouver School District Interim Report on Windsor House in June 1976, one third of the students had learning disabilities and another one third had emotional problems,[40] "in other words, for two thirds of her pupils she is doing the work of what we would classify as a Special Education teacher."[41] Only one third of the school's student body were enrolled because the parents believed in the school's philosophy. As Ms. Hughes wrote to a district administrator in 1980: "Windsor House is a school that accommodates many children

who have had quite severe difficulties in regular classrooms. These children are often unpredictable and difficult to deal with."[42] Since 1975 North Vancouver principals have tended to transfer difficult students to Windsor House, similar to the alternative programmes in Vancouver.

Conclusion

Former Windsor House students have ended up in many walks of life. Some pursued secondary education in the public school system, others have gone to such alternative secondary schools as Ideal School, and a few were self-taught. Today they work at diverse occupations including: television actor, nurse, accountant, teacher, self-taught audio-visual consultant, and restaurant manager. One has a Ph.D. in English and two are in business. As one parent and teacher says: "Students who came from strongly academic families tended to go to university. Not as much university attendance as in a regular school."[43] Whether attendance at Windsor House limited students' later academic and professional opportunities is difficult to say because their parents wanted to diminish academic pressure on their children and considered inter-personal relations and life experience at least as important as academic achievement.

Windsor House students and parents report numerous advantages to their association with the school. One student appreciated the accepting atmosphere at Windsor House, the lack of labelling, the personal attention, and Helen's patience.[44] Most students appreciated the personal attention they received from the many adults around the school. To another student the most important benefit was "learning to communicate and inter-personal skills."[45] According to another parent whose son had a reading disability "Windsor House was the best thing that ever happened to my son's life. He had no self-esteem problems. The school was the reason."[46] Another student comments that: "Public school was torture; the social value of Windsor House was more valuable than anything you learn at public school."[47] Still another says: "Kids from

Windsor House felt like they can make a difference."[48]

Windsor House provided a learning environment for individuals who were different from the mainstream. One former student, who now lives in a remote area of Indian Arm accessible only by boat, found a place for herself at Windsor House after being unhappy at large public schools. Another former student, upon leaving Windsor House, travelled with her mother for two years before starting public school at age nine on Galiano Island. Although she had missed simple addition and writing skills she "caught up in a year and graduated from university with a nursing degree."[49]

When it was time to leave Windsor House most students made the transition to public school without a great deal of difficulty. One student remembers having no trouble returning to public school after two years.[50] Another student who was put back a grade on returning to public school recalls that, although she was stressed because she missed long division (and never learned it), she had no trouble catching up and is now an accountant. She credits the accepting environment with giving her confidence.[51] Numerous students report being behind when they re-entered public school, but often in only one subject, usually English or mathematics. Several were put back a grade but most caught up quickly. One student reported "culture shock" when she entered grade eight at the local high school. This student had missed a significant number of writing skills. Although she did catch up, this student finished her high school education at Ideal School. Several students chose to complete their schooling at Ideal School, other alternative high schools, or though "home schooling."

Windsor House differed from the extreme Romantic schools of the 1960s, in that all of its students learned to read, despite the fact that they were not required to learn at a particular age. According to one parent, her son was "still not reading at age nine. He decided he wanted to read *Treasure Island* and within a year he was reading aeronautics journals. My kids were able to learn how to learn."[52] Her son confirms that "I had a difficult time reading until grade four because I wasn't interested. I remember picking up *Treasure Island* in grade four and it

happened almost overnight."[53] Although this student did attend university, he has had no trouble with mathematics, reading, or writing and owns an audio-visual consulting business. Another student similarly did not learn to read until age nine but "when I did learn to read, I worked at it hard and in the space of a year I went from being very poor to being able to read anything."[54]

Parents, former students, and observers considered the strengths of Windsor House to be the strong parental involvement, positive interpersonal relationships, the creative problem solving approach, and the emphasis on affective development. One student comments that "public schools have changed a great deal since the early 1970s" and that schools like Windsor House "must have had an effect."[55] The major weakness was the lack of emphasis on the development of basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics.[56]

Whatever success the school has had is in large measure due to the skill and determination of Helen Hughes. A modest person who has pursued her teaching career with little fanfare, Ms. Hughes made a difference in the lives of many adults and children. One parent refers to her as a "brilliant woman–a highly skilled teacher and a highly skilled motivator."[57] Another says: "Helen was philosophically devoted to child-centred education. She had total determination to make it work." A North Vancouver administrator described Ms. Hughes as "extremely capable" as evidenced by "her ability to involve students, the atmosphere she creates within the classroom, her attention to individual progress, her concern for people, and her industry."[58] One former student describes her as "fair, kind, and approachable."[59] Another says "Helen guided, mediated, asked leading questions, but let people make their own decisions. She definitely set the tone."[60] Still another student said "Helen was easy to learn from. The way she presented the material turned me on to learning. She and our parents realized what was wrong with the school system. They were ahead of their time."[61]

Windsor House parents from 1972 to 1975 were particularly attracted to the absence of competition and the lack of academic "pressure" on their children. Some parents remarked:

> Our son has been with Windsor House for two years and the school has played a major part in his development into a self-reliant human being who has respect for the rights of others. He has received strong support there for academic, personal, and interpersonal growth.
>
> The children at Windsor House are productive and display a great deal of initiative. The openness and the supportive atmosphere make it very happy and attractive, an ideal place for learning and growth.[62]
>
> The reason my husband and I took the children to Windsor House was simple. They were unhappy in the public school system. Learning wasn't fun anymore.

One parent describes how her son wanted to quit public school after two weeks of grade one. After three years of "headaches, stomach aches, and fights at recess and after school," she enrolled him at Windsor House.

> I don't have words to express how I feel about the changes in my son since he attended Windsor House. He is beginning to come out of his shell and starting to feel confidence in himself. I asked him why he liked going to Windsor House and he said "because they understand kids."[63]

The school continued to move after 1982, occupying space at Lonsdale, Queen Mary, and Cloverley schools. At the latter school, Windsor House finally has its own building. Formal academic lessons became more prevalent during the 1980s, but in 1989 the school staff made a re-commitment to "non-coercive education" modelled after the Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts.[64] Not all parents agreed with this decision and more than half took their children out of the school, but by the mid-1990s Windsor House had rebuilt its enrollment to close to one hundred students from kindergarten to grade ten.[65] Parents continue to be extensively involved as volunteers. Academic activities are provided for students who request them but all scheduled classes are voluntary. Aside from safety measures, school rules are set at weekly meetings of staff and students, with decisions made by a two-thirds vote. "Problem solving" has been replaced by a judicial committee of student volunteers and one staff member.[66] Helen Hughes continues to teach at Windsor House and still provides the school's main source of inspiration. Her daughter, Meghan Hughes (for whom the school was started), is a central staff member and

a committed proponent of non-coercive education.

Windsor House's entry into the North Vancouver School District was successful mainly because it satisfied the needs of both the school and the public system. Windsor House staff and parents, financially drained and exhausted, could not have carried on without the funding and facilities provided by the school district. The school district, on the other hand, acquired an already existing innovative programme at a time when parents were beginning to demand more options in public education. It made sense to take in an established programme like Windsor House, whose continuing operation had demonstrated the need for therapeutic and parent-participatory alternatives. In the Vancouver School District the same set of motivations would lead to the incorporation of Ideal School into the public system there. In both cases, the public school districts would now benefit from the newly-included alternative programmes and from the commitment of the teachers who worked in them. During the next few years numerous therapeutic programmes would be developed in school districts across the province. The result was more educational choice for parents and students.

NOTES

1. Helen Hughes, Notes on Windsor House history, untitled, early 1980s. Unless noted, all documents cited are located in the school archive, Windsor House School, North Vancouver.
2. Helen Hughes, personal interview, September 30, 1996.
3. Helen Hughes, Notes on Windsor House history, untitled, early 1980s.
4. Helen Hughes, personal interview, September 30, 1996.
5. Helen Hughes, "Windsor House: A History," unpublished paper for Jean Barman, Educational Studies 426, University of British Columbia, circa 1984.
6. Helen Hughes, personal interview, September 30, 1996.
7. Susan Lawton, personal interview, January 27, 1997.
8. Susan Brown, personal interview, March 20, 1997. Mrs. Brown' husband, Fred Brown was a significant figure in the Intentional Communities Movement. The Browns knew Watson and Mary Thomson when the Thomsons lived on a co-operative farm in Surrey.
9. Parents' Manual, 1978, p. 3.
10. Parents' Manual, 1978, p. 4.
11. Windsor House parents, "A Brief on Alternatives in Education," presented to the North Vancouver school trustees, April, 1975, p. 4.
12. Windsor House parents, "A Brief on Alternatives in Education," presented to the North Vancouver school trustees, April, 1975, p. 4.
13. Windsor House, "An Interim Report," February, 1977.
14. Windsor House executive meeting, September 1, 1971.
15. Helen Hughes, "What is Windsor House All About?" brief to day care funding agency, October 1973, p. 7.
16. Sylvia Simpson, personal interview, November 21, 1996.
17. Helen Hughes, Day Plans, 1971/72.
18. Sylvia Simpson, personal interview, November 21, 1996.
19. Susan Lawton, personal interview, January 27, 1997.
20. For example, Chelsea House in West Vancouver (based on the British "integrated day") and the Albert Street School in Burnaby both opened in 1972 but closed after less than a year.
21. "Parents Play Key Role In Private Education System," *The Citizen*, September 1972.
22. This was just before Mr. Perls came to British Columbia himself.
23. Windsor House School parents, "A Brief on Alternatives in Education," presented to North Vancouver school trustees, April 1975.
24. Windsor House parents, "A Brief on Alternatives in Education," p. 18.

25. "School Tries Experiment," *The Citizen*, April, 1974.
26. Katanya Woodruff, personal interview, April 2, 1997.
27. Meghan Hughes, personal interview, October 3, 1996.
28. Sharon Mason, personal interview, November 25, 1996.
29. Judy Stone, personal interview, January 13, 1997.
30. Judy Stone, personal interview, January 13, 1997.
31. Helen Hughes, "What is Windsor House All About?" brief to day care funding agency, October 1973, p. 6.
32. Darcy Hughes, personal interview, February 6, 1997.
33. Glynis Sandall, personal interview, November 18, 1996.
34. Laura Elderton, personal interview, April 3, 1997.
35. John McNaughton, personal interview, January 22, 1997.
36. Parents Meeting, minutes, October 23, 1974.
37. Helen Hughes, "What is Windsor House All About?" brief to day care funding agency, October 1973, p 2.
38. Dr. Williams was a member of the Advisory Committee on Alternative Education in the Vancouver School District (see Chapter 13).
39. Dr. Ray Williams, "Private Alternatives and the School System," a brief to the North Vancouver School Trustees, April, 1975, p. 9. Dr. Williams quotes from a June 1973 report of the Advisory Committee to the Administrative Co-ordinating Team on Alternative Education in Vancouver.
40. North Vancouver School District, "An Interim Report: Windsor House," February 10 1977.
41. "Windsor House School: A Report," June 14, 1976.
42. Letter from Helen Hughes to Mr. McEown, June 16, 1980.
43. Pam Douglas, personal interview, November 25, 1996.
44. Laura Elderton, personal interview, April 3, 1997.
45. John McNaughton, personal interview, January 22, 1997.
46. Ian McNaughton, personal interview, January 28, 1997.
47. Darcy Hughts, personal interview, February 6, 1997.
48. Meghan Hughes, personal interview, October 3, 1996.
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50. Glynis Sandall, personal interview, November 18, 1996.
51. Christina Cepeliauskas, personal interview, January 22, 1997.
52. Katanya Woodruff, personal interview, April 2, 1997.
53. David Elderton, personal interview, January 21, 1997.
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56. Dr. Ray Williams, "Windsor House School: A Report," brief presented to the North Vancouver school trustees, April 1975, p. 2.
57. Sharon Mason, November 25, 1996.

58. Allan Stables (North Vancouver Assistant Superintendent), "Windsor House School: A Report," June 14, 1976, p. 2.
59. David Elderton, personal interview, January 21, 1997.
60. Glynis Sandall, personal interview, November 18, 1996.
61. Jenny Lawton, personal interview, February 4, 1997.
62. Letters from Polly Pawley, Ian McNaughton, Lorne and Sharon Priestley, appendix to "A Brief on Alternative in Education," to North Vancouver School Trustees, April, 1975.
63. Letter from J. Bratkowski in appendix to "A Brief on Alternative in Education," to North Vancouver School Trustees, April, 1975.
64. See Daniel and Hanna Greenberg, *The Sudbury Valley School Experience* (Framingham, Massachusetts: Sudbury Valley School Press, 1985).
65. Meghan Hughes and Jim Carrico, "Windsor House," in Matt Hern, ed., *Deschooling Our Lives* (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 1996), pp. 134-139.
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CHAPTER 10: IDEAL SCHOOL

Founding

In the early 1970s there remained many students in mainstream high schools who felt bored and alienated in large impersonal institutions. Some of these students had feelings similar to those of the teenagers who had founded Knowplace several years earlier. Garry Nixon was a teacher during this period at St. George's School located on the west side of Vancouver, an exclusive private school offering an education based on the British Public School model. He was particularly concerned about the many academically-motivated students he believed were not being well served by traditional high schools. He had been a frequent visitor to Knowplace in 1968, often spending the late afternoon hours there after finishing his teaching day at St. George's. But his attempts to generate interest in mathematics and social studies at Knowplace were unsuccessful and he believed the lack of academic structure in free schools was unrealistic. In the early spring of 1972 in the middle of his sixth year at St. George's Mr. Nixon decided to open a small independent high school where students could pursue their studies in a less oppressive and more exciting atmosphere than he believed existed in the public schools.

Mr. Nixon's conception was of a "store-front" school for motivated students who were bored with their present high school education. He believed that bright students were usually ignored in mainstream classrooms because teachers feared leaving the rest of the class behind. His school would offer an exciting curriculum with small classes in an informal atmosphere. But attendance at classes was expected and students would be responsible for completing their academic requirements. There would be no discipline problems because all students would want to be there. The school would take advantage of the many community resources available. The prospectus described the school this way:

> The Ideal School is an alternative academic school based on the premise that children are valuable human beings who will best grow and learn in groups that are small enough to enable them to have a close relationship with their teachers and fellow students. The school is designed for enthusiastic students who wish to participate fully in an exciting learning programme.[1]

Mr. Nixon had grown up in Lethbridge, Alberta, and later moved with his family to Victoria where they owned a cinema.[2] His wide variety of academic interests and his rapport with teenagers drew him to teaching. He had an undergraduate degree and nine years teaching experience, the last six at St. George's, but he had never bothered to complete his requirements for a teaching certificate. As a generally "self-taught" person, Mr. Nixon believed that motivation was the prime prerequisite for successful learning. He was somewhat eccentric, had an infectious sense of humour, and made classes so interesting that student attention rarely wavered.

Garry Nixon was not a person to hesitate translating an idea into action, similar to David Hummel who had founded Craigdarroch School in Victoria six years earlier. In May 1972 he placed an advertisement in the *Vancouver Sun* seeking teachers who "want to teach for freedom, fascination, and abject poverty." He was flooded with over sixty applications from teachers attracted by the promise that students at Ideal would be "eager to learn." The *Sun* published an article about the school headlined "Teachers flock to school that offers life of poverty" and a staff of six teachers was selected by mid-June.[3] Mr. Nixon formed the Ideal School Society in July which would be governed by a Board of Advisors. He enlisted the support of a number of educators and well connected community members who agreed to sit on the Board chaired by Robert Bacon, a social worker, teacher, and former colleague at St. George's. Among the Board members were several teachers, a lawyer, a minister, a Y.M.C.A. counsellor, and the director of the Vancouver Art Gallery.[4] The same month Mr. Nixon took out a five-year lease on a large five thousand square foot building (a former sausage factory) at 16th Avenue and Willow Street in Vancouver.

There was considerable interest in the school from prospective students and parents. Mr.

Nixon arranged two public meetings, the first in June at the Unitarian Church and the second in August at the school building, each attracting two hundred participants. His straightforward approach was appealing: "The idea is that if you get students who want to learn and teachers who want to teach and small classes and a good atmosphere, a school should work."[5] Mr. Nixon told parents that "bright students are simply not being challenged enough in large-sized classrooms today" and that while Ideal School was not for bright students only, "we do guarantee that no outstanding students will be bored." He also emphasized that "we don't want a school for the wealthy alone."[6] Fees were set at $600 per year, which Mr. Nixon claimed was half the standard rate for existing private schools, and students began signing up immediately.

Mr. Nixon was not interested in his staff members adhering to a uniform educational theory since he did not consider theory particularly important. He was looking for teachers who were versatile, innovative, and academically strong, who would tailor their programmes to fit the goals and interests of the students, and who were committed to making academic learning exciting. He gathered together a group of teachers with very diverse backgrounds and styles. Some had taught in the public school system, others had taught abroad, and others were newly graduated teachers. Rob Wood, who had returned to Vancouver after several years of living in a "back-to-the-land" community in the Slocan Valley, was hired to teach mathematics and photography. Mr. Nixon knew him from earlier visits to Knowplace where Mr. Wood had been a principal staff member four years earlier. Hugh Barr saw the newspaper advertisement and was immediately interested. Of Irish background, he was aware of the growing number of informal elementary schools in England and had also taught in Nigeria where he worked with students who "valued education and wanted to learn." Upon arriving in Vancouver he worked as a substitute teacher before agreeing to teach mathematics, science, and Russian at Ideal. Georgie Wilson also saw the advertisement and accepted a position as Ideal's English and drama teacher. She had just graduated with a teaching certificate from U.B.C. and was enthusiastic about trying innovative methods. Lorna Allan, the school's geography teacher, had taught previously in Scotland and at

Simon Fraser University and Vancouver City College. Other full time staff during the first two years were Robin Inman who taught French, science teacher Terry Kellington, and English teacher Bonnie Chernoff. Part-time staff included English literature teacher Richard Holmes (from St. George's), Martin Eskanasy, Alan Dobbs, Wayne Richards, and Toni Bacon.[7]

Ideal School opened in September 1972 with seventy students. Most were in grades eight to twelve, but the school did enroll one class of younger children in grades four to seven. Students came for a variety of reasons. Many were precisely the kind of bored or alienated high school students Mr. Nixon was seeking. They heard about the school from newspaper articles, advertisements, a radio appearance, and word of mouth. Several of Mr. Nixon's St. George's students followed him to his new school. Robert Bacon, chair of the Board, sent several students from the Catholic Children's Aid Society where he was a social worker. During the middle of the year several students transferred from another alternative high school, Relevant High. As well, a number of students had attended elementary alternative schools such as the New School and the Whole School in Vallican. A few were exceptionally bright while others were non-conformists, both of which could cause distress at traditional high schools. The student body was an unusual mix ranging from the St. George's students "who didn't know what they were walking into," to "hippie types" influenced by the events of the 1960s, to students who were simply discontented with the public schools.[8] Others were political activists; one student was the daughter of a founder of Greenpeace and another had edited a city-wide dissident newspaper produced by high school students. Despite their differences, though, most students were academically motivated.

Most students grew up on the West Side of Vancouver. However, 10% came from Vancouver's East Side and 25% came from Burnaby, Richmond, Delta, and North Vancouver.[9] Most students were able to pay the fees although a few scholarships were available and one student performed secretarial work for reduced fees. All applicants were interviewed for over an hour by Mr. Nixon (or other teachers in subsequent years) and the interview was far more

important than the student's academic record in determining acceptance. Almost all students were accepted although a few were turned away if the staff believed they were simply looking for a "free ride." The school's first year was successful and enrollment increased to ninety in September 1973.

The school building had several advantages. It had a variety of large and small rooms conducive to small classes, individualized study, and a flexible programme and timetable. It was centrally located which made field trips relatively easy. The five year lease gave the school security for the future, and the owners permitted the staff to do as much remodeling as they wished. The building was large enough that at various times during the first two years Mr. Nixon and several other staff members actually lived at the school. During the summer staff and students renovated and painted the building, installed indoor-outdoor carpeting, and built art and science rooms. When the school was ready for opening there were two large and two small classrooms on the second storey with three classrooms, a meeting room, and a student lounge on the main floor. However, as in most alternative schools, the building lacked specialized facilities for physical education, home economics, industrial education, music, and senior physics and chemistry.[10] The building was also run down, which would cause problems later. At first the building inspector withheld approval, but a newly elected Vancouver N.D.P. M.L.A. telephoned to smooth things over.[11] Some students complained that the smell of sausages remained indefinitely, but by all accounts the building was adequate to the needs of the school.

Curriculum

Ideal School offered the full B.C. academic curriculum as well as a varied selection of electives. English, mathematics, social studies, science, geography, and history were taught at all grade levels. Several teachers spoke second languages and the school was rich in its language offerings which included French, Spanish, German, Russian, and Chinese. Other academic

electives included Civilization, Philosophy, Geology, and Law.[12] The school made use of community resources to augment the fine arts programme. Groups of students attended plays at the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre and City Stage and the Vancouver Art Gallery supplied visiting artists and craftspeople to help establish the school's art programme.[13] Students found Ms. Wilson's enthusiastic drama classes particularly memorable. The school had a well-equipped darkroom for the photography class. Since no one on staff had musical skills, the school offered no music instruction. The physical education programme consisted of weekly skiing sessions in winter and other activities such as tennis, skating, softball, and hiking.

The school had a regular timetable and students were expected to show up on time, attend classes, complete assignments, and write government examinations. One of the unique features of Ideal was its small classes which rarely exceeded twelve students and were conducive to individual attention, flexibility, and "meaningful interaction."[14] Another basic principle was that students could progress at their own rate. Some students completed several grades in one year in subjects in which they were gifted. On the other hand, those having difficulty with a course could take as much time as they needed and teachers set up individual programmes for students when necessary. If students were interested in subjects such as astrology, yoga, film-making, or dance Mr. Nixon would find a teacher to come in to the school. Intellectual pursuits outside the school were also recognized and several students were given credit for attending university classes. One journalist described Ideal as a school "for students who want to learn." Mr. Nixon explained that "the teachers are committed to keeping the child from being bored or from feeling stupid while the student is committed to work to the best of his or her ability."[15]

Most courses were enriched beyond the standard curriculum. Georgie Wilson emphasized female authors in her literature course and one female student recalls that it made a "huge impression" on her. Other students remember the excitement of reading Chaucer in Old English. Richard Holmes developed a Civilization course that was a combination of history, art, and architecture based on the Kenneth Clark television series.

Teaching styles were diverse. Some teachers were flamboyant, others were funny, and some were subdued. But most adopted a participatory and "hands-on" approach in their classes and students found learning was exciting. In addition to standard lectures there were seminar-style classes with lots of discussion where students and adults shared viewpoints and teachers conveyed respect for student opinions.[16] Students read each other's work and explored themes together. Classes were held around tables or sitting on the floor. Two former students describe the wider learning environment at Ideal School:

> Ideal School wasn't about classrooms. It was an environment where people engaged each other from morning until evening. People would sit around and have discussions. Some of us would hang out at the Starlight Café in the evenings and smoke marijuana. What made it different was it had a sense of community. The school was populated by visionaries.[17]

Discipline was rarely a serious issue. There were a few students with emotional or behavioural problems but because of the school's academic requirements, they usually dropped out. There were occasional instances of theft and, as in all schools at the time, drug use was a recurrent problem, but for the most part Ideal had few of the emotionally distressed teenagers who often came to other alternative schools. The school's message was simply to "treat people with respect" and most students did.[18] The few rules were common sense: no drugs, courtesy and consideration for others, "no violence, respect for other people's rights, and the right to study quietly."[19] The school encouraged "a set of attitudes" rather than a set of rules.[20] As in the British Public School system, older students socialized younger ones into the ways of the school. If a student was disruptive on a continuous basis he or she was asked to leave but this rarely happened. For most students the only alternative was the public school system which was simply unacceptable. The fact that the students wanted to be there was the best assurance of a smoothly functioning school. Students felt respected, as one student recalls: "If you screwed up, smoked dope or missed class, there was an honest discussion with Garry. We were treated with respect, as people with enough sense to make a decision."[21]

The school made direct use of learning opportunities in the community and purchased a van to assist in transportation for the many field trips. Students visited museums and libraries, went hiking in Manning Park, and spent several days in Victoria visiting the legislature and cabinet ministers.[22] Mr. Holmes regularly drove students to the U.B.C. library to do research and also arranged for them to use the language laboratories on the campus. Senior students used the science labs at a nearby high school. Accomplished individuals were also brought in to the school from the outside community. These visitors included art gallery director Tony Emory, artist Evelyn Roth, environmentalist Irving Stowe, and folksinger Ian Anderson. Friday afternoon was reserved for showing film classics such as *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *Inherit the Wind*, and one student who went on to become a writer recalls that the films "kindled my interest in film and storytelling."[23]

Day-to-day life at Ideal School was informal. Everyone dressed casually, teachers were called by their first names, and students were welcome in the staff lounge. The official school day was from 9:00 to 4:00 but students often stayed at the school well into the evening. Although there was less of a countercultural feel than at 1960s alternatives like Knowplace or Saturna, Ideal was certainly influenced by that period and one former student recalls, "we thought the sixties were still on."[24] Many students smoked marijuana at least occasionally, some of the boys had long hair, and values of sexual freedom prevailed. At the end of the first year the graduating class and the teachers all went skinnydipping together and, as in other alternative high schools of the day, liaisons occasionally occurred among young staff and students. "Everyone thought it was okay then." Most students ended up at Ideal because they felt somehow different from the mainstream and this encouraged an ethos of tolerance. The school was populated by "some very bright people and a high percentage of eccentrics."[25] Two legendary brothers were "walking history encyclopedias." As one student suggests: "you had to deal with and relate to people who were a lot different from you. Students at Ideal became a pretty tolerant lot."[26] They formed a close community and remained important in each others' lives for years afterwards.

Garry Nixon was the director. Since he financed the school with his own money, he retained control over finances and hiring. By the middle of the second year this led to some discontent. Most staff members were young with a "left of centre" political stance and expected decision making to be democratic. However, Mr. Nixon did establish collegial decision making in regard to academic matters and admissions. The teachers made academic decisions at regular staff meetings and, although there was an understanding that the basic curriculum would be covered, teachers were free to organize their own courses as they saw fit . As one former teacher describes, Mr. Nixon "handpicked his people and then never interfered."[27]

Regular school meetings of staff and students were also held. Although students had no official power at Ideal, in practice they had a good deal of input into the day-to-day functioning of the school. One student remembers that "if we really wanted something it would happen; I can't recall any difficulty that wasn't resolved."[28] Another recalls that "we felt that our opinions were really listened to, that they mattered."[29] Students were encouraged to initiate activities. When some students decided they needed a cafeteria they established and ran it themselves. One student organized the library while another who had dance training arranged a dance class for both students and staff. Another student who felt strongly about environmental issues organized everybody to go out and pick up garbage. This student recalls that "there was room for zealotry; you were allowed to be yourself."[30] Students also helped create their own academic programmes although the overall academic direction of the school was the domain of the teachers.

By most standards the first year was successful. The graduating class numbered twelve students and enrollment increased from seventy to ninety for the 1973/74 year. Most participants believed that the inclusion of younger children had been a mistake and grades four and five were dropped for the second year. The core staff remained intact and the school hired several part-time teachers. Morale remained high despite the fact that the teachers were working long hours and earning little. Although the Board of Directors rarely met, at the end of the first year a new Board was elected which included teachers Hugh Barr, Georgie Wilson, and Rob Wood.

The school did manage to make ends meet financially during the first two years. Expenses for the first year were just over $43,000 with more than half going towards salaries, another 20% towards rent, and the rest for office expenses, advertising, and travel. Student fees amounted to $45,000 and the school showed a modest profit of $2,000.[31] During the second year both revenue and expenses increased to just over $50,000 as the school broke even.[32] But the only reason the school did not lose money was that staff salaries were so low. Teachers were paid an average of $250 per month, far less than they would have earned in the public school system. Tuition fees increased from $600 to $800 in the second year but the additional revenues were used to hire more teachers to keep class size low. The only way to increase salaries would have been to raise tuition fees significantly. Mr. Nixon was reluctant to raise fees any further for fear that many of the kind of students he wanted to attract might not be able to afford to come.

A Public School

By the end of the second school year Garry Nixon realized that he could not ask his staff to continue teaching for less than a living wage. The deteriorating condition of the building added to the financial difficulties. After unsuccessful attempts to arrange a government grant Mr. Nixon saw that "the only way out of this dilemma is to join the public school system."[33] So in the spring of 1974 he began to negotiate with Vancouver School Board officials in the hope that the district would take over the school.

The timing was opportune. In the early 1970s the Board had become aware of the need to develop alternative programmes for the many high school students who were in danger of dropping out because they were unhappy in large traditional schools. The Vancouver School District had established City School as an alternative high school in 1971 and entered into a partnership with Total Education the same year. The Board recognized that many parents and students were demanding more choice within the public school system and that some teachers

wanted more freedom to develop innovative programmes. Small "mini-schools," with integrated curricula for motivated students, and other alternative programmes were beginning to appear with great frequency (see Chapter 12). An administrative committee under the leadership of assistant superintendent Alf Clinton was charged with creating and supervising alternative programmes.

After visiting Ideal and meeting with the teaching staff, Dr. Clinton and his committee reported to the Board that "Ideal School is a private alternative school and has a strong academic component, its success largely based on the low pupil-teacher ratio of ten to one."[34] They recommended to the trustees that the school be established as a "mini-school under the wing of the Board" attached to a secondary school similar to the mini-school at Prince of Wales. The committee believed that it would be "to the advantage of the Vancouver school system to have an academically oriented mini-school." The recommendation was endorsed by the School Board in July 1974.[35] The only conditions were that the school not charge fees and that all teachers be certified. The Board offered to take in the entire school, "staff, students, and philosophy," and promised to let the school operate with "as much autonomy as possible."[36]

Mr. Nixon wrote to the parents explaining the decision he had taken to join the Vancouver School District. "The agreement with the School Board was the best that I could negotiate. We were faced with the prospect of raising fees exorbitantly in a deteriorating building. This would have still left our teachers at the poverty level and we would have had to exclude students not from wealthy families." He went on to describe what he saw as the significance of the arrangement.

> This is an experiment. To my knowledge it is the first time in English Canada that a private school has joined the public system *in toto*. The School Board will be watching us to see that their faith in us was justified; and we, in turn, will be watching them to see that we have the necessary autonomy. We have a very good chance to make it work. You, as parents, will have the right and responsibility to make representation to your elected School Board if you think the school is not working as it should. I look forward to continuing to work with them and I will do my best to make this new arrangement work. If we are successful it will have a lasting effect on our school system.[37]

Taking over Ideal School produced significant benefits for the school district. The district gained a unique programme, a cohesive staff that had worked together for two years, and another place for students unhappy with large mainstream schools. The deal resulted in enormous benefits for the school as well. Teachers would be paid according to the Vancouver School Board salary scale and the school was offered a new location in five classrooms on the top floor of the former Dawson School on Burrard Street in downtown Vancouver which had closed due to declining enrollment.[38] The main floor of the building would be occupied by City School.[39]

Ideal School moved into its new location in September 1974. The school had six classrooms, a student lounge, an office, and shared use of the auditorium and gymnasium. Although the building was old and needed renovation, the physical space suited the needs of the school well and the downtown location was convenient for walking to the library and art gallery. Enrollment jumped to almost 120 students. True to its word the School Board hired all the existing teachers. But in an ironic twist Garry Nixon could not be hired immediately because he did not have a teaching certificate. Mr. Nixon stepped down temporarily from the directorship of the school and enrolled in education at U.B.C. where he could obtain his necessary qualifications by December. He was assigned to Ideal School for his ten weeks of "practice teaching" after which it was understood that he would be appointed as head teacher.

When January arrived, Mr. Nixon was offered a position with the Vancouver School District but not at Ideal. Although no reason was given, the most plausible explanation is that the staff did not want him back. Most supported a more collegial decision making procedure and some of the teachers had found Mr. Nixon's style autocratic during the first two years. As well, although his vision and leadership had provided the necessary ingredients for the creation of the school, his lack of methodical administrative skills and his lack of interest in educational theory may not have suited the role of an administrator in the public school system. Mr. Nixon declined the Vancouver job and instead became director of Columbia College for two years. He never returned to teaching and has been a successful Vancouver accountant for many years.

Rob Wood also lacked a teaching certificate and went back to U.B.C. to earn one. Like Mr. Nixon he did not return to Ideal but he did continue his teaching career. After teaching for many years in the public school system he became principal of an independent Catholic school in Vancouver. Georgie Wilson and Hugh Barr became the nucleus of the Ideal staff along with most of the original group. They were joined by several new teachers over the next few years including social studies teacher Marcie Thoms and mathematics teacher Phil Knaiger, an original member of the Total Education staff. No director was appointed to replace Mr. Nixon. Decisions were made by consensus of the whole staff and one teacher remembers long, exhausting meetings.[40]

Staff and students enjoyed their time in the Dawson School building. Ideal was attached to King George Secondary School for administrative purposes and both Mr. Barr and Ms. Wilson remember the principal there as supportive and congenial. But the school's use of this site was soon called into question. In late 1974 the Vancouver School Board entered into discussions with the provincial government regarding the sale of the property.[41] Although the sale did not take place, eighteen months later in April 1976 the Board announced that the Dawson site was too expensive to be used for educational purposes and both Ideal and City School would have to move. The trustees, also claiming fire regulations made the use of the building untenable, offered to provide three classrooms for Ideal at Lord Byng Secondary. Teachers, students, and parents protested and the Board agreed to delay. But six months later the trustees made a firm decision that the school would have to move.[42] Parents and students addressed School Board meetings, picketed the Board office, and wrote letters to the editor.[43] The teachers presented a lengthy brief arguing that the school's unique features of trust, informality, self-discipline, integrated courses, and student participation in decision making required a separate facility.

> Ideal School involves students whose dissatisfaction with larger schools resulted in declining attendance, social problems, feelings of alienation, and conflicts with teachers. Some students had dropped out entirely. The larger schools with their authoritarian structure, inflexibility, and pressure to conform have left many needs unfulfilled. The strength of Ideal School and the reasons for its success lies in the awareness of the needs of each individual. The development of a supportive

> atmosphere of trust is directly dependent on the small size of the school. It is essential that rules be kept to a minimum. To place this school with its principles of flexibility within the confines of a large institution would be to destroy it.[44]

Finally in January 1976 the move to Lord Byng was carried out. The Ideal community had less autonomy and students were forced to adapt to a formal learning environment and a set of traditional school rules similar to what they had rejected by enrolling in Ideal in the first place.[45] But the parents and teachers did not give up, the issue was well covered in the daily newspapers, and the Board promised to re-examine the situation in six months.[46] At the end of the school year the trustees re-considered and a new home was found for Ideal in a former elementary school annex near Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School in South Vancouver. The school moved into its new building in September 1977 where it has remained ever since. Teachers report a good relationship with the administration at Churchill. Hugh Barr stayed at the school for almost ten years before transferring to a mainstream secondary school in 1985, and Georgie Wilson remains at Ideal School to this day.

Effects on Students

Ideal School was evaluated by a Vancouver School District research official after its first year with the Board in the fall of 1975. His report concluded that the school had a "positive influence on students' attitudes toward academic achievement" and "if the students had not been accepted by Ideal School, over one-half would have dropped out of school altogether." The report continued:

> The dedicated teachers, the low student-teacher ratio of twenty to one, and the emphasis on mutual respect tend to keep classroom problems to a minimum. At the same time these factors have helped breed trust and the formation of a cohesive working unit oriented to academic achievement. Evidence of these effects may be seen in better attendance, improved relationships with others, greater creativity in thinking, and more freedom to make decisions.[47]

Almost 90% of the students surveyed by the researcher expressed satisfaction with their lives at Ideal School. Students cited improved personal relationships, more participation in decision making, increased interaction with teachers, and increased confidence, motivation, and personal responsibility. The majority of students also reported that they were encouraged to pursue their academic interests and to work independently, and that they were committed to completing assignments. They considered field trips valuable, and learning experiences "positive." Teachers reported good relationships with students, a friendly atmosphere, few discipline problems, a firm base of mutual respect among staff, and a good sense of teamwork. Teachers also reported that the "quantity of work they could complete far exceeds that achieved by regular classes" due to the co-operativeness and willingness of the students.[48]

Most students ended up at Ideal because they "could not hack the regular system." One student, now a naturopathic physician, says "thank God for those schools at that time for creating opportunities for kids like me."[49] Most Ideal students realized they were different. In describing themselves in 1976 a group of students wrote: "Students who attend do so for varying reasons, such as feelings of alienation and loss of individuality experienced in a large learning institution."[50] Ideal was very influenced by the 1960s, but differed from other alternative schools in that most of its students were motivated by a desire to prepare for further education and a career.[51]

Although parents of students at alternative high schools were far less involved in the day-to-day life of those schools than were elementary alternative school parents, Ideal School parents were appreciative of the existence of the school. One parent described how her son had been repeatedly beaten up while attending a Vancouver high school. After being advised by a school district official that a transfer to Ideal may avoid the "cliquishness and scapegoating prevalent in our local high schools" she wrote: "Enrolled at Ideal School, my son gradually got over his painful experiences and is now doing well in Grade 10."[52] Another parent wrote the following in 1977 about her son who "had spent two disastrous failure-ridden years in our local high school and had reached the stage of not attending classes at all:"

> In the short time he has been at Ideal, I have seen him change from a sullen, withdrawn, unproductive child to one possessing considerable maturity and self-assurance in his whole approach to life and he is now achieving high marks in Grade 9 math which he had failed twice before. The students are a close-knit, articulate little family, sharing with their teachers a mutual respect and awareness.[53]

While the majority of students thrived at Ideal School, some did not. One former student, who counts himself as one of the school's success stories, points out: "There were also a few tragedies. Several of my classmates ended up as alcoholics, heroin addicts, and homeless. Two of those had been former classmates of mine at St. George's, and I seriously doubt whether their stories would have been quite the same had they stayed in that structured environment." While some of these students may well have had difficulty in mainstream schools anyway, "others, crying out for greater discipline, floundered where there was none, and still other bright students took a longer time to obtain their diplomas."[54]

Former students who attended Ideal during its early years believe the school prepared them well for post-secondary education as well as for their career paths. Most Ideal graduates went on to university. Several became academics and lawyers, others ended up in the creative arts (dance, animation, poetry), one became a naturopathic physician, and one Ideal graduate was, for many years, editor of the *Georgia Straight*, Vancouver's alternative cultural newspaper. Ideal School gave rise to an intimate learning community populated by some extremely bright and unusual individuals. In certain specific fields such as senior science students may not have been as well prepared as they would have been in a more traditional school but most former students consider the gaps to have been minor. Students cite the school's major strengths as the emphasis on academics, the small classes, and the flexibility of the programme. Individual student goals and interests were taken seriously and respected. Perhaps most important was the attitude conveyed by the director and the teachers that anything was possible. One member of the first graduating class says: "I really blossomed there."[55] Another student credits the emphasis on discussion with teaching her how to argue a position and take chances. In the words of another

former student: "the teachers were passionate about what they did and communicated excitement about learning. The school created people who were resourceful, who could cope with life, who could take initiative. It prepared me admirably."[56]

The school owes its success in part to the vision and bravado of its founder, Garry Nixon, and to the talent, enthusiasm, and dedication of its staff. Mr. Nixon is remembered by former Ideal students as an animated and enthusiastic teacher who "likes to teach, likes ideas, and likes people."[57] He was "passionately interested in his subject, had a way with words, and had a sense of humour."[58] "He appreciated intellectual energy, had a genuine interest in his subject, and made it interesting. He taught his own version of history. Lessons with Garry were never dull."[59] According to students, Mr. Nixon was committed to helping young people achieve their best and learn how to question "the system." He encouraged students to pursue what they were interested in and he valued intellectual and artistic accomplishments equally. Another recalls that "Garry instilled the idea that learning has no boundaries or no end. All learning is worthwhile."[60]

It was perhaps inevitable that Mr. Nixon would have to leave the school. Though he was a natural teacher, he relied on charisma rather than cultivated pedagogical skill. The fact that he had not earned a teaching certificate proved to be costly in the end. He had an ideological commitment to democratic decision making but he wanted to make the important decisions himself. This created conflict between himself and the teachers who believed they were equal partners and one former student describes him as a "benevolent despot." Furthermore, Mr. Nixon had little interest in the details of administration and is described by a former student as a "disorganized visionary." Mr. Nixon's leadership strengths were his ability to motivate others and to recognize talent in other people. This was sufficient when the school was small and informal, but as it grew in size and became accountable to the authority of the school district, the administrative problems became more significant. Ideal School provides an example of the widely held notion that often the person who has the drive and talent to start a project is not the right person to carry it to completion.[61]

Alternative Schools Which Remained Independent

Most alternative schools of the 1970s followed the example of Ideal School, Total Education, and Windsor House by joining the public school system to ensure their survival. However, a few schools, due to their unusual circumstances, carved out unique niches and remained independent entities. One such school, Relevant High, developed a programme centred on social responsibility, co-operation, and world citizenship. Another, the Vancouver Waldorf School, had a peculiarly spiritual foundation. The Waldorf School and Vancouver's Montessori schools had the benefit of outside support systems in world-wide educational organizations that provided teacher training, resources, and curricula. Still another school, the Vallican Whole, survived largely because it grew out of an isolated and cohesive countercultural community that settled in the Slocan Valley in the early 1970s and which retained its distinct identity through the years. All of these schools showed a commitment to underlying beliefs their teachers feared would be diluted if they entered the public school system. Since these schools appealed to a unique and committed clientele, and since their teachers were prepared to continue working for low salaries, they were able to make ends meet. In addition to the above factors, these schools have benefitted from government financial support for independent schools provided by Bill 33 in 1977. The provisions of that legislation allowed them to supplement their budgets with Ministry of Education funding, thus contributing to their long-term survival.

Relevant High School

Relevant High School remained independent although its beginnings were similar to that of Total Education and Ideal School. Relevant High opened in September 1970 with six teachers and seventy-five students in grades seven to eleven. The school was founded by Robert Sarginson who had taught at private Catholic schools in Burnaby and North Vancouver. Prior

to teaching he had been in the merchant marine, had excelled at athletics and coaching, and had been active in the trade union movement. Mr. Sarginson, commonly know as "Sarge," believed that many students disliked public high schools because of "boredom, irrelevancy, and being treated like children," which often led to drug use and anti-social behaviour.[62] He sought to present courses in an "interesting and exciting manner" and develop "teaching methods aimed at making courses more relevant to the lives of students."[63] Relevant became Vancouver's first "school without walls" with its own bus to aid in the field trip programme. Professionals, educators, politicians, and experts in various fields were brought in to speak at the school and students spent a great deal of time visiting newspapers, laboratories, industrial sites, the C.B.C. (English and French), and the art gallery.[6465]

The school headquarters in the early 1970s was located in a downtown office building on Burrard Street across from the old Y.W.C.A. building where some of the classes were held. The school moved several times during the early years first to rented rooms in an office building on Alberni Street and later to the Y.M.C.A. building. During the second year the school acquired a forty acre farm in Langley where students spent one day per week. As in other alternative schools the student body was composed partly of counter-cultural youth and partly of students having difficulty at traditional schools. In the second year the school added grade twelve and expanded to 120 students. Student fees were $400 per year in 1970 increasing to $600 the following year, and teacher salaries were from $300 to $400 per month. Despite low salaries, the school lost an average of $5,000 per year for the first four years until it began to break even.[66]

During the first year not much learning was accomplished and illicit drug use was widespread. Although there was a timetable in theory, classes were haphazard. There were no traditional classrooms and classes were informal with students sitting on the floor or on couches.[67] Students did research at the Vancouver Public Library and some studied languages at the Berlitz Language School. Although there was no competition for grades and no formal testing, graduating students had to write government examinations in order to secure their diplomas.

Among the school's primary academic goals was the aim to teach students how to cope with the advancement of science and technology. To this end the school emphasized the integration of subject matter, creative thinking, and a good grounding in the humanities and the aesthetic arts.[68]

Although Mr. Sarginson placed a high value on academic learning, other values, particularly group co-operation and involvement in democratic life, were paramount at Relevant. The student body was divided into multi-age learning groups of eight to fifteen students who were responsible for each other's attendance, behaviour, and academic progress. Students were permitted to dress as they pleased but Mr. Sarginson expected them to take responsibility for their behaviour and attendance through peer pressure using "common sense and consideration for others" as guidelines.[69] But group pressure bordered on the coercive at times and according to some students Mr. Sarginson ran the school "with an iron fist." Contrary to the free school ideology, Relevant was "group focused," the group taking precedence over the individual. By 1974 the school had developed an intricate committee structure. Every staff member and student participated in running the school through compulsory membership in committees which included academics, attendance, communications, community relations, and classroom management.[70] According to former teachers and students Mr. Sarginson's personal energy and commitment contributed significantly to the school's success. A long-time teacher at the school recalls his "amazing gift for working with teenagers." He respected students and "changed a lot of kids' lives," many of whom "would not have finished school" otherwise.[71]

Relevant School finally left downtown Vancouver in 1978. It rented four classrooms in the Peretz School in South Vancouver for six years before moving to New Westminster in 1984 where the school rented a former Catholic school building. In 1992 the school bought a former college building in Cloverdale, Surrey, for an elementary school and two years later moved the high school to that location where it still exists today. During its New Westminster years the school fluctuated between one hundred and one hundred fifty students and now enrolls about three hundred. Although discussions took place between the school and the Vancouver School

District in 1980, Relevant remained independent. By that time the school was making ends meet financially and the staff feared that the school's philosophy would be lost within the public school system.[72]

Vancouver Waldorf School

The Vancouver Waldorf School was founded in 1971 as part of a world-wide network of schools based on the ideas of Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner.[73] Waldorf education is based on Steiner's developmental stages and one unique aspect is that the classroom teacher remains with the same group of children for eight years as they progress through the elementary grades. Waldorf schools place great emphasis on artistic development and art is incorporated into every academic activity. Students study eurythmy (a form of movement), crafts, and organic gardening. Spiritual development is also important as students are taught to balance "head, heart, and hands." Waldorf schooling has a number of common elements with Progressive education. It emphasizes "education for the whole child," favours an interdisciplinary approach to learning, utilizes "concrete" activities in the early grades, minimizes formal examinations, tries to develop flexible thinking, and seeks to maximize the individual development of each student through producing "free human beings."[74] The school opened in West Vancouver with two full-time teachers and twelve children in grades one and two before moving to its permanent home in North Vancouver in 1972. Each year one grade was added until the school spanned from Kindergarten to grade ten by the early 1980s.[75] Today the school includes grades eleven and twelve and enrollment is over three hundred students.

Vancouver Montessori School

Another international educational movement that spread to British Columbia during the 1970s was the Montessori School network inspired by the teachings of the Italian educator Maria Montessori. Many of Montessori's ideas became an integral part of Progressive educational theory throughout the 1920s and 1930s, particularly her emphasis on the use of concrete materials.[76] The Vancouver Montessori School was founded in 1972 with eight pre-school students in a rented room in the Vancouver School District's Model School building on Twelfth Avenue. The school shared this facility with Total Education and the fledgling Vancouver Music Academy. The Montessori School continued to grow and five years later added an elementary programme. Many other Montessori schools have been established in British Columbia since 1980 including over twenty in Greater Vancouver. Some of these are elementary and others pre-school, some private and others part of the public school system. Most are small schools but the original Vancouver Montessori School has remained independent and today enrolls more than two hundred students in its new Marpole Building. It may seem curious that, given Maria Montessori's connection to the Progressive movement, Montessori schools did not appear in British Columbia in the 1960s. However, her ideas were better known in Britain than in North America and took root there earlier. As well, the founders of such Progressive schools as the New School and Craigdarroch were too independently minded to adopt a single method.

Vallican Whole School

Although the counterculture of the late 1960s had waned in most parts of British Columbia by the early 1970s, it remained strong in the isolated Slocan Valley in the West Kootenays. This community was a major site of the "back-to-the-land" movement which began in the late 1960s and reached its peak by the mid-1970s.[77] The immigrants were mainly young, well-educated, and idealistic Americans seeking to escape the pollution of the cities and the violent politics of the 1960s, and were attracted by the prospects of "a personally-meaningful and satisfying existence in the countryside."[78] As one newcomer wrote: "There is a new kind of community growing in this quiet, rural Valley. Most of us come from the cities hoping to find a different kind of life for our families on the old Doukhobor farms."[79] By the early 1970s the newcomers in the Valley numbered in the hundreds, by 1976 close to one thousand.[80] Like the Argenta Quakers two decades earlier, the 1970s back-to-the-land immigrants had few opportunities for making a living and formed a co-operative, the Rural Alternatives Research and Training Society, to initiate employment projects.[81] One early success was the creation of a community library made possible by a generous federal grant. Another project undertaken by the newcomers in 1971 was the construction of the Vallican Whole Community Centre.[82] The Centre took five years to build and was financed partly by federal grants from the Opportunities For Youth and Local Initiatives Programmes, and partly by donations and volunteer labour. The project organizers included former Knowplace participants David Orcutt, Rob Wood, and Greg Sorbara (see Chapter 5) who had all moved to the Slocan Valley the previous year.

The newcomers were disliked by some long-term residents who resented the abundant formal education of the new immigrants, their perceived lack of work ethic, and the ease with which they could access government grants. Other locals were unhappy with the lifestyle of the new residents–their "hippie" appearance, their drug use, and their communes such as the New Family where the participants engaged in a group marriage. For their part, the newcomers did

not go out of their way to win over the local people.[83] In 1972 and 1973 divisiveness among three groups, Doukhobors, "Anglos," and "hippies," reached unpleasant proportions as the *Nelson Daily News* reported in a story headlined "Unrest Sweeps Valley:" "There are the long-haired scruffily-dressed hippies who have come across the border seeking solitude and there are the staid, long-time residents who have worked hard in the many years they have occupied the fertile land, to establish a good environment for their children."[84] Local residents were particularly angry that the community centre construction crew did not complete more than the foundation of the building by the time the federal grant was exhausted, and the project was not resumed for two years. Angry letters appeared in local newspapers and the region's Social Credit Member of the Legislature also entered the controversy. Even the distant *Vancouver Sun* ran several stories in February 1972 with such headlines as "Hippies, deserters 'cause real problem,'" and "Hippies, nudies, and hole in the ground."[85]

Some of this resentment was taken out on the "hippie" children at the Winlaw local school who were harassed by children of local residents to the point that many parents in the countercultural community began keeping their children home. Furthermore, the well-educated newcomers had other reasons for being critical of the school. They believed the quality of education was poor, they generally distrusted public education, and they wanted to inculcate their own values in their children.[86]

In the fall of 1972 several families decided to start their own school. The principal founders of the Free School (also called the Slocan Valley Community School and The Centre: An Alternative School) were Marcia Braundy and Joel Harris. Ms. Braundy grew up in Massachusetts and New York before earning a degree in environmental education from Antioch West University in San Francisco. She founded several alternative schools in California before coming to British Columbia. Joel Harris also came from California with a Masters degree in philosophy, and had taught at Portland State University. Other founding parents were T.C. and Brian Carpendale, Bonnie and Corky Evans, Tom and Sally Drake, Gretchen and Michael Pratt,

Dan and Pat Armstrong, Marty and Susan Hykin, and Freye Grey. Others helping with the school were Fred Eisen, Bob Inwood, Bryan and Cathie Marrion, Susan Zander, and Jeannie Neilson. Most were from the United States, particularly California, and lived within a ten mile stretch of the central Slocan Valley approximately forty miles north of Castlegar.[87] Before moving to the Slocan in 1970, the Carpendales had been associated with Knowplace, the Floating School, and housing co-operatives in Vancouver where Brian Carpendale had taught communications at Simon Fraser University.[88] The Drakes came from Los Angeles where they had been involved in the film and music industries before leaving the United States to escape the Vietnam war, pollution, and the "police state."[89] The Evans, also from California, were political activists from Berkeley who decided that was not "a place to raise children."[90]

Although most were determined to become farmers, the school founders had a variety of former careers. Two were dancer/actors, one a professional artist, one a Hollywood writer and director, one a publicity writer, one a linguist, two film-makers, one a theatre set carpenter, one a registered nurse, one a biologist, three teachers, and three university instructors. Although the counterculture had begun to wane in urban areas several years earlier, most of these parents considered themselves counterculturalists. Despite being highly educated, many had developed doubts about the value of academic learning as practised in mainstream society. They wanted their children to be free to make their own decisions about learning and behaviour and wanted the school to emphasize artistic activities, an appreciation for the natural environment, and personal awareness.

The school opened in December 1972 in the large "Morton" house, temporarily empty after the breakup of a group marriage. The school's twenty-five children, aged six to sixteen, came from as far as five miles away. Tuition was set at the value of the monthly family allowance cheque plus a small percentage of family income, and all parents were expected to volunteer at the school. Students attended four days per week and were divided into two groups, the younger children up to age nine, and older students ten and over. By September 1973 enrollment climbed

to thirty-five and the school rotated among the Drake, Carpendale, and Pratt homes, "the houses that could handle it." One parent remembers that "you had to hide all the food the night before."[91] The students were an exuberant group.

Although student attendance at classes was completely voluntary, the school offered a full, though haphazard, schedule of activities. Marcia Braundy along with Joel Harris, the school "principal," organized courses given by parent volunteers. Parents had expertise in many different areas and offered a wide variety of courses, most meeting once a week for one to two hours. Courses offered in the first year were drama, art, environment adventure, videotape and film-making, basic 3 R's, junior science, senior science, mathematics, physics, French, music and crafts, health education, environment, sports play, journal, Canadian and Doukhobor history, reading and writing, gardening, film, arts and crafts, first aid, pantomime, and ballet.[92] Judo was held in the hayloft of a barn and science was taught in the fields.[93] Students particularly enjoyed Sally Drake's ballet classes, making films, writing plays, and acting.

In March 1973, three months after the school opened, the Nelson School District served notice of their intention to prosecute the parents of children in the Free School for not sending their children to public school. One of the parents, Sally Drake, received a letter from the chair of the Board that "it has come to my attention that you are conducting a school which is possibly operating outside the jurisdiction of the Public Schools Act."[94] After an inconclusive meeting between parents and school district officials, school trustees debated the issue at a board meeting on March 26.[95] Over two dozen parents attended the meeting to support a presentation by Tom Drake listing the teaching credentials and university degrees of the twenty people associated with the school.[96] After delaying its decision,[97] the board decided to drop the matter two weeks later and open negotiations with the parents about the school's possible inclusion in the school district.[98] Although the negotiations did not come to fruition, in September the school board confirmed that they would not take any legal action against the school, and in subsequent years provided resources and bus service to the school.[99]

Most parents believed the trustees acted under pressure from some local residents hostile to the countercultural community.[100] As in the case of the Saturna Island Free School two years earlier, the major opposition to radical alternative schools came from local authorities. It is significant that this issue arose in the same region of the province where Doukhobor children were removed from their families twenty years earlier for not attending public school. Several local reporters implied, in their accounts of the school board deliberations, that members of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobor sect were "watching the school closely." The local opposition to the school had the opposite of the intended effect making the newcomer community more close-knit and determined to continue the school. In the ensuing years the school would play an integral role in the ongoing development of the community.

Turning their attention to practical matters, the school group sought a permanent facility. They continued to meet in several different homes, and for a brief period in 1974 leased a small public school building which had closed. Meanwhile, the community centre project was renewed in 1973 with a federal grant from the Local Employment Assistance Programme, and money raised from large scale benefit dances. Students, teachers, and parents spent many hours working on the building and the Vallican Whole Community Centre was finally completed three years later. The school, renamed The Whole School, moved into the Centre in the fall of 1976 as an elementary school with twenty-six students aged five to twelve.[101]

The school's philosophy during its early years was decidedly laissez-faire about learning and behaviour. Students were growing up in a permissive environment where drug use and sexual experimentation were accepted among most parents. Some inquisitive students delved into academics on their own but most did little conventional study. One teacher recalls: "Whether the kids learned to get along with each other was more important than learning math."[102] Adults engaged in spirited debate over whether students should be allowed to decide if they would learn to read.[103] By the late 1970s the school admitted only students who "want to attend and come to school primarily to learn."[104] Despite this objective, most students in the early years of the

school recall little academic learning. One former student recalls: "I wasn't a very good alternative student. I didn't do any English, I didn't do any math, I didn't do any art. They tried to interest us in things but all I did all day was smoke dope and play guitar."[105]

If the academic aims were informal, the school's egalitarian social principles were well articulated. The "School Philosophy"written in 1970s states: "The Whole School exists to provide an environment where children can learn to understand and counteract the effects of living in a society which oppresses people because of their sex, race, age, class, physical and mental disabilities."[106] The school also encouraged co-operation as opposed to competition, personal responsibility, and respect for the environment. The empowerment of women was particularly noteworthy. Female students were encouraged to consider such non-traditional careers such as carpentry and welding, and the school discussed the effects of pornography. Several students say today that they appreciated the strong female role models at the school. On the other hand, several former male students report that they have been disadvantaged in their personal development by the lack of a strong male presence among the school's leaders. Students and adults also participated in numerous gestalt therapy groups and other psycho-therapeutic activities.[107] Feminist, environmental, and personal/social transformation aspirations of the 1970s formed the bedrock of the Whole School community.

The school was governed by the entire school community of parents, teachers, and students, with decisions made at general meetings where "everyone who is able to understand has a vote." Although there were attempts to institute a Board of Directors, the community resisted, believing such a change would: "destroy the democratic nature of our school."[108] Most decisions were made by majority vote although "in questions with considerable opposition, we strive for consensus."[109] Even teacher hiring was conducted each year by the entire group. Joel Harris was the first school administrator followed, in the late 1970s, by Bonnie Evans and Alex Berland. Full democratic decision making, as in other alternative schools, was difficult. One parent remembers that the "endless" meetings became "increasingly time consuming and impossible."[110] In a letter

to parents, reminiscent of the New School under the parent co-operative, one teacher stated: "Teachers at our school work hard under often impossible conditions, while constantly being subjected to the pressures of philosophical factions and the demands of individual parents."[111]

The school was also prone to other problems including "noise and overcrowding, financial problems, morale problems, lack of parent participation, and some difficult children that had two teachers in tears."[112] The school had to struggle financially, partly because many parents were on subsistence incomes, and half of the school budget had to come from donations, benefit events, and grants. As in other alternative schools teachers' salaries were low, $300 per month (for a four day week) in 1977 and $500 per month by the end of the decade.[113] Parent fees were based on income and ranged from $40 per month to $135. Parents were also expected to contribute volunteer labour to the school and to serve on committees.

By the 1980s the school had nonetheless achieved some stability. Enrollment fluctuated between thirty-five and forty-five students with three to four full-time staff.[114] A 1980 decision to apply for government funding as an accredited independent school alleviated some of the financial difficulties. The school retained two fundamental tensions basic to most alternative schools: first, how directive or free would the adults be in regulating the academic learning activities of the students, and second, how democratic would decision-making be. The Whole School has remained on the side of participatory democracy, with all decisions, including hiring, made by the entire school community. However, academically the school has changed and students are expected to engage in typical classroom academic pursuits.

The Whole School was a courageous enterprise in experimental living. Students felt they were respected and given the freedom to fashion their own lives. One former student believes she "learned how to learn"[115] and others appreciated their involvement in setting school policy. But although some may have benefitted from the freedom there were costs. Some children were confused by the open drug use and relaxed sexual practices: "Our parents treated us as adults when we were not ready to be adults."[116] One parent reflects: "We were having a wonderful time

being political and falling in love with each other. The children came second."[117] One former student says: "I was taught to be marginal. We all had a difficult time fitting in."[118] Students remember few formal classes, many missed spelling, grammar, mathematics, or social studies, and a few are poor readers. Those who were not self-motivated or disciplined enough to create their own learning experiences, were limited academically and professionally. A few older students managed to keep up their academic skills and one has a Ph.D in psychology, another a Masters Degree in planning.[119] The lack of academics was particularly hard on those who came to the school at an early age before they had learned basic reading and mathematics.[120] About half went to university and a few struggled to complete high school. Several believe that if they had had a more academic education they would have gone to university. One student who did complete university sums up her Whole School experience: "We felt loved and important. The interpersonal skills were invaluable. I just wish I had a better academic foundation."[121]

Many Whole School students entered traditional public high schools. Former principal of Mt. Sentinel Junior Secondary in Nelson, Tomo Naka, wrote in 1984 that Whole School graduates were strong in the arts and oral communication skills, but "their written work would be weak, their science would be weak, their math would be weak."[122] However, many other students felt out of place in mainstream schools and a significant number attended alternative secondary schools in Vancouver. The Vallican Whole School continues to exist as one of the few independent alternative schools in the province. It enrolls forty students, mainly at the primary level, and employs four full-time staff. The school has survived because of an increased emphasis on academics and because the back-to-the-land community in the valley has retained a distinct identity and has continued to support the school in large enough numbers to maintain its financial viability and organizational vitality.

Conclusion

While the schools discussed above chose to remain independent, Ideal School thrived as a public school. Its entry into the Vancouver School District in 1974 was successful in most respects. Ideal School teachers were satisfied with the consequences of the move, particularly the elimination of student fees, increased staff salaries, administrative assistance, provision of a school building, and access to equipment and materials. The only negative aspects were the reduction in the size of the teaching staff in order to fit the district formula and the slowness with which the bureaucracy acted on school needs and requests.[123] However, all former teachers report that the district administration allowed the school to develop according to its original values and with a minimum of interference. Ideal School has retained most of its original character and continues to emphasize academic learning in an informal small school environment which appeals to students who object to large impersonal institutions.

Ideal School has also provided a home for many students who attended alternative schools in their elementary years. Almost half of the students enrolled in 1975 had previously attended an alternative or private school.[124] A significant number of students from the New School, the Barker Free School, Windsor House, and the Vallican Whole School attended Ideal. So many students came to Vancouver from the Slocan Valley to attend Ideal School in the late 1970s and early 1980s that they formed a kind of miniature community in the city. These students appreciated Ideal's academic emphasis and respect for students. Georgie Wilson and Marcie Thoms, who joined the staff in 1977, were considered particularly engaging by these students. One former Whole School student says: "I got turned on to learning there."[125] Another describes it as "more like a real school; I was privileged to be there."[126] Still another who had never been to a public school says: "There was good camaraderie and the teachers were clear about boundaries. I was motivated and excited to be there; my goal was to go to a real school."[127] Finally, one former Whole School student recalls: "Academic standards were exceptionally high.

Teachers taught the material but also sent the kids off in many directions. They expanded my desire to seek out knowledge. They went far beyond–exceptional children were given exceptional opportunities."[128]

Ideal School also owes part of its success to the fact that it came along at the right time. By the early 1970s the school's goals had become recognized as worthy by educational leaders and a cross-section of parents. It was therefore welcomed into the public school system which is the only way it could have survived. Ideal school owes a debt to its 1960s predecessors in the alternative school movement. By emulating their strengths and avoiding their mistakes 1970s alternative schools like Ideal have been more lasting ventures. The fact that many alternative schools now thrive within the public school system is an indication of how that system has changed. The example and pioneer work of the early alternatives contributed to that change.

The continuing existence of Ideal School, Windsor House, Total Education, and others is one of the legacies of the alternative school movement. By the mid-1970s these schools all had to make a choice–either join the public school system or close. Because they were committed to keeping their fees moderate, alternative schools were always on the edge of bankruptcy. The only way they could have survived as independent entities would have been to double or triple their fees, but in so doing would have eliminated almost their entire clientele. The years between 1973 and 1975 were a pivotal moment. Pressured by parents for more choice in the system and encouraged by a few innovative administrators and teachers, larger school districts like Vancouver, Victoria, and North Vancouver sought to develop alternatives. Taking in already established programmes like Ideal School, Windsor House, and Total Education made sense. The school districts gained the benefit of alternative programmes and the energy of the committed individuals who worked in them, and were finally able to offer a wider choice to the public. The alternative schools gained the financial means to continue teaching young people in an innovative and personally satisfying manner.

NOTES

1. Ideal School Prospectus, spring 1973, archive of Alan Best.
2. Garry Nixon, personal interview, October 16, 1996.
3. "Teachers flock to school that offers life of poverty," *Vancouver Sun*, June 14, 1972, p. 84.
4. "Board of Advisors," September, 1972, personal archive of Hugh Barr.
5. Alan Daniels, "An Ideal is adopted at last," *Vancouver Sun*, September 7, 1974, p. 44.
6. Dan Mullen, "This school looks for bored students," *Province*, June 21, 1972, p. 10.
7. Dr. Janet Measday, Dr. Leonard Walker, and Andrea Edwards taught for a brief period.
8. Barbara Stowe, personal interview, April 17, 1997.
9. Ideal School enrollment list, 1972/73, archive of Hugh Barr.
10. Vancouver School Board, Education Committee minutes, July 10, 1974.
11. Garry Nixon knew many N.D.P. politicians and subsequently co-wrote a book with Lorne Kavic about the Dave Barrett government titled *The 1200 Days* (Vancouver, Kaen, 1978).
12. Ideal School Prospectus, April, 1973.
13. Ideal School Prospectus, April, 1973.
14. Charles Campbell, personal interview, April 24, 1997.
15. Elizabeth Touchette, "Making Ideal Commitment," *Vancouver Sun*, September 9, 1972, p. 44.
16. Georgie Wilson, personal interview, November 5, 1996.
17. Alan Best, Megan Ellis, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
18. Georgie Wilson, personal interview, November 5, 1996.
19. Alan Daniels, "An Ideal is adopted at last," *Vancouver Sun*, September 7, 1974, p. 44.
20. M.A. Middleton, *An Evaluation of Ideal School, 1974-75* (Vancouver: Board of School Trustees) Research Report 75-22, November 1975, p. 23.
21. Charles Campbell, personal interview, April 24, 1997.
22. Sharon Kirsh, Roger Simon, Malcolm Levin, eds. *Directory of Canadian Alternative and Innovative Education* (Toronto: Communitas Exchange, June 1973).
23. Charles Campbell, personal interview, April 24, 1997.
24. Alan Best, Megan Ellis, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
25. Alan Best, Megan Ellis, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
26. Charles Campbell, personal interview, April 24, 1997.
27. Hugh Barr, personal interview, February 24, 1997.
28. Alan Best, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
29. Charles Campbell, personal interview, April 24, 1997.
30. Barbara Stowe, personal interview, April 17, 1997.
31. Ideal School Society, Annual Report, June 30, 1973, Registrar of Companies, Victoria.
32. Ideal School financial statements, 1972/73, 1973/74.

33. Garry Nixon, letter to parents, July 23, 1974, personal archive of Alan Best..
34. Vancouver School Board, Education Committee minutes, July 10, 1974.
35. Vancouver School Board Meeting, minutes, July 15, 1974.
36. Garry Nixon, letter to parents, July 23, 1974.
37. Garry Nixon, letter to parents, July 23, 1974.
38. Vancouver School Board Meeting, minutes, July 15, 1974.
39. "Dawson school to be reopened," *Vancouver Sun*, August 22, 1974, p. 41.
40. Hugh Barr, personal interview, February 24, 1997.
41. Vancouver School Board, Planning and Building Committee minutes, August 13, 1974, Board Meeting minutes, September 3, 1974.
42. *Vancouver Sun*, Letters to the Editor; "Ideal School students unjustly treated," and "Parent feels betrayed by school relocation," December 15, 1976, p. 5.
43. *Vancouver Sun*, "Students mount final protest over new home," January 4, 1977, p. 2.
44. Ideal School Staff, "The Case For A Separate Facility For Ideal School," brief to Vancouver School Trustees, October 27, 1976.
45. Karenn Krangle, "Situation is less than ideal for displaced students," *Vancouver Sun*, January 7, 1977, p. 28.
46. *Vancouver Sun*, "Ideal school move to Byng changed to six-month test," January 8, 1977, p. 12.
47. M.A. Middleton, *An Evaluation of Ideal School, 1974-75*, (Vancouver: Board of School Trustees, November, 1975) p. 4.
48. M.A. Middleton, *An Evaluation of Ideal School, 1974-75*.
49. Neil Tessler, personal interview, April 11, 1997.
50. Ideal School students, *Vancouver Sun*, letter to the editor, December 15, 1976, p. 5.
51. M.A. Middleton, *An Evaluation of Ideal School, 1974-75*, pp. 17-18.
52. Dr. Sue Stephenson, *Vancouver Sun*, Letter to the Editor, December 15, 1976, p. 5.
53. Nora Williams, *Vancouver Sun*, Letters to the Editor, January 6, 1977, p. 5.
54. Alan Best, Letter to the Author, June 29, 1999.
55. Barbara Stowe, personal interview, April 17, 1997.
56. Charles Campbell, personal interview, April 24, 1997.
57. Charles Campbell, personal interview, April 24, 1997.
58. Barbara Stowe, personal interview, April 17, 1997.
59. Alan Best, Megan Ellis, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
60. Alan Best, Megan Ellis, personal interview, March 17, 1997.
61. Barbara Stowe, personal interview, April 24, 1997.
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63. *Vancouver Province*, "Turning on--without drugs," June 24, 1970, p. ?
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66. Relevant Schools Society, Annual Financial Reports, 1971-1980.
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68. Relevant High School, Constitution, "Philosophical Statement," September, 1974.
69. Lorraine Shore, "The best way to build a barn is in French," *Vancouver Sun*, September 2, 1971, p. 13.
70. Relevant High School, Constitution, September 1974.
71. Doug Smith, personal interview, March 6, 1997.
72. Doug Smith, personal interview, March 6, 1997.
73. Vancouver Waldorf School Society, Annual Report, 1971.
74. Vancouver Waldorf School, brochure, February 1997.
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76. See Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (London: 1913).
77. Pat Moan, "Farm communes thriving in flowery Slocan country," *Vancouver Sun*, August 6, 1971.
78. John Gower, *The Impact of Alternative Ideology on Landscape: The Back-to-the-Land Movement in the Slocan Valley* (Masters Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1986), p. ii.
79. Bryan Marrion, L.E.A.P Project Grand Application, "Media and the Rural Alternative," circa 1971, Whole School archive, Vallican, B.C.
80. John Gower, op. cit., p. 103.
81. Russell Oughtred, "Urban Refugees Will Learn Rural Skills," *Nelson Daily News*, July 8, 1971, p. 2.
82. The community centre was originally named the Centre for Rural Alternatives.
83. John Gower, op. cit., pp. 90-97.
84. "Unrest Sweeps Valley," *Nelson Daily News*, June 22, 1973. A similar article, "Freaks Along the Slocan," appeared in the *Vancouver Sun*, July 12, 1973, p. 37.
85. "Hippies, deserters 'cause real problems," *Vancouver Sun*, February 10, 1972, p. 12; "Hippies, nudies, and hole in the ground," *Vancouver Sun*, February 18, 1972, p. 11.
86. John Gower, op. cit., p. 92.
87. A few parents were Canadian, two were British, and Tom Drake had been born in B.C.
88. Brian Carpendale wrote widely on alternative education in the late 1960s. He was one of the instructors fired during the political strife at Simon Fraser University.
89. Tom and Sally Drake, personal interview, January 9, 1977.
90. Bonnie Evans, personal interview, December 12, 1996.
91. Tom and Sally Drake, personal interview, January 9, 1997.
92. School timetable, March, 1973.
93. Moira Farrow, "Free school starts out in bind," *Vancouver Sun*, November 9, 1973, p. 31.
94. Letter from Trustee M.D. Berg to Sally Drake, February 26, 1973.

95. Four parents travelled to Victoria to meet with Education Minister Eileen Dailly but had to see special commissioner John Bremer instead. Little came of the meeting.
96. "Staff, tutors, and consultants of the Centre School, a preliminary list," March 26, 1973.
97. Peggy Pawelko, "Board defers action," *Nelson Daily News*, March 27, 1973, p. 2; "No decision yet on free school," *Nelson Daily News*, April 4, 1973, p. 2.
98. "Negotiations open on Slocan school," *Vancouver Sun*, April 12, 1973, p. 22; "Trustees shelve court action," *Vancouver Province*, April 12, 1973, p. 6.
99. "Public funds to be denied," *Vancouver Sun*, September 27, 1973, p. 39.
100. Eli Sopow, "Free Schools Meet Heavy Opposition," and "Parents Desire Educational Choice," *Kootenay Miner*, March 29, 1973, p. 4.
101. John Gower, op. cit., p. 102.
102. Marcia Braundy, personal interview, January 20, 1997.
103. Bonnie Evans, personal interview, December 12, 1996. Ms. Evans was one of the parents most strongly in favour of being assertive about teaching the children to read.
104. "Whole School Policy," late 1970s.
105. Steven Drake, personal interview, March 26, 1997. Mr. Drake's guitar playing did have some benefits. He is the lead guitarist with one of Vancouver's most successful bands.
106. "Philosophy of the Whole School," mid-1970s.
107. Pamela Swanigan, personal interview, December 11, 1996.
108. Dick Vission, letter to members, circa 1979.
109. "Whole School Policy,"
110. Pat Armstrong, personal interview, April 1, 1997.
111. "Letter to Whole School Parents," undated, late 1970s.
112. "Letter to Whole School Parents," undated, late 1970s.
113. General Meeting, minutes, July 25, 1977.
114. School enrollment registers, 1980-1982.
115. Ailsha Grey, personal interview, April 14, 1997.
116. Jono Drake, personal interview, February 10, 1997.
117. Bonnie Evans, personal interview, December 12, 1996.
118. Barbara Pratt, personal interview, March 13, 1997.
119. Jeremy Carpendale, James Pratt, personal interviews, November 13, 1996; April 11, 1997.
120. Carolyn Eaton, personal interview, April 2, 1997.
121. Erin Harris, personal interview, January 15, 1997.
122. Tomo Naka quoted by Adrian Chamberlain, *Castlegar News*, October 10, 1984.
123. M.A. Middleton, *An Evaluation of Ideal School, 1974-75.*
124. M.A. Middleton, *An Evaluation of Ideal School, 1974-75*, p. 3.
125. David Eaton, personal interview, April 2, 1997.
126. Steven Pratt, personal interview, March 9, 1997.
127. Erin Harris, personal interview, January 15, 1997.
128. Jono Drake, personal interview, February 10, 1997.

CHAPTER 11: THE NEW SCHOOL: LATE YEARS

The New School was the prototype of the alternative schools movement in British Columbia as it exhibited characteristics of all three of the phases through which alternative schools passed. Founded as a Progressive school in 1962, it had taken on most of the elements of a Romantic school by 1968. The New School changed again in the early 1970s becoming a therapeutic community with an emphasis on personal empowerment and transformation.

A Therapeutic School

The New School underwent a second major shift in membership and philosophy around 1973. The academic families had long since departed, and many counterculture parents, who had dominated the school since 1968, also began to leave. For some their children were ready for secondary school, others no longer endorsed free-school methods, and still others were re-entering society's mainstream as they matured.

Of the remaining students some had been unable to cope in the public school system, and almost all came from single-parent and low-income or welfare families. A few parents were social workers and one had a managerial position in the post office, but most were unemployed or marginally employed. The parent body had become a mix of former hippies, political activists, and "downwardly mobile"[1] poor people. One teacher, Margaret Sigurgeirson, described the remaining clientele as "really poverty-stricken, single parent, or low income families."[2]

The shift from a middle-class to a lower-income population is borne out by demographic information taken from enrollment lists. When the school opened in 1962 only three out of thirty families (10%) lived east of Main Street. By 1969 this had increased to 20% (nine of forty-six families) and in 1971 to 35% (eighteen out of fifty-one). But by 1973 this rose to 50% (twenty-two out of forty-three) and by 1975 to 72% (eighteen out of twenty-five) of New School families

living on Vancouver's east side.[3] Many now lived in the immediate school neighbourhood, in sharp contrast to the days when carpooling from the west side of town was such a part of school life. A 1975 fund-raising brief described the shift from a "school founded by a group of university professors" to a "work-oriented, east end school."[4]

Family structure had also changed dramatically by 1973. Of thirty-nine New School families in 1975/76 only six were two-parent families and two of those were about to break up.[5] Thirty-three families (87%) were headed by single parents; in only seven of these were both parents active in the children's lives. In the other twenty-six families the second parent (in most cases, the father) had all but disappeared from the children's lives. Application forms for 1973/74 and 1974/75 showed two intact families with both parents living together, four families in custody of the mother, three families in custody of the father, two families with joint custody in separate residences, and two students cared for by "four women with equal responsibility for the children."[6] In three cases, the non-custodial parent had no contact with the child at all. Three of the custodial arrangements were informal and in one family the child "moved organically" between the two homes.[7] Several of the parents lived in communal houses. The living situations of New School families were far from traditional.[8]

The acceptance of large numbers of special needs children began transforming the New School into a therapeutic institution by about 1973. During its first years the school had accepted a few special needs students, but by the mid-1970s students with learning disabilities and emotional disturbances became more numerous. The school even accepted two students from Browndale, a centre for very disturbed children founded by John Brown, and one teacher remembers learning how to do the "Browndale hold."[9] There were few mainstream schools offering programmes for disturbed kids in the early 1970s.

The acceptance of troubled students was partly an attempt to solve some of the school's financial problems. Teacher Barbara Hansen arranged for the New School to receive Department of Human Resources subsidies if the school accepted more emotionally disturbed children.[10] The

subsidies were a temporary financial benefit of several thousand dollars per year but, in the long run, the increased number of troubled kids weakened the school.[11] Parents of normal students began to withdraw because their children were not receiving a regular programme. Finally, the shift towards special needs students became irreversible.

Joan Nemtin describes the changing atmosphere:

> A lot of new parents had personal problems and their children were quite disturbed. As a child care worker I knew what an emotionally disturbed kid looked like. The kids were badly behaved. They would throw rocks at one another and run right into the middle of what you were doing. There were several acting out boys and it was difficult to teach them anything. You could sit around a table and talk, but you couldn't (teach them) to read. It was discouraging. Barb was the only one strong enough to provide the disturbed kids with the structure they needed. It was a harrowing experience for the quieter kids. The problem kids had too much power and bullied the others. They were too disturbed to be with normal kids; they needed a more therapeutic setting. We didn't have the training to deal with at least five kids who were there but we felt that if we turned them away there would be nobody else. I felt it wasn't fair to the other kids.[12]

Another teacher, Sharon Van Volkingburgh, estimates that over 20% of the students had serious behaviour problems and that close to 40% had learning disabilities. She describes one girl, whose mother was an alcoholic, stealing cars at age thirteen. Another child "just showed up at our door one day. Her mother was so out of it (on drugs) that we never even found out her last name."[13] One former student recalls the younger kids being picked on by "a lot of weirdos."[14] Another remembers "destructive kids with bad tempers who should have been in halfway houses—kids I was deathly afraid of."[15] One teacher, in recalling a boy who was eventually asked to leave the school, says "his name strikes fear into my heart still!"[16]

A group of aggressive boys was particularly difficult for the teachers to control and the staff did not have the training to handle children with serious problems. Teachers attended a conference on special needs testing but for the most part assessment was simply done by teacher intuition. Parents desiring a formal assessment had to arrange and pay for it themselves.

Some students ended up at the New School because the public school system could do

nothing for them. Desperate social workers placed kids there knowing the school would not turn kids away when there was no other place for them to go. Student Margot Hansen remembers how her mother, Barbara, used to bring kids home:

> She'd bring kids home that needed a break from their parents. She took in the ones who couldn't fend for themselves and looked out for them. I also remember picking up a couple of kids whose parents were heroin addicts. The only way they could get to school was if we drove, so we did.[17]

Barbara Hansen, the acknowledged school leader, had a vision of the school as a "caring community," a concept she developed through her association with Unitarianism, and the school became a refuge for local kids who needed help. Many of these students received little emotional support from their families. Some kids didn't get enough sleep or enough food, several spent much of their time destroying property, and a few were violent and bullying.

In a funding request to the Human Resources Ministry the teachers listed the kind of troubled families they served:

> One woman has three children, is pregnant, on social assistance and is attempting to get a restraining order on her husband.
> One single mother has five children and just completed a course in welding. She is trying to find employment.
> One girl was referred to the New School from Transition House. She was not attending school because she was looking after her mother who is on drugs.
> One native woman, single parent, has a child who was kicked out of a public school. She thinks it did not respect her culture.
> One woman has two children who had reading problems in public school. She found the New School in desperation.
> One child would be labelled hyperactive by the school system. His mother is a single parent on social assistance.[18]

The teachers understood that their principal function had become therapeutic rather than educational. In a fund-raising brief prepared in 1975 they stated: "We provide a programme for sixty to seventy children who for a variety of reasons cannot succeed in the school system. It is also a programme for these children's parents."[19] The document elaborates on the school's therapeutic and political function in a description of parent and family support groups:

> The programme provides an environment where children and their parents learn life skills and responsibility for their lives. It is a preventative programme that helps families out of the poverty cycle and social services dependency. The programme gets children and their parents in touch with their competence and stresses the importance of taking care of oneself physically, mentally, and emotionally, and taking care of one's environment.[20]

The brief emphasizes the development of practical work attitudes: "There is a familiarization for the children of different occupations in the community (printing, woodworking, retail stores, factory work) to give them concrete employment experiences so that they can begin to see themselves making choices and have a clear connection of the skills they work on and how they can be used in life in the community."[21] Only once in four paragraphs is education mentioned: "The basic skills are taught on an individual basis and in small groups to ensure competence in these areas."[22] Competence in the basic skills is a far cry from the loftier goals of earlier years—the development of problem solving skills, critical thinking, research skills, and self-expression in the creative arts.

Barbara Hansen was recognized by the teachers and parents for her exceptional ability to work with children who had serious behavioural or emotional problems. But most New School teachers did not have the skill or the training to help these students other than to make them feel loved and worthwhile. The effects of a positive attitude could be considerable, however. One parent, whose son's behaviour was "pretty extreme," credits the school with restoring his self-esteem and "saving him from delinquency." She continues: "Any other school would have kicked them (seriously disturbed students) out or made their lives hell, but the New School just loved them to death."[23]

The staff was primarily concerned with the emotional rather than academic development of their students and put a great deal of energy into working with families. This took the form of social work to solve immediate personal or economic problems, and political work in an attempt to organize the individuals to take some collective action. This approach was developed by Barbara Hanson and Sandra Currie, a parent who had immigrated from the United States. Ms.

Currie saw her work in the school as a natural extension of her political activity which was concerned with social change and the empowerment of poor people through collectivist organizations.

The New School maintained a strong communal atmosphere and became an extended family for many of the participants. Social evenings at the school featuring potluck meals, dancing, or films were frequent.[24] The school provided emotional support for parents with financial or marital problems and some students would move in temporarily with other families. It was empowering for the kids to feel that they had choices. One parent remembers nights when she "took home six kids." One a longtime New School parent, says:

> I lived on the North Shore and there were kids staying in our house every night. Sometimes they'd come every night for three weeks. They'd think they lived at our house for a while. Then my kids would disappear for a week or two and live in Kitsilano at somebody's house and I knew, sort of knew, where they were. There was a community even though it changed from year to year with new kids coming and people moving away.

The New School Teachers Society continued to govern the school and addressed matters of finance, personnel, and long range planning. Society membership consisted of permanent teachers, former staff members, and two elected parent representatives.[25] One member was responsible for managing school finances with the help of a professional accountant from time to time. The policy was to make decisions by consensus but votes were taken when necessary. The parent representatives played an important role in society business as parents wanted more input in school affairs than they had had in recent years.

Day-to-day decisions were made by the teachers at weekly staff meetings. They discussed programmes and scheduling, problems with individual students, and communication with parents. Staff members divided up tasks such as building maintenance, purchasing supplies, secretarial duties, screening admissions, and janitorial work. Most staff members became plumbing experts. Salaries were equitable, although teachers with dependent children received a monthly bonus when finances permitted.[26] Staff made decisions collegially, but Barbara Hansen was the

dominant figure during this period.

The day care and after-school care programme was one New School operation that broke even because parents were eligible for government subsidies. However, the day care was engaged in a running battle with the health department, and visits from health and fire inspectors were frequent. These visits usually resulted in repair requirements such as upgrading the washrooms and kitchen.[27] In 1973 the day care gave up trying to meet licensing standards and closed. This closure did not affect parents since the school was by now accepting children as young as four years old into its regular programme. But the loss hurt the school financially as parents of pre-schoolers no longer received government subsidies.

The parent body once again became a powerful group in the school. From 1974 to 1977 only two staff members out of ten were certified teachers and the distinction between parents and teachers became blurred. Some parents volunteered in classrooms and one parent attended staff meetings. Several times a month both parents and staff attended workshop sessions, on issues such as aggression or discipline, and get-togethers to discuss the children.[28]

Staff/parent meetings sometimes resulted in intense conflict over the direction of the school and, in an attempt to reach consensus, discussions could drag on until late at night. The school was run as a collective and became very politicized. There was "a lot of rage" expressed, and according to Joan Nemtin, meetings were draining and decision making often became a case of the "survival of the fittest."[29] There was a sense of desperation in the belief, voiced by some, that "the school got better (more authentic), the poorer it got."[30]

Co-operative organizations flourished throughout British Columbia in the early to mid-1970s and the "co-op movement" became an important feature of New School politics. Many parents and teachers belonged to other co-operative and collectivist organizations such as food co-ops, daycare co-ops, and housing co-ops. This high level of social/political activity was balanced by a continuing quest for individual self-actualization and parents were busy participating in radical therapy groups, a blend of individual transformation and political analysis.

The emergence of radical feminism as a unifying theme for teachers and parents was a significant aspect of New School life during its last few years. Most of the women were single parents, many on welfare, who saw in the New School a place they could afford where their kids would be treated well. Many also saw the school as an important element of their social, political, and emotional life. Some were lesbian, a few were Marxist, and others militant feminists. The feminist group grew so strong that from 1973 to 1976 the school became a focus for feminist activism throughout the city and several important women's groups had close connections with New School participants. These organizations included the Women's Health Collective, Press Gang publishers, *Makara* magazine, Women's Inter Art Co-op, Women's Emotional Emergency Centre, and the B.C. Day Care Federation.[31] Several parents were also active members of Southhill Day Care which took a leading role in advocating children's rights and increased government funding for day care.

Feminist theory and practice dominated New School activities during these early years of the women's movement much as counterculture attitudes had consumed participants a few years earlier. Discussions were sometimes directed against indiscretions of male teachers such as the infamous Playboy pinup, or the use of sexist and degrading language. Several members recall groups of parents walking down the hall, tearing off the walls any material that could be construed as sexist. Whether or not this constituted censorship was a hotly debated question. Parents and teachers worried about the lack of teacher attention to the girls because of the anti-social and destructive behaviour of several emotionally- troubled boys.

One parent remembers how "Barbara Hansen used to refer to us as the Feminist Mafia. We were extremely prickly in the seventies. There really was a sexist pig under every bed."[32] Ms. Hansen says that a feminist orthodoxy developed that had everyone "looking over their shoulder" for fear they were not politically correct.[33] One former student remembers how the girls were teased if they played with dolls or wore dresses. She also recalls dances where men were not allowed and describes the school as a "cold man-hating place."[34] More moderate women had

mixed feelings about the school's direction. They agreed with feminist goals but also believed that several fathers and one male teacher contributed significantly to New School life. Nevertheless, the feminists successfully eradicated most sexist attitudes at the school within two years.

Ms. Currie organized a women's support group for parents and teachers. Members supported each other both as women confronting sexism and as poor people aspiring to meaningful occupations. Women talked about personal experiences with sexism and how they were affected by soft- core pornography.[35] The group helped one parent, a welfare recipient, realize her ambition to become a welder.[36] Another parent credits the emotional support she received at the New School with "helping her get out of a bad marriage and into a career."

Female students were encouraged to confront male teachers whenever sexist behaviour arose.[37] Several parents conducted sessions with the girls about female social conditioning and how girls "can no longer do and be the way they are."[38] One of the girls rebelled and insisted on wearing a dress to school for several months. As was often the case at the New School, the adult preoccupation dominated the activities.

The boys' response to radical feminism was mixed. One former student is bitter in recalling that the "male energy of the boys was shut down."[39] One parent describes how her son became a "militant anti-feminist" (her daughter is a "militant feminist") but points out that "although the boys did not get the usual male privilege, they were still cherished even when being outrageous."[40]

A major staff turnover occurred in September 1973. Daryl Sturdy, Saralee James, and Daniel Wood[41] who had led the school for several years all left to pursue other jobs. Claudia Stein, Joan Nemtin and Jonnet Garner had also left by the following June,[42] and a new group of teachers led by Barbara Hansen would carry the school throughout its last years. They were Margaret Sigurgeirson, Sharon Van Volkingburgh, Daniel Morner, Ellen Nickels, Jill Fitzell, Kathy Stafford, Judy de Barros, Linda Proudfoot, and Jan Robinson. Ms. Hansen, Mr. Morner, and Ms. Sigurgeirson worked closely together with the older students for three years.

Key staff members shared a common political orientation which included the co-operative movement, the women's movement, grass roots community associations, children's rights groups (such as co-operative day care), and left of centre political organizations (including the N.D.P.). Ms. Sigurgeirson had been a long time parent at the school and Mr. Morner had come to Canada as a draft resister from the United States. He had a special interest in working with the hyperactive boys. Ms. Van Volkingburgh had been active as a community organizer with the Company of Young Canadians and in an interfaith church association. She met New School parents and teachers through her work with anti-poverty and welfare rights groups and through the community woodworking classes she taught. Ms. Nickels was a classical musician and Ms. Robinson was a former New School student. Several staff members had social work and child care backgrounds thus strengthening the therapeutic and weakening the academic orientation. Only Linda Proudfoot and Jill Fitzell were certified teachers.

This group of teachers was more cohesive than any other in the school's history. They had uniform objectives and a strong leader in Barbara Hansen who was admired by teachers and parents for her energy, ingenuity, and intuitive skill in reaching troubled children. Staff members were drawn together by the almost insurmountable obstacles they faced. They were inadequately trained to work with such difficult children and they confronted an increasingly grim financial situation. Staff had to be administrators and custodians in addition to their roles as teachers and care givers, often cleaning and maintaining the school building after a full day of teaching or on weekends.

Ms. Van Volkingburgh and Ms. Sigurgeirson describe the challenge faced by the teachers: "It was often uncomfortable for adults—it was so much of a kid's place. We had no adult space, no place to take refuge." "The New School was very physical—kids were moving all the time. You were living with those kids. I used to spend my Saturdays washing the floor. It wasn't just your job—it was your life."[43]

Curriculum

The curriculum continued to de-emphasize academic work. The teachers did not believe in separation between "playing, learning, and working," and offered "lots of individual attention and ungraded work with no pressure." The teachers believed that future success would depend more on children's attitudes than on skills.[44]

The first two hours of the morning were scheduled for academic work followed by play time until lunch. Art, creative activities, and special projects were done in the afternoon. Swimming and physical education took place outside the school two mornings per week cutting into academic time. According to Barbara Hansen, most of the classroom day "went according to whatever came up."[45]

There was little systematic attempt to teach reading skills until the last two years. Teachers wrote down student stories or read aloud to groups of children. Some students did not learn to read effectively and some read poorly to this day.[46] Most of those who did learn to read did so on their own or at home. Some teachers believed reading was no longer so important in a highly technological society. One parent describes the haphazard approach towards her son:

> He liked to help (the younger students) because he was also learning while he was doing that. He had a learning disability or I call it a perceptual difference. So he never really sat down and learned anything. He just sort of picked it up as he was wandering around."[47]

Another parent claims that "no one noticed" that her daughter didn't know how to read,[48] and still another reports that her oldest son was reading at a grade two level at twelve years old.[49] One student who learned to read at home doesn't remember any academic instruction at school.[50] One teacher who taught during the late 1970s at City School, an alternative secondary programme, says that some New School kids couldn't read.[51] Some students were dyslexic and although the teachers did provide them with individual attention and understanding they were not skilled enough to really help them.

Ms. Hansen taught a regular mathematics programme emphasizing practical skills. One parent remembers that "she used to take ten kids down to the bank and say 'this is how you fill out a deposit slip so you won't get ripped off.'"[52] The younger students did little math other than counting things out and sharing. There were occasional science experiments with makeshift equipment or social studies lessons with castoff textbooks from the school board. The teachers encouraged project work. On one occasion, after a visit from a geology professor, students painted floor to ceiling dinosaurs and made a geological time line around the inside walls of the school.[53] Academic work was individualized and teachers set minimum standards that varied with each individual.[54] In theory, students had to finish their work before doing anything else, but in practice they could get away with doing very little. Thinking about the value of a regular routine one teacher says: "I thought kids needed creative stimulation; I didn't think the routine was as important as I do now."[55]

A change in thinking about academics occurred in 1975 as the teachers and some parents realized that sending poor kids into the world without basic literacy skills would double their disadvantage. Barbara Hansen told a journalist: "There is an expectation of some kind of work being done. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are survival skills in this society, and kids have to learn them, and the job of the teacher is to teach them as efficiently as possible."[56] This view was consistent with a general rethinking of free school methods and the value of literacy initiated by the writings of Jonathan Kozol in the United States and George Martell in Canada by the mid-1970s.[57] The back-to-basics movement was also in full swing by 1975.[58]

In 1976 the teachers initiated a serious programme to teach the younger kids to read.

> We got a set of textbooks and worked one to one with the kids—we had enough teachers that we could do that. We had checklists and worked on phonics and key words. We felt we were making progress.[59]

Teachers spent twenty minutes per day with each child while one staff member supervised the others at play or doing individual projects. Teachers were enthusiastic about the programme

despite the lack of quiet areas or carpets to sit on comfortably. However, the school closed before any significant results could be achieved. Whether the teachers were skilled enough or the students receptive enough to have made this programme a success is uncertain.

Students participated in weekly swimming and skating sessions, played floor hockey and soccer, and exercised on the school's modest gymnastics equipment. There were crafts sessions one afternoon per week and occasional art gallery workshops. Ms. Van Volkingburgh revived the woodwork shop and some students built forts and even their own desks out of wood lying around in the playground. Ms. Nickels played the piano or led students in singing and one parent, a symphony member, performed at the school from time to time, but there was no comprehensive music programme.

Field trips with small numbers of students were easy to arrange and often occurred spontaneously. Students went to the beach frequently and set up a salt water aquarium back at the school. One year students were given rides on a hot air balloon; after the experience they made miniature balloons and flew them outside the school. The school provided a student "feast" on Fridays and everyone looked forward to this event, often held at Stanley Park.

The New School accepted many visitors including student teachers, and for several years students in a Vancouver School Board training programme for area counsellors spent an afternoon at the school.[60] Social work students from Simon Fraser University came to the school once a week and organized interest groups. These were organized around topics such as photography, theatre, cooking, arts and crafts, music, sports, exploring Vancouver, and visiting parents' workplaces.[61] During the school's last months Ms. Hansen initiated a comprehensive legal rights and awareness programme for students and parents utilizing experts from the field. This programme was consistent with the school's commitment to children's rights.

The teachers organized regular camping trips. One parent donated a cabin at an old mine site in a remote area near Anderson Lake south of Lillooet. The only access was via a B.C. Rail stop and campers had to climb four and a half miles of steep mountain switchback trail to reach

the camp site.[62] Adults and children spent up to a week at the cabin learning basic survival skills in the bush including cooking, hauling water, and chopping wood. Several adults remember learning how to use a chain saw. Students as young as six were expected to do their share of the work and were responsible for getting along with each other.

Teachers were more willing to set minimal expectations for student behaviour and participation than during the early 1970s. Some rules included: younger children not to cross streets without an adult, no smoking in forts or burning paper, no more than two students on the tire swing, and school equipment was not to be taken home. Other rules stipulated that younger children were not permitted to go to the store, students could not change interest groups, all students were required to go skating, and students were to vacate the staffroom if asked to do so by an adult.[63] Even these minimal rules were far stricter than the teachers would have imposed a few years earlier.

Despite the rules, one student who attended during the final two years remembers the school as "totally free where kids could do what they liked."[64] Attendance was difficult to enforce and some students missed a lot of school. Students were permitted to smoke in restricted areas. One former student remembers a lot of bullying of younger kids in the unsupervised basement.[65] The only rules enforced consistently were those about violence or damaging property, and fights were usually dealt with right away by several staff members. But the basic stance was to promote student autonomy in almost all situations and teachers expected students to solve most of their own problems. One teacher says in retrospect "we thought the world was a safer place than it was and we exposed kids to scary situations. Some of them developed a pseudo-maturity that made adolescence unnecessarily hard."[66]

The school held monthly student/staff meetings in the Summerhill fashion and students set the agenda and chaired the meetings.[67] New School students learned how to express themselves and debate issues, and were not afraid of adults. Students of all ages played and worked together, and older students looking after younger children contributed to the family

atmosphere. Many of the students were going through divorce in their families and living chaotic lives that, according to one parent, would have challenged even the most structured school setting. She points out that the students learned to take care of themselves and that the adventure they experienced at the New School kept some from ending up in the drug subculture or other destructive environments.[68]

The End of the New School

The financial situation at the New School continued to worsen. Salary expenditures were too high due to the large teaching staff, and fee income was too low because of dropping enrolment and an influx of poor families. Many parents were unemployed or marginally employed and few could afford even the minimum fee which had risen to $500 a year by 1973 and $600 per year in 1975.[69] Families who could have afforded to pay more left the school, unhappy that the regular educational programme was neglected due to the school's increasingly therapeutic nature. The New School could not afford to expand its offerings or to pay staff adequately even though teachers were earning only $5,000 per year.[70]

By 1973 parents looking for a less structured school setting could choose from a number of alternative programmes emerging in the Vancouver School District. For example, Bayview Elementary School in the Kitsilano district had developed a reputation for being open, integrated, and innovative, and some New School students transferred there. Bayview offered multi-age groupings and was influenced by the "open classroom" and "integrated day" practices often found in British primary schools. Teachers were called by their first names and students were encouraged to work on individual and group projects. Charles Dickens primary annex in East Vancouver was another school offering a more individualized programme and one former New School student has good memories of Dickens after transferring there. Irwin Park Elementary School in West Vancouver developed an Alternative Intermediate Programme in the early 1970s,

attended by two New School students. The existence of these alternatives hastened the departure of the very families necessary for the New School's financial solvency.[71]

The school could have become financially viable through integrating into the Vancouver public school system as Total Education and Ideal School did during the mid-1970s.[72] This possibility was discussed but there were serious obstacles—the teachers were not certified, the building was substandard, and many participants believed the school was simply not respectable enough. They were too tired to muster the energy to convince the school board that the New School was acceptable. In addition, the group felt a general "hostility" towards the school system.[73] Parents and teachers distrusted large institutions and feared that the school would "lose everything it stood for."[74]

Beyond these considerations was a belief that the New School's function was fundamentally different from that of the alternative schools within the school system which they saw as merely rehabilitative. New School leaders saw their primary goal as political: the prevention of problems through a kind of education that would empower children rather than teach them to fit into a system.[75]

Ms. Hansen and Ms. Currie applied for grants from numerous organizations and agencies. They applied to Opportunities for Youth and Local Initiatives Programmes for assistance to the after school programme and a summer camping experience. They made numerous requests to government agencies particularly from 1972 to 1975 hoping that their political orientation would give them some clout with the N.D.P. government. A grant request to the Ministry of Education for science equipment and supplementary salaries was denied because the government was opposed to grants to private schools. In the proposal the applicants had referred to the school as "a real independent school, not one subsidized by a religious organization."[76] A 1974 request to Norman Levi, Human Resources Minister and former New School parent, managed to produce some funds to assist the school in caring for children of families on welfare.

The school began losing money consistently from 1971 at an average of $5,000 per year,

and managed to balance its budget in only two of its last seven years.[77] There was a brief period of optimism when the original mortgage was retired in 1973, and a staff reduction led to a surplus. But a big loss in 1974/75 forced the school to borrow $15,000.[78] In 1976/77, the last year of operation, the school was virtually kept afloat by half a dozen families with average or above incomes. Yet despite an uncertain future, as late as 1975/76 the New School enrolled fifty-one students and employed six teachers.

Benefit concerts and rummage sales became less frequent as energy for these events decreased, and fund-raising rarely brought in more than $500 per year after 1971.[79] Starting in 1974/75 the school required parents to pay their June tuition at the beginning of the school year[80] and parents were asked to sign a legal fee agreement stating the tuition fee and the date by which it would be paid. If a child withdrew part way through the school year, the parent(s) agreed to be liable for 50% of the remaining fees until the end of the term.[81] Of course, such agreements were impossible to enforce.

Attempts to increase income through fees could not succeed because half of the parents could not afford to pay them. Of thirty-eight families registered in 1975/76, fourteen (37%) were assessed the minimum fee of $600 while twelve (32%) were assessed less than the minimum. Five of those families were charged $200 or less and one parent was assessed no fees at all. Five families paid between $600 and $1,000. On the other hand, a few families carried a much heavier burden, demonstrating how badly they wanted to send their children to the New School. Three families paid the maximum fee of $1150 per child and four other families with more than one child paid total fees over $1150. Two of these paid $1800 while one family of five children whose father was a post office manager contributed a total of $3150.[82]

Twenty-three families managed to pay their assessments in full by the end of the year while another five paid 80% or more. However, six families paid less than half of their assessed fee and another five withdrew during the year. The debenture system was abandoned because no one could afford to pay them. Given this kind of uncertainty the school could not rely on

income from fees and the situation became even worse in 1976/77. Yet, the teachers were not about to abandon families in financial trouble and fought hard to keep them in the school. As several teachers commented, "we were carrying a lot of families."

The financial problems were exacerbated by the deteriorating state of the school building. The basement floor, back porch, and roof were in poor condition.[83] The play area and side yard were inadequate but there was never extra money to develop them. The outside appearance was shabby, the inside dark and dingy, and the roof began to leak badly in 1974.[84] The frequency of work parties was increased to every six weeks by 1973[85] and during the 1973 Christmas holidays alone, the stage floor, kitchen linoleum, a kitchen wall, and curtains were repaired, and three rooms were painted.[86] Attempts to scrounge replacement furniture had some success but there was no money for badly needed repairs. Ms. Hansen describes:

> The building was slowly dissolving into a junk heap and getting more and more unattractive so we were losing the ability to generate the parents that would have been beneficial to the school's financial needs. There is a level of slum living that becomes really hard and produces emotional strain on everyone—a building that you can't keep clean because the building itself makes it impossible.[87]

Teachers found their work harder than ever with materials scarce and school equipment that was falling apart. Day care and gymnasium equipment also needed replacing and Mrs. Currie applied for grants to the Vancouver School Board, the Department of Education, and other government agencies but with limited success.

To make matters worse, the school began to suffer from considerable vandalism. In June 1975 an arsonist set a fire that left the basement a "charred wreck."[88] The following year break-ins became a weekly occurence according to one teacher. "Mostly, it's neighbourhood kids who throw stuff around, spill paint, break windows, upset displays, and steal equipment such as tape recorders and slide projectors. They destroy the students' work when they can find it. Our kids can't even leave their things here overnight. They're liable to find them stolen the next day and have them turn up in the second-hand store down the block."[89]

Theft and hooliganism were not the only motives for these incidents, for there was a good deal of resentment towards the school in the local community. Another teacher reported at the time:

> We feel there is a basic antagonism in the neighbourhood to the school. The (local) kids pick it up from their parents. They don't like the kind of school we are, they think we're too free. They don't like the school's run-down appearance.[90]

Ms. Hansen believed the vandalism resulted from antagonism of some neighbourhood residents "to the unconventional school."[91] The *Vancouver Sun* reported "substantial opposition within the community to the New School because of its unorthodox approach to education."[92]

Attempting to solve the problem of the school's shabby appearance and to make it more secure against vandalism, the teachers applied to the Vancouver Planning Department for a Neighbourhood Improvement Programme (N.I.P.) grant to finance painting, landscaping, and the installation of vandal-proof windows and doors. The application was supplemented by letters of support from parents, members of the local community, and education officials[93] and was approved in November, 1975 for $5,300. However, the grant was conditional on repairs being made to the roof of the building, which the school could not afford.[94] The situation reached crisis proportions when the building was heavily damaged by a severe fire on March 11, 1976. The students had to move to temporary quarters and spent much of the next six weeks on field trips to museums and parks. According to Robert Sarti of the *Vancouver Sun*, the break-ins continued even while the school was being repaired and parents had to take turns sleeping in the building.[95]

The school reopened six weeks later. The teachers invited the public to an open house in May to establish better relations with the community. Barbara Hansen said, "if they still don't like us, at least they'll know what they don't like. All our kids will be there and the people from the neighbourhood will be able to see how we go about our business."[96] Teachers went door to door to talk about the school.[97] They also requested that local businesses protest the holding up of the N.I.P. grant. The New School was back in its building but it was short of supplies, short

of money, and low in morale. One parent put it well:

> I held the values but I couldn't live the marginal life. The chaos and burnout was not beneficial to the kids. David (her son) wanted out. I wanted out.[98]

The school never recovered from the fire or from its precarious financial situation, but it did begin the 1976/77 school year (its fifteenth) with thirty students and a staff of five teachers. Work parties were convened in September to paint the building, plant shrubs, and clean up the playground.[99] The school received a grant from the Vancouver Foundation to cover the roof repairs[100] which finally allowed the N.I.P. grant to be released. Security improvements including steel doors and unbreakable windows were under way by October.[101] School life returned to normal for a few months and parents held regular pub nights and a Hallowe'en potluck party.[102]

However, part way though the year the financial situation became desperate. The school was running a deficit of almost $1,000 per month and $2,000 was owing in back tuition.[103] The shortfall reduced the teachers' incomes directly and several took evening jobs to make ends meet. The teachers were already working for less than a living wage, and by midway through the year they were receiving their salaries two to four weeks late because parents were so far behind in fee payments.[104] Essential supplies and food for the Friday feast were often bought straight out of one of the teacher's pockets.[105]

The school appealed for help in an advertisement in *Makara* magazine in October, 1976:

> The New School assumes that both children and adults are people. Our needs are the same. We need to eat. We need to have shelter. We need to care for ourselves. We need to care for others. We need to do meaningful work. We need to be with other human beings. We need to be alone. We need to learn. We need to teach. We need to change. WE NEED FUNDS.[106]

Parent/staff meetings discussed fund-raising ideas and March was declared "responsibility month" for parents to bring fee payments up to date. The March 1977 edition of the school newsletter informed the school community that some parents had not paid any fees since the previous September and announced an immediate 20% fee increase. This was a futile request given most family's financial circumstances and the "parent difficulty" committee reported simply that

"parents who aren't paying are broke." A "mega-committee" was formed to brainstorm new fund-raising projects which included benefit concerts, renting out school space, a rummage sale, movie showings, bingo, and soliciting donations from corporations and foundations.[107] Teachers and parents distributed leaflets and posters explaining the school's plight throughout the community in an appeal for money, furniture, and equipment. They even requested help from a few founding parents. Some support did materialize but it was not enough.

The school managed to limp through to the end of June and as late as March the teachers were busy planning for the coming year. They advertised in the *Vancouver Sun* for a staff position promising "minimum salary and maximum satisfaction at a co-operatively run elementary school," receiving seven replies.[108] However, the school could not even pay its teachers by the end of the year, and Sandra Currie had "half the staff living and eating at her house" during the last few months.[109] No matter how strong their political commitment may have been, the teachers could not continue to work under these conditions.

Parents described the teachers as heroic. Mary Schendlinger, an active parent during the last two years, reports that half of the parents were not paying anything in the last year. She describes the demoralizing financial situation:

> We were asking the teachers to work for almost nothing. We took advantage of O.F.Y. and C.Y.C. when we could but they had shut down by the mid 1970's and there weren't any more grants or subsidies. There was no other way to finance the operation than to get it off parents. There were a few of us paying what we could afford. We were paying a couple hundred a month which was a lot, but it was worth it to us. The teachers would have to ask for it and they would divy up whatever came in. Everybody was goodnatured about it. There weren't any fights, it was just demoralizing.[110]

The teachers served notice at the end of March that "the entire staff may be leaving at the end of this year."[111] Parents were urged to attend a meeting in April "devoted to talking about what kind of school we want—if you have something to say, this is the time to say it."

The school did not officially close in June 1977, but had neither the money nor the spirit to reopen in September. Teachers and a few parents met during the summer and it became clear

that everyone was just too tired to keep the school running. They decided to sell the school building and individuals expressed sorrow as well as relief that the struggle was finally over. Some hoped the school would resurface in a "new, revised, sensible, workable form."[112] Mary Schendlinger talks about the fatigue and poverty that caused the school's demise:

> We were desperate, hanging on by our fingernails. But the fire killed us. It was something from which we could not recover. We had faith and a belief that things could be better for our kids. We were really crushed about losing our school.[113]

She expressed admiration for:

> the dedicated women who, for little or no pay helped with my mothering, to the parents who spent long hours painting and fixing the place up, and to the kids who have been such a pleasure for me. I have been so turned on by the sights and sounds of children doing their work in ways they think are important.[114]

The students returned to a public school system that had become somewhat more flexible but many students had difficult transitions and most were too far behind in academics to make catching up easy. Few could cope with traditional high schools and even those who could meet the academic standards found the size and formality daunting. Sharon Van Volkingburgh estimates that 70% of New School students from the mid-1970s went to alternative secondary schools—Total Education, City School, Ideal School, or Relevant High. The following parent's description of her daughter's experience is typical:

> She wasn't learning at the New School but when she went to a public school in the neighbourhood she was worse there. She used to come home from school and cry every day. She was miserable until she was old enough to go to Ideal.[115]

Ms. Van Volkingburgh reports that at least ten students in the older class were "entrenched non-readers who had learned to get by without reading." She believes that if students "could read when they got to high school they were okay" for their research skills were well developed from doing so many projects.[116] However, one former student whose reading ability was well advanced says the New School's neglect of other skills was the reason she did not finish secondary school:

> I did no school work for three years and went into grade six with a grade three education. High school was overwhelming because I didn't have any mathematics or writing skills. I just gave up.[117]

The New School helped a few students even in these difficult years. Students were empowered to take responsibility for their own decisions and learned that they did have choices in their lives. One parent refers proudly to her "uppity, sassy, no-nonsense kids" while another describes the students as "undisciplined but spirited."[118] In March 1976, the *Vancouver Sun* published a letter from a parent whose son was a diagnosed hyper-kinetic. She described how an alternative programme had been recommended by a physician, psychiatrist, and school counsellor, but the few public school programmes that could help him had long waiting lists. She enrolled her son at the New School even though he had to travel two hours a day on the bus. She wrote:

> In the past year at the New School, I have found an approach to education which I wish I had given to both my children. There is no separation between learning, working, and playing. In those walls he has developed into an outgoing, energetic, and responsible young human being, no longer on medication. I am relieved that neither he nor his skills will become obsolete in an ever-changing world because learning as a part of living means his education will not stop at the end of his school days.[119]

Other than in a few such cases, the New School had outlived its purpose. Its appeal had become too marginal, its financial base had disappeared, and its students had not been given adequate academic skills. The burnout permeating the school was debilitating. As the public school system began to offer more options, the New School either had to find a place inside that system or carve out an even lonelier position on the fringe. Its only other role could have been as a recognized therapeutic institution within the Human Resources Ministry. In the end, fatigue, bankruptcy, and a fierce streak of independence left the New School with no option but to close.[120]

Epilogue

In April 1978, less than a year after the school's dissolution the New School Teachers' Society sold the building for $105,000. A fund of approximately $50,000 was left after repayment of the mortgage, the immediate creditors, and the N.I.P. grant they had worked so hard for.[121] Annual reports and financial statements had to be brought up to date before the sale could go through and Ms. Van Volkingburgh "stayed up all night with boxes full of receipts."[122] Another member tried to locate the many former parents who had allowed their building shares to remain with the school. Some of the original families had forgiven these loans but by the time of the school's closing, $9,000 worth of debentures were still owed to more than eighty families.

The society's directors have continued to administer the fund to the present day. Each year since 1978 interest earnings of up to $6,000 have been donated to educational projects approved by the directors. Priorities have been given to projects involving children from low socio-economic backgrounds or with special educational needs. Sometimes the society's assets have been used to secure loans by small organizations such as co-operative day cares. The society has retained its interest in alternative education and guaranteed a loan to Theodora's restaurant, run by students at Total Education.[123] True to their belief in co-operative structures and social change, the society directors have kept most of the money at the Community Congress for Economic Change Credit Union (C.C.E.C.). The society has also continued to maintain the mine property which is used exclusively for children.[124]

NOTES

1. Sharon Burrows, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
2. Margaret Sigurgeirson, quoted by Robert Sarti, *Vancouver Sun*, March 15, 1976, p. 25.
3. School enrollment lists: 1962, 1965, 1969, 1971, 1973, and 1975. West and North Vancouver were included with "west of Main Street," and Burnaby and New Westminster were considered to be east of Main Street, the traditional dividing line between the West and East sides of Vancouver.
4. New School Teachers' Society Brief, "Request For Neighbourhood Improvement Programme Funds," September, 1975, page 2. It should be noted that some of the low income parents differed from their east side neighbours in that they were middle class in origin.
5. New School tuition records, 1975/76.
6. Student applications, September, 1973, Nora Randall collection.
7. Student applications, September, 1973, Nora Randall collection.
8. This concurs with Daniel Duke's findings in *The Retransformation of the School* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978): 79-81. Over half of the non-public alternative schools he studied had predominantly single parent families. As well the parents "share a pattern of living marked by social experimentation."
9. Staff Meeting Minutes, January 8, 1974, Randall Collection.
10. A funding request to the Children's Aid Society was unsuccessful. Staff Meeting Minutes, September 24, 1974.
11. Financial Statements, 1970-1977, Registrar of Companies, Victoria.
12. Joan Nemtin, tape recorded interview, December, 1987.
13. Sharon Van Volkingburgh, tape recorded interview, November, 1991.
14. Karen Schendlinger, tape recorded interview, May, 1991.
15. Cara Felde, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
16. Jan Robinson, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
17. Margot Hansen, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
18. Funding Proposal to Ministry of Human Resources, December 3, 1975.
19. New School Teachers' Society Brief: "Request for Neighbourhood Improvement Programme Funds," September, 1975, page 2.
20. N.I.P. Fund-raising Brief, September, 1975, page 2.
21. N.I.P. Fund-raising Brief, September, 1975, page 2.
22. N.I.P. Fund-raising Brief, September, 1975, page 2.
23. Sharon Burrows, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
24. Staff Meeting Minutes, November 13, 1973, Randall Collection.
25. New School Society meeting minutes, April 22, 1974.
26. Staff Meeting Minutes, October 22, 1974, Randall Collection.
27. Staff Meeting Minutes, November 13, 1973.
28. Staff meeting minutes, September 6, 1973 and September 10, 1974.
29. Joan Nemtin, tape recorded interview, December, 1987.
30. Sandra Currie, tape recorded interview, May, 1988.

31. Mary Schendlinger and Nora Randall, taped interview, June, 1991.
32. Mary Schendlinger, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
33. Barbara Hansen, tape recorded interview, October, 1987. Most former parents now agree with this assessment.
34. Margot Hansen, tape recorded interview, July, 1991.
35. Sandra Currie, tape recorded interview, May 1988.
36. Sandra Currie, tape recorded interview, May 1988; Nora Randall and Mary Schendlinger, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
37. Daniel Wood, Personal Journal, 1972.
38. Sandra Currie, tape recorded interview, May, 1988.
39. Scott Robinson, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
40. Sharon Burrows, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
41. Daryl Sturdy returned to the Vancouver School District in 1974 where he has taught for many years and found more freedom for teachers in the public school system than there had been in 1968. Saralee James left to pursue a career in film and the visual arts. Daniel Wood received a grant from the U.B.C. Educational Research Institute where he worked with John Bremer, author of *The School Without Walls* (see Chapter 13), and later worked with the Community Education Programme in the U.B.C. Education Faculty.
42. Joan Nemtin taught in Vancouver at Total Education, a secondary alternate programme. Jonnet Garner moved to Ontario.
43. Margaret Sigurgeirson, Sharon Van Volkingburgh, interviews, 1991.
44. Fund-raising letter, 1977.
45. Barbara Hansen, tape recorded interview, October, 1987.
46. Dana Long and Karen Schendlinger each cite several classmates who did not learn to read at the New School; interviews, May, 1991, and June, 1987. Several parents interviewed cite examples as well.
47. Sandra Currie, tape recorded interview, May, 1988.
48. Nora Randall, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
49. Sandra Currie, tape recorded interview, May, 1988.
50. Karen Schendlinger, tape recorded interview, May, 1991.
51. Starla Anderson, telephone interview, April, 1987.
52. Mary Schendlinger, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
53. Roy Blunden of U.B.C. Professor Blunden was the last academic parent at the New School. His son left the school in 1974/75.
54. Margaret Sigurgeirson, tape recorded interview, November, 1991.
55. Sharon Van Volkingburgh, tape recorded interview, November, 1991.
56. Barbara Hansen quoted by Audrey Grescoe in "Working Classrooms: Alternate Education in Vancouver, *Vancouver* (January, 1975): 29.
57. See George Martell, *The Politics of the Canadian Public School* (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1974) and Jonathan Kozol, *Free Schools* (Boston: Houghton Miflin, 1972).
58. J. Donald Wilson, "From the Swinging Sixties to the Sobering Seventies," in Stevenson and Wilson, eds., *Precepts, Policy, and Process: Perspectives on Contemporary Canadian Education* (London, Ontario: 1977): 21-36.

59. Sharon Van Volkingburgh, tape recorded interview, November, 1991. Also mentioned in Audrey Grescoe, "Working Classrooms," page 29.
60. Staff Meeting Minutes, February 12, 1974.
61. Staff Meeting Minutes, October 9, 1973.
62. Nora Randall, "Can You Wear Earrings in the Wood?," unpublished short story, 1975.
63. Staff Meeting Minutes, September 6, 1973, February 12, 1974, April, 1975.
64. Karen Schendlinger, tape recorded interview, May, 1991.
65. Penny Ryan, interview, January, 1992.
66. Sharon Van Volkingburgh, tape recorded interview, November, 1991.
67. Staff Meeting Minutes, September 10, 1974.
68. Sharon Burrows, tape recorded interview, December, 1991.
69. New School Society Meeting Minutes, June 22, 1973, and school fee assessments, 1975/76 financial records, Van Volkingburgh Collect.
70. Annual Financial Reports, 1973-1977; New School Teachers' Society Fund-raising brief, 1975.
71. See Starla Anderson, "Mainstreaming Progressive Education," in *Working Teacher* 2:3, p. 12. The author also points out that by this time "progressive" parents wanted their children to learn academic skills.
72. See Chapters 10-12. Windsor House, an alternative elementary school in North Vancouver joined the North Vancouver School District in 1975 after coming similarly close to bankruptcy.
73. Margaret Sigurgeirson, tape recorded interview, November, 1991.
74. Nora Randall, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
75. Sharon Van Volkingburgh, tape recorded interview, November, 1991, and New School Teachers' Society Minutes, November 16, 1980.
76. Funding Request to Education Minister, Eileen Dailly, July 7, 1975.
77. Annual Financial Reports, 1971-1977.
78. Annual Financial Reports, 1973-1975.
79. Financial Statements, 1971-1977, Registrar of Companies, Victoria.
80. New School Society Meeting Minutes, May 7, 1974.
81. Fee Agreement, Randall Collection.
82. New School accounting book, 1975/76, Van Volkingburgh Collection.
83. Staff Meeting Minutes, October 16, 1973.
84. Staff Meeting Minutes, September 17, 1974.
85. Staff Meeting Minutes, September 6, 1973.
86. Staff Meeting Minutes, December 18, 1973.
87. Barbara Hansen, tape recorded interview, October, 1987.
88. *Vancouver Province*, June 11, 1975: 7.
89. Sharon Van Volkingburgh, quoted in the *Vancouver Sun*, March 15, 1976: 25, reported by Robert Sarti.
90. Margaret Sigurgeirson, quoted in the *Vancouver Sun*, March 15, 1976: p. 25, reported by Robert Sarti.

91. One long-time neighbour, Mrs. Mai Lai Wong, recalls being concerned that the children were allowed to "play in the street." She also remembers "hippie people going in and out," children with old and torn clothing, and the poor condition of the building. She didn't allow her son to play there. (Interview, November, 1991)
92. Mrs. F. Simatos of the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, quoted in *Vancouver Sun*, March 15, 1976, p. 25.
93. Gary Onstad, Education Ministry consultant during the N.D.P. government and later a Vancouver School Trustee sent a letter of support to the N.I.P., September 3, 1975. One neighbour and several local merchants also sent letters.
94. Letter from the Cedar Cottage Planning Office of the Vancouver City Planning Department to the New School's lawyer, April 15, 1976.
95. Robert Sarti, *Vancouver Sun*, April 30, 1976, p. 30.
96. Barbara Hanson, quoted in the *Vancouver Sun*, April 30, 1976: 30, reported by Robert Sarti.
97. Nora Randall, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
98. Sharon Burrows, personal interview, December, 1991. Ms. Burrows was atypical of parents from this period. She managed to go back to university to acquire a profession.
99. New School Newsletter, September, 1976.
100. Letters to the New School from the Vancouver Foundation, June 30, 1976 and September 28, 1976.
101. New School Newsletter, October, 1976, Randall Collection.
102. New School Newsletter, October, 1976.
103. Parent/Staff Meeting Minutes, February, 1977.
104. Payroll Records, 1976/77, Van Volkingburgh Collection.
105. Sharon Van Volkingburgh, tape recorded interview, November, 1991.
106. *Makara*, 1, 6 (October/November, 1976): page 48.
107. New School Newsletter, March, 1977.
108. Applications to advertised staff position, April, 1977.
109. Sandra Currie, tape recorded interview, May, 1988.
110. Mary Schendlinger, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
111. New School Newsletter, March, 1977.
112. Mary Schendlinger, Private Journal, entry for July, 1977.
113. Mary Schendlinger, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
114. Mary Schendlinger, Personal Journal, entry for July, 1977.
115. Nora Randall, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
116. Sharon Van Volkingburgh, tape recorded interview, November, 1991.
117. Penny Ryan, interview, January, 1992.
118. Mary Schendlinger, Personal Journal, entry for July, 1977.
119. Mrs. H. K. Piltz, "New School changes view of education," *Vancouver Sun*, March 23, 1976, p. 5.
120. None of the teachers from the 1973-1977 period remained in education after the New School closed. Barbara Hansen has worked for many years with troubled adolescents and heads the Alternate Shelter Society.

121. New School Teachers' Society, Financial Statement, 1977/78.
122. Nora Randall, tape recorded interview, June, 1991.
123. New School Teachers' Society, Meeting Minutes, 1978-1984.
124. The society has funded many projects. It purchased a van so that Dan Morner could continue to take young people to the mine, and a moon ball for use by alternative schools. The society also bought shares in Isadora's co-operative restaurant. The organization has made grants to a tutoring service for special needs children, Arts Umbrella for scholarships, and Kenneth Gordon School for dyslexic children for a scholarship. It supports a variety of projects at Sunrise East, an alternative public school in east Vancouver, and donated $10,000 to the Alternate Shelter Society to purchase land on Nelson Island for the use of the adolescents in its care. The society has supported Imagination Market, Maple Tree Pre-School, Family Place, a concession at the Children's Festival run by students, and a walkathon to raise money for children with cancer.

CHAPTER 12: ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Vancouver School District

Despite the rise of independent alternative schools, public schooling in Vancouver and the rest of British Columbia changed little in structure and curriculum throughout the 1960s.[1] There was little official interest in innovative programmes in Vancouver, the only exception being the rapid growth of open-area classrooms where several teachers shared a large open space. These numbered forty-six by 1969, and one school, MacCorkindale Elementary, was designed and built as an "open-area school" in 1967.[2] But by the end of the decade some teachers and administrators within the district had become aware of the individualized learning methods pioneered in elementary classrooms in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1968 references to "continuous progress," "open education," "individualized instruction," "ungraded classrooms," and the "discovery" science method began to appear in Vancouver School District publications and Board meeting minutes.[3] The Vancouver School Board Annual Report that year suggested that "gradually the spirit of change is moving through Vancouver's school system with a growing trend towards individualization of instruction and involvement of students and a resultant lessening of the use of traditional teacher-dominated methods with their emphasis on memorization of content."[4]

There was also a hint of interest in Progressive Education in the British Columbia Teachers' Federation. In 1968 the B.C.T.F. convened a Commission on Education to study the public school system and make recommendations. The Commission's report, *Involvement: The Key to Better Schools*, recommended that "education should be humanized and personalized, that programmes should be specifically designed for individual children recognizing the unique way in which each learns, and that active involvement of students will result in the development of real scholarship."[5] The report recommended many changes in public schools including

"individualized programmes" for every student, "continuous progress," accommodation of "different learning styles," de-emphasis on "large group instruction," education "not confined to school buildings," an emphasis on "human relations" and communication skills, more student responsibility for planning learning activities, far greater student choice in secondary school courses, elimination of corporal punishment, "student participation in the running of their schools," "active parent involvement," and "experimental schools" in every district.

Parents and students desired more choices in the public school system. In July 1969 the Vancouver Board of Trustees heard a delegation called Citizens Action to Reform Education (C.A.R.E.), a group of parents which had originally grown out of the Social Action Committee of the Unitarian Church. This group was typical of the small but growing number of parents who believed that learning should be "exciting, interesting, and relevant" and urged the Board to develop more innovative programmes in Vancouver schools.[6] This increased demand of parents for educational alternatives for their children and the growing number of professional educators interested in innovative methods resulted in the rapid development of alternative programmes in Vancouver public schools during the next five years.

By the fall of 1968 a modest beginning was made as several experimental programmes were inaugurated. At Point Grey Secondary two hundred grade ten and eleven students took part in an Integrated Programme which adopted a thematic approach to interdisciplinary learning.[7] The programme was partially inspired by the new "Arts I" integrated humanities programme at U.B.C. and the Arts I director came to Point Grey to assist in developing the experiment.[8] Six teachers from the English, Social Studies, and Counselling Departments were involved in the programme which had the enthusiastic support of vice-principal Jim Carter. Mr. Carter, who would eventually become Deputy Minister of Education in the 1980s, had been one of the authors of the B.C.T.F. Commission Report. He was struck by the number of "bored, disaffected, and uncommitted young people" at Point Grey. Mr. Carter was one of several young Vancouver administrators and teachers who believed that public education should be based on student

responsibility and should accommodate a wider variety of learning styles.[9]

A similar programme offered jointly at Prince of Wales and Lord Byng schools, called Project S.E.L.F., involved seventy-five students in grades nine to eleven with two teachers. The School District advertised the project as "an individualized programme in which an effort is made to place as much responsibility as possible on the student, to develop his interests, to expect a maximum amount of original research, to give him certain freedoms, and to permit students to move more freely about the school and out into the community."[10] Like the Integrated Programme, Project S.E.L.F. followed an interdisciplinary approach drawing from English, Social Studies, Physical Education, Music, and Art.

These projects continued as quiet experiments for several years. But in 1971 the number of alternative programmes in Vancouver began to increase dramatically. The number of capable students dropping out of high school continued to worry district officials and a majority of trustees believed there should be a choice of schooling available for every child. The Board's Education Committee suggested that the district implement a system of "continuous progress, non-grading, and flexible grouping" as "there is no evidence to justify keeping pupils in a lock-step arrangement according to age."[11] On March 22, 1971 the Board accepted a recommendation from district officials "encouraging the creation of alternative programmes throughout every school" and created a fund of $72,000 for teacher-initiated innovative projects. Beginning that year V.S.B. Annual Reports featured an entire section on alternative programmes explaining that "the emphasis on alternative programmes recognized that no one kind of education suits all pupils, parents, or teachers."[12]

This growing commitment to alternative programmes in Vancouver was promoted enthusiastically by Director of Education Alf Clinton. As a vice-principal in Vancouver during the mid-1960s Dr. Clinton had encountered many students "who didn't fit into the school system and he realized that it was highly unlikely they would succeed in the system the way it was."[13] In 1968 he completed a doctorate in "educational change" at the Ontario Institute for Studies in

Education and became committed to decentralizing the school system and creating alternatives. During that time he also worked with Mario Fantini, a leading American advocate of innovative programmes, and this association provided Dr. Clinton with "the theoretical and practical background" to make a strong case for alternative programmes in Vancouver.

City School

In May 1971 Dr. Clinton unveiled a proposal to the Trustees for "An Ungraded Continuous Progress School" to be known as City School.

> The City School Project is designed for students whose educational growth requires experiences beyond those found within existing school programmes. Each student will design, carry out, and evaluate his own learning programme. By having to decide what he wants to learn and through finding out how and where this can be done each learner should develop habits and skills which may better enable him to continue learning through life. The City School experience is designed to develop a healthy sense of responsibility for one's actions and for the community through active involvement in it.[14]

Students would be encouraged to use the resources of the "entire metropolitan area" similar to several high profile programmes in the United States, particularly the Parkway Programme in Philadelphia and the Metropolitan Learning Centre in Portland. One of the initiators of the project was Dr. John Wormsbecker, Assistant Superintendent in charge of secondary schools since 1967, who had been particularly influenced by John Bremer's *The School Without Walls.*[15] Dr. Clinton and other committed supporters of City School worked hard to convince district officials and elected trustees that such programmes would make a significant difference in students' lives and were therefore a reasonable use of taxpayers' money.

The curriculum would aim to develop a "sound general education" through an ungraded and interdisciplinary approach. Although there would be a core content of required courses in English, mathematics, and other basic disciplines, the primary emphasis would be on the "learning process" and the solution of "relevant problems."[16] Students would decide what they want to

learn, find out how and where in the community to do it, and then evaluate their efforts. Perhaps most important, City School's founders wanted students to "gain experience in making real decisions affecting their lives." As one teacher recalls: "there was nothing artificial or hypothetical about it. Everything students had to learn was based in a context of reality." Another former City School teacher explains: "we saw ourselves as resource people rather than teachers. Our hope was that we would be able to guide students in *how* to get educated."[17]

The proposal was approved by the Board and City School opened in September 1971 with one hundred students aged ten to fifteen and four teachers in the former Edith Cavell School annex on Tenth Avenue near Ash Street.[18] There was no formal timetable and students initiated and planned their programmes in consultation with a staff "sponsor" who monitored the students' progress. City School had two major goals. One was to help students develop independent research skills and during the first year research topics included genetics, ecology, electronics, drama, photography, film-making, cooking, and organic gardening.[19] The teachers offered voluntary classes to cover basic literacy and computational skills as they saw needs develop. The school's other goal was to "use the city as its classroom" and City School developed an extensive field trip component using public transit and rented vans. Students visited the universities, the public library, the art gallery, the law courts, and the Women's Health Collective. During the third year law students interviewed judges, police, Family Court workers, and Legal Aid Society representatives while other students helped establish a co-operative radio station and still others made costumes and sets for a production at the Frederic Wood Theatre. Another year groups of students surveyed their neighbourhoods to produce socio-economic, cultural, and architectural maps.[20] Students and teachers camped at Long Beach, went hiking in the Rocky Mountains, and learned about nature at the Evans Lake Outdoor School near Squamish. They visited other Canadian cities including Calgary, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City.

The founding teachers were Thom Hansen, Kit Fortune, Marge Jones, and Lynn Cobb. There was no principal and the staff reported directly to Dr. Clinton. The teachers ran the school

on a co-operative basis but the nominal head was Mr. Hansen who had been one of the teachers in Project S.E.L.F. Other staff members from 1972 until 1976 were Michael Day, Alan Crawford (a future B.C.T.F. president), Eva Zebrowski, Sue Arundel, Joanne Broatch, Barbara McClatchie, and Daryl Sturdy (who had taught for four years at the New School). By the third year enrollment reached one hundred twenty-five students spanning grades four to twelve. Although the original conception was that the school would eventually include the primary grades, this was never implemented because some trustees were squeamish about placing young children in such an unstructured environment. At the end of the second year the school went to a four day week with Friday set aside for voluntary field trips or independent study. Although the school was intended to attract students who were functioning well in class and wanted more independence, in reality two-thirds of City School's enrollment, according to Thom Hansen, consisted of "students the principals wanted to get rid of" who were having serious problems in traditional schools.[21] Some students were referred by the Children's Aid Society, others by school principals or counselors, and some applied to City School because they wanted a less structured learning environment than provided by traditional schools.

Although the school had the backing of the school district, it did incur some criticism. One trustee who visited the school during the first year brought back reports about the "seeming aimlessness and boredom of the students."[22] Another visitor observed that less than half of the students appeared to attend classes and meetings while the others "are either wandering around, sitting in the smoking room, or not at the school at all." This observer noted that "the ideology of freedom of choice (that a student can not learn until he or she is ready to learn) is very strong," and there was "little evidence of attempts to get students involved in any academic work."[23] Some parents believed more structure was necessary and the staff decided to implement a "more structured curriculum plan and school organization as a result of their experience at the school during the past year."[24] However, although administrators were aware of some problems, most teachers, parents, and students connected with City School were satisfied with the programme.

Almost from the outset City School experienced organizational difficulties in staffing, facilities, and decision making authority. In 1973 a parent delegation submitted a brief to the trustees criticizing the Board for insufficient staffing, inadequate facilities for science and other subjects, and the absence of a transportation budget even though activities in the community were to be a major aspect of the school. The brief claimed that the school had been established with insufficient time for planning and the teachers had been expected to develop and implement the programme with little administrative assistance. The brief also suggested that a faulty admission policy resulted in an abundance of students who were not benefitting from the programme. The parents accused the Board of setting up the school as a "token gesture" and claimed that "the school is regarded by many officials as a nuisance." The delegation asked the Board to increase funding to hire more staff and improve the facilities. They believed City School to be a highly important programme reaching beyond the one hundred students involved. "It is the nucleus of a very significant aspect of our educational system" providing "a unique and potentially successful answer to the growing disaffection of many of our young people with existing conditions."[25]

The school staff also made several presentations to district officials requesting budgetary improvements, more administrative support, improved facilities, and a realistic transportation budget. The district responded to the transportation needs by leasing two vans, but the teachers continued to be concerned about their substandard building. Staff were even more critical of what they saw as ineffective and perfunctory channels of communication with district officials. During the first year Dr. Clinton, described by one teacher as the school's "spiritual advisor," kept in close touch with the staff, but each year a new district administrator was assigned to the school. Since supervising City School was only a small component of the administrator's duties, the teachers felt both ignored and powerless to make any decisions without permission. Requests from the staff to be more involved in decisions about the school location and teacher hiring and for the head teacher to attend principals' meetings remained unanswered.

The teachers continued to appeal to district administrators for more support and more

autonomy but often felt they were receiving less of each. A letter from the staff to the district superintendent in 1975 expressed distress at "what appears to be a breakdown in communication between the Vancouver School Board and City School."[26] The teachers maintained that the original conception of the school was a collegial and community-oriented programme entrusted with the responsibility for developing its own direction. They were unhappy about their lack of input into major decisions. In 1975/76 the appointment of a vice-principal of a nearby secondary school to be responsible for City School made matters worse. Although this administrator rarely visited the school, he angered the staff by insisting on more traditional practices regarding attendance, report cards, and student supervision. These administrative problems resulted from several contradictions. Although the district leadership was undoubtedly sincere in its desire for alternative high school programmes, it did not want to commit the kind of funding necessary to guarantee success. Secondly, most administrators were squeamish about such practices as voluntary attendance and student autonomy, either of which might result in bad publicity for the programme and the district. In addition, the teaching staff's vision of City School as a democratic enterprise led to an almost inevitable struggle with the district bureaucracy.

Despite these various problems, most students found the programme a success. At the end of the first year, a district evaluation of the school indicated that "students had achieved a better attitude towards school and had gained confidence."[27] Those who returned to a regular school were more accepting. A former student comments on his years at City School:

> City School taught me to be resourceful. The teachers would never give you the answers but they would give you some direction in how to find out what you needed to know. One of the things that was important for me was that the students really ran the school. Students decided what the direction was. That was a lot of responsibility for a young kid. There were times when it did good things for me.[28]

Other students remember the emphasis on self-motivation. The school was "student oriented rather than teacher oriented;" its goal was "teaching individuals how to learn."[29] However, not all students were self-motivated and one student remembers "playing guitar all year long."[30]

In September 1974 City School moved downtown to occupy one floor of the former Dawson School on Burrard Street, a building they would share with Ideal School. Although the building was considerably run down, the majority of staff and students liked the location because of its proximity to such downtown sites as the public library, law courts, and the art gallery. However after just over two years, in January 1977, the school was forced to move again due to the sale of the building. The school took up its new residence at the former Sacred Heart school on East Pender Street in Chinatown. Staff and students were never happy with this location due to the distance from downtown and the presence of a teenage gang in the neighbourhood.[31] The school eventually moved once more to the basement of King George Secondary School in the West End where it has remained for twenty years. In this setting the school has become more traditional and is now considered an "academic enrichment programme" with a much reduced enrollment although it retains some of its original "joie de vivre."

Growth of Alternative Programmes

Other significant projects were inaugurated in 1971.[32] At University Hill Secondary, students were responsible for organizing their own timetables which included a compulsory integrated humanities course, and a combination of scheduled classes, contracted individual work, and six-week mini-courses in such topics as creative writing, mythology, and ceramics. The school encouraged parental involvement and was so popular that over seventy applicants were turned away.[33] Bayview Elementary School in the Kitsilano district, which had been home to Vancouver's countercultural community, developed a flexible approach to education which included team teaching and multi-age groups. The school encouraged an informal atmosphere as students worked together on thematic projects, addressed teachers by first names, and moved freely around the building. In July 1971 Dr. Wormsbecker reported that thirteen Vancouver schools offered programmes of "considerable change and innovation" while twenty-seven schools

planned to implement new programmes during the coming year.[34]

The rapid growth of alternative programmes in the Vancouver School District after 1970 coincided with the rise of The Electors Action Movement (T.E.A.M), a reformist civic party founded in 1968. T.E.A.M. candidates won three seats on the nine member School Board in 1968 and again in 1970. The T.E.A.M. trustees proposed many new programmes and policies and were often convincing enough to win the support of their more conservative colleagues.[35] The pace of reformist policies increased even more when T.E.A.M. swept eight of the nine seats in 1972.[36] Several T.E.A.M. trustees were U.B.C. faculty members including Peter Oberlander, Fritz Bowers, and Peter Bullen, who became chairperson in 1973.[37] The vice-chairperson was Olive Johnson, a writer and child welfare worker. Two years later T.E.A.M. retained its majority on the Board under chairperson Katherine Mirhady, a pediatrician, and vice-chairperson Elliott Gose, another U.B.C. professor. The number of educators and other professionals on the Board was in sharp contrast to the previous Non-Partisan Association boards and resulted in a far greater interest among the trustees in school programmes as opposed to financial issues.

These liberal-leaning candidates had campaigned on making the school system more democratic and responsive to the wishes of parents, and were clearly more receptive to innovative programmes than their predecessors.[38] Elliott Gose was a strong believer in Progressive principles and had been a co-founder of the New School ten years earlier. Olive Johnson was equally committed to alternative forms of education. She had experienced her children's schools as "rigid, authoritarian, and lockstep." She recalls: "I read everything I could get my hands on. I read about developmental psychology; I read John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, and *Summerhill*. I knew there was a better way to do this."[39] In 1967 Mrs. Johnson visited and wrote about the Barker Free School and Knowplace and her articles appeared in *Vancouver Magazine* and *Maclean's*. She was also one of the founding members of Citizens for Action to Reform Education and recalls that "we were all unhappy for our teenagers." Upon her election in 1970 she stated that her goal was to "increase flexibility in the school system so that students will have

a wide variety of programmes from which to choose."[40]

The 1972 election of a T.EA.M. dominated School Board reflected a growing concern about the education system among the general public. Government and citizen committees of all kinds discussed educational ideas and suggestions for change. Even the Education Committee of the Greater Vancouver Regional District referred to the education system as "a hierarchic, self-perpetuating, self-serving system which no longer meets the needs of its users and those of the broader community."[41] The committee called for greater citizen participation in educational planning, more de-centralized decision-making, and a significant increase in "educational-cultural alternatives based on different philosophies and methods from those presently used."[42] Public concern about education was part of a wider questioning of the role of all governing institutions at this time. It grew out of the aftermath of the 1960s and was reflective of the public mood desiring change. Many Canadians wanted their society to be more democratic, less centralized, and more responsive to individuals. The civic victory of T.E.A.M. in Vancouver came just three months after the New Democratic Party swept to power under the leadership of Dave Barrett and four years after "Trudeaumania." As Mrs. Johnson recalls, the times were right for political and educational change: "The times were progressive. Change was in the air. Young people were no longer prepared to be ordered about."

By 1970 many educators had heard about "open classrooms" in Britain and some of the innovations in Vancouver were an attempt to incorporate features of the British primary school system. Under the heading "Informal Education," the 1971/72 Vancouver School Board's annual report stated that the district's education staff was interested in "a more child-centred, open type of elementary school" similar to Progressive British primary schools. Staff were particularly interested in "the integrated day, multi-age grouping, and informal learning."[43] This interest increased as a result of visits to England to observe British primary schools involved in "informal education," by trustee Olive Johnson and by the district's Co-ordinator of Primary Education. The Co-ordinator reported to district staff on how teachers organized individual instruction and

supervised independent studies.[44] Mrs. Johnson reported on her observations of "informal education" and the "integrated day" approach in the twelve English schools she visited. She found that most classrooms were organized into "activity areas," that students "spend most of the day working individually or in small groups on a wide variety of activities which involve all the various subject-areas," that the learning is "interesting and enjoyable," and that teachers have few discipline problems. She also observed that children in English informal schools "learn as individuals" in multi-age groups with the teacher supplying "educational materials spanning a wide range of abilities," that most subject areas are integrated into themes, that "rote learning and memorizing have been replaced by discovery, experience, and activity," and that evaluation was performed by observation and recording what work was done rather than by keeping marks.[45]

Mrs. Johnson found her visits to the English schools "inspirational." She recalls that: "the teachers knew about child development, they knew that individual children learn at different paces; it was really working." In her extensive report for the trustees she wrote: "These schools create learning environments in which the child can learn for himself. Informal education is based on the premise that each child is an individual who learns in a unique way and whose development proceeds according to his own personal blueprint. It is based on the conviction that learning is more effective when it grows out of the needs and interests of the learner rather than the teacher." She concluded that "the goals of child-centred education and educating children as individuals are actually being realized in good British schools" and that "a child in a good English primary school is receiving a vastly superior education to that of his Vancouver counterpart."[46]

Mrs. Johnson and district staff recommended that the Vancouver School Board bring a British expert on primary schools to Vancouver to consult with interested teachers and school staffs about how best to implement aspects of "open education." Mrs. Johnson also proposed that the Board finance a year's exchange between six Vancouver teachers and six teachers "from outstanding British primary schools." The proposal entitled "Open Education in Vancouver Schools: A proposal to accelerate a child-centred approach to elementary education" stated:

> There is a growing interest among Vancouver educators in a more child-centred, open type of elementary school. In open schools teachers seem to be more successful in translating into practice the theories of Montessori, Dewey, and Piaget about child development, learning from experience, exploration, and discovery.[47]

Acknowledging the impetus given to the child-centred approach in Vancouver by Progressive British primary schools, the authors hoped an examination of open education principles would lead to changes in "our philosophy, curriculum, and methodology."

Several months later in early 1972, V.S.B. Assistant Superintendent John Wormsbecker travelled to Britain to examine in-service programmes for practising teachers, to observe in British primary schools, and to arrange the teacher exchanges and the visit of a British consultant to Vancouver. He was impressed by "the emphasis upon the individual child rather than on the class or subject matter, the controlled freedom of pupils in integrated curriculum classes, the workshop atmosphere of most classrooms, and the role of the teacher as a learning co-ordinator working with individual pupils and groups of pupils."[48] The district inspector of primary schools in Bristol visited Vancouver in the fall of 1972 and made extensive recommendations about how "child-based, individualized, and open education" could be implemented in Vancouver elementary schools. She assured trustees and administrators that such a programme would lead to many benefits for students including "taking responsibility, self-control, wise choice, sound judgement, respect for other people, confidence and willingness to explore and master a new environment, and the ability to think in original and creative terms.[49] Vancouver began to actively recruit primary teachers from Britain and several elementary schools, particularly Charles Dickens Annex, began to use "integrated day" methods.

As the new programmes at City School, University Hill, and Bayview were being established, the Vancouver School Board received a request from Total Education for financial assistance. This independent alternative school requested one teacher and the use of four bungalows at the former Model School at Twelfth Avenue and Cambie. Alf Clinton supported

the proposal citing the school's "remarkable success" working with teenagers who had dropped out of Vancouver schools because of a "feeling that they did not fit in" and helping them "to rehabilitate themselves into the educational sphere."

> Some of these students have been referred by welfare agencies and others by Vancouver Schools. Educational officials were most impressed with the work being done by this organization which follows the curriculum of the Department of Education closely and, wherever possible, encourages students to re-enter the Vancouver school system. A low pupil: teacher ratio is necessary because most of the students need counselling and someone to take a personal interest in them. For some time education officials have been aware of the need for an institution of this kind, and the service being provided by this organization fills this void.[50]

The school trustees approved Dr. Clinton's recommendation in September 1971.[51] This was a significant event as it was the first formal association between a school district and an independent alternative school in British Columbia. In 1974 the Board increased its commitment to the school by providing four teachers, four teacher's aides, and other district services, and assumed "full responsibility for the educational component of Total Education."[52] That same year in another notable decision, the trustees brought Ideal School into the district as a "mini-school" to be located in the former Dawson School building which it would share with City School in downtown Vancouver.[53] (See Chapters 8 and 10)

Between 1972 and 1975 an impressive number of alternative programmes were created by or incorporated into the Vancouver School District. The first of Vancouver's mini-schools was established at Prince of Wales Secondary School in 1973.[54] This was a separate programme for eighty academically motivated and self-disciplined students emphasizing an integrated curriculum, multi-age groups, flexible timetables to allow for in-depth independent study, one-to-one consultation, enrichment through experiences out of the school, increased student responsibility, and the opportunity for students to design their own programmes.[55] There was also a high degree of parent involvement. Vancouver's first bilingual school, l'Ecole Bilingue, and a wilderness education programme, B.C. Quest, were also established that year and continue to be popular programmes today. The School Board also designated Bayview and Champlain

Heights Elementary Schools as "comprehensive community schools," a new idea in the 1970s which favoured more integration of school and wider community activities.[56]

Many rehabilitation programmes were developed for students who had dropped out of school or were identified as potential dropouts. These included the Britannia "8J9J" programme, Operation Step-Up, the Vinery Project, Outreach School, the Grandview 7A programme, the Bridge, the Cedar Cottage Project and Chimo Place for learning disabled students.[57] In 1975 alone six new rehabilitation programmes were established.[58] Several of the programmes were initiated by private organizations and were run in partnership with the Vancouver School Board until eventually the school district assumed complete responsibility for them. Some were partially funded by grants from the federal government and the provincial Human Resources Department. Most programmes were housed in school buildings but a few, such as the Vinery at Kitsilano Neighbourhood House and Operation Step-Up in a Fourth Avenue apartment, were located in the community. Typically, rehabilitation programmes enrolled from twenty to thirty teenagers and were attached to a mainstream school for administrative purposes. They provided instruction in basic academic skills and, unlike "remedial" programmes, often offered personal counselling, interpersonal skills instruction, and assistance with family problems. Most rehabilitation schools were characterized by individualized academic programmes, a low student/teacher ratio, informal but respectful relationships between teachers and students, and some degree of student autonomy regarding attendance and daily activities.

The rehabilitation programmes adopted a variety of approaches. At the Vinery, associated with Kitsilano Secondary School, three staff members worked with twenty-five dropouts. Students spent each morning working on individualized mathematics or English according to weekly contracts. The academic programme was combined with a strong recreational component, counselling, and volunteer community service projects to help students "establish an idea of their own value."[59] The goal was to bring them up to the grade ten level or to give them the "social and academic skills to enable them to cope with society." The 8J9J programme was

similar to the Vinery but its two staff members and twenty students had closer ties with the mainstream school, Britannia, since it was located on the school grounds. The programme emphasized traditional academic work to enable students to return to the regular school. There were frequent field trips and one day per week was set aside for the teachers to assist students with legal and family problems. Close peer group ties were encouraged and new students had to know someone already in the programme to gain admittance.[60] Operation Step-Up, for forty juvenile offenders on probation, was founded by a learning disabilities teacher, a probation officer, and a U.B.C. professor. Step-Up offered a highly structured, incremental programme in basic reading, writing, and arithmetic for three hours each day with twenty university volunteers who tutored the students on a one-to-two basis. The underlying theory was based on a behaviour modification approach which rewarded progress while ignoring unsocial behaviour.[61] The goals for these programmes varied; some students were prepared for re-entry into mainstream schools while others were steered towards employment or other projects outside the formal school system. In all cases, though, rehabilitation programmes sought to improve academic skills while at the same time addressing the social problems caused by alienated and idle youth.

Public interest in alternative schooling was high in the early 1970s. Although as late as 1971 some parent groups attempted to organize independent "unstructured schools," most were content to accept the school district offerings by the middle of the decade.[62] Vancouver newspapers kept the public informed about new approaches to public schooling in numerous articles. Some discussed individualization, continuous learning, a de-emphasis on competitive grading, and children learning from each other.[63] Others reported on new organizational forms such as team-teaching, open area classrooms, and multi-age groups. Some reporters remarked on changes in atmosphere such as the democratization of high schools, and attempts to make school environments "pleasant and enjoyable" rather than authoritarian.[64] Several 1974 articles reported on the many new programmes in the district. Due to keen parental interest in alternatives the Vancouver Parent-Teacher Council organized a conference in 1974 to make the

public aware of the full range of innovative programmes available in Vancouver.[65] The following year, in May 1975, the Vancouver School District joined with several Lower Mainland districts to sponsor a three day Conference on Alternatives in Education.[66] However, the interest in alternative education was mainly a middle class phenomenon. When school district officials surveyed parents on Vancouver's East Side about an alternative school in their area, most cited "skill development and basic literacy" as their main priorities, and the idea was not pursued.[67]

Alternative programmes became so numerous in the district that in January 1973 the Board created a special committee, the "Administrative Co-ordinating Team on Alternative Education" (A.C.T) to supervise existing alternatives and to evaluate proposals for new ones.[68] The A.C.T. was to undertake a "comprehensive assessment to determine the causes and needs for alternatives in the Vancouver school system." The establishment of the A.C.T. was a response to the public interest in educational alternatives and Board officials emphasized that there should be "continuing community involvement in the process" of developing new programmes.[69] District officials encouraged Vancouver teachers to recognize and accommodate a variety of learning styles present among the children in their classrooms. A few district leaders hoped the introduction of alternative programmes would not only create diversity but would influence the the rank and file teaching staff thus acting as a catalyst for widespread change within the system.[70]

The Administrative Co-ordinating Team would play a significant role in Vancouver School District affairs for several years while the district was consolidating its alternative programmes. This committee was headed by Alf Clinton and consisted of district administrators and teacher association representatives. One of the group's important tasks was to inspect such independent schools as Total Education and Ideal School and develop a consensus about how they could best be incorporated into the system. One member of the committee recalls: "What we were really doing was to preserve the essence of their programme, what was unique about it, maintain its identity. It was exciting visiting the schools. You never knew what you were going to see."[71] One the other hand, committee members were concerned about the unqualified

personnel and the "extreme" countercultural or political nature of some of the programmes. In asking "does this programme really exist for the kids or does it exist for the teachers?" the committee had to be convinced that the teachers had a genuine interest in students. To be acceptable a programme had to be able to work within the system.[72]

The A.C.T. was assisted by a broad-based advisory committee with representatives from business, labour, religious organizations, Canada Manpower, Family Court, counselling services, Children's Aid, and the Citizens' Action to Reform Education. The makeup of this advisory group is indicative of an emphasis on rehabilitation in many of the 1970s alternative programmes. This was a significant change from the philosophy underpinning the Progressive and Romantic schools of the 1960s even though such Progressive ideas as child-centred activities, individualized instruction, and informal discipline remained.

Many other liberal policies were discussed by the Vancouver School Board in the early 1970s. There was considerable discussion at board and committee meetings about "school dropouts and disaffected youth." In an effort to make Vancouver secondary schools less authoritarian, board members and administrators gradually relaxed hair and dress codes and instituted voluntary attendance for grade eleven and twelve students. Trustees such as Peter Bullen and Olive Johnson were committed to making the schools more "democratic," and the Board encouraged the formation of parent and staff committees. In a significant decision, the trustees also instituted an "open boundaries" policy giving students and their parents the right to choose schools. In 1971 the Board approved a statement on "professional freedom" which assured teachers that they were free to try experimental programmes without fear of sanction. The official view of discipline was gradually changing and in February 1973 N.D.P. Education Minister Eileen Dailly outlawed the use of the strap in British Columbia schools with the enthusiastic support of the Vancouver trustees.[73] However, the Board stopped short of adopting a student charter of rights, although this matter was debated for several years and policies that would give students more control over their schooling were slow to be implemented.

Victoria and Other Districts

Several years before alternative programmes appeared in the Vancouver public schools, a small high school in northern Vancouver Island made news by allowing a substantial amount of freedom to its students and teachers. The Campbell River Senior Secondary School opened in 1965 under the principalship of John Young. Mr. Young, who grew up in New Brunswick, had been an idealist from an early age. After earning degrees in international development and education at U.B.C., he served as chief educational advisor in Sarawak, Borneo in the late 1950s and was a co-founder of Canadian University Service Overseas (C.U.S.O.) in the early 1960s. He was principal of two schools in central B.C. before taking the position at Campbell River.[74] Mr. Young was familiar with the writings of radical educators such as Jonathan Kozol and John Holt as well as with the British Columbia Teachers' Federation Commission study, *Involvement: The Key to Better Schools*, the Hall-Dennis Report, *Living and Learning*, and the British Plowden Report. He had come to disagree with many traditional educational practices including the rigid grade system, the artificial divisions of subject matter, the unfair labeling of students, motivation by punishment, and the "obsession with order, control, and uniformity in our schools."[75] He was also concerned about the unprofessional treatment of teachers.

At the Campbell River school attendance at classes was voluntary, students were free to move about the school building without supervision, students participated in independent study, students decided how many courses to take and chose their teachers, flexible timetables permitted students to be employed, dress and appearance codes were eliminated, students were responsible for their own behaviour, and there was no failure or punishment. In addition, staff decisions were made collegially and teachers were permitted to decide how to teach their courses including whether or not to have examinations.[76] Pregnant girls were permitted to continue in school and many came from other parts of the province. As well, some out-of-district students who disliked traditional high schools were accepted and one Knowplace student attended for a year when that

school closed in 1969. By all accounts the Campbell River experiment was educationally successful as well as popular with teachers and students, but John Young was fired for insubordination in 1972 and the school reverted to traditional practices. Mr. Young, a flamboyant and forthright individual, angered some trustees and ministry officials for attracting too much attention to the school and for criticizing School Board decisions. As well, many conservatives in the community questioned Mr. Young's reforms and, as he was five to ten years ahead of his time in the world of public schooling, it was perhaps inevitable that his innovations would not last.

Many British Columbia school districts began to develop alternative programmes by the mid-1970s although none had the breadth offered in Vancouver. That Vancouver was so far ahead is not surprising since the large urban district was considered the most desirable place to teach for young progressive educators, and since parents in Vancouver were more affected by the cultural and political ideas of the 1960s than in any other part of the province. However, a few smaller urban districts were not far behind. West Vancouver had an alternative high school programme, the Sentinel Satellite, founded by Jim Carter after he was offered a principalship there in the early 1970s. As well, the North Vancouver School Board accepted an offer to take over Windsor House, an independent alternative elementary school, in 1975.

The Victoria School District developed its first alternative programmes in 1973, despite its deserved reputation as a conservative district. The change was driven by pressure from parents, concerns about high school dropouts, and the fact that "free schools had become a buzz word." By the early 1970s the district superintendent and assistant superintendent believed the school district should offer more choice. Victoria had begun to generate a counter-cultural community and the election of the New Democratic government in 1972 brought more "anti-establishment" people into the city. John Wiens, assistant superintendent, was sympathetic to the "rebellious generation" and played a similar role in Victoria to that of Alf Clinton in Vancouver.[77] Mr. Wiens thought that many sound educational ideas had become discredited during the 1960s because they had been naively misunderstood. Alternative schools were sold to the conservative

trustees through a proposal to establish two "prototype" elementary schools one "less structured" and one "more structured." The latter, called Sentinel, appealed to parents who wanted teacher-directed classrooms and traditional discipline but could not afford expensive private schools.

The "less structured" school, Sundance, generated immediate excitement when it opened in September 1973. There were 170 inquiries to the district's first advertisement and parents "camped out overnight" to ensure their children would be accepted.[78] By the following June there were over two hundred children on the waiting list for the 1974/75 school year.[79] A year later there was still a waiting list of fifty-five. Some Sundance parents were educators and professionals, others were former hippies, and some were "pretty ordinary folks."[80] Parental demand was a major impetus behind the formation of Sundance School.[81]

Sundance opened with one hundred twenty-five students divided into four multi-age or "family" groupings in which older students were encouraged to take some responsibility for the younger children. Several teachers had experimented with "open classrooms" and principal George Olsson had been principal of an open area school in Cowichan. He was succeeded in 1976 by one of the school's founding teachers, Donna Wooliams. Ms. Wooliams had been influenced by the British primary system and by Summerhill. She recalls the enthusiasm with which teachers and parents embarked on the project: "On the first day of school we were walking on air and parents were hugging teachers."[82] One of the many distinguishing features of Sundance was the unusual level of parent participation with as many as a dozen parents volunteering at the school on an average day. As well, parents were active in decision making and helped shape the educational theory. There was a great deal of discussion and intellectual ferment in the early days. Similar to many alternative schools, the parents agreed about what they disliked in the public school system but, not being educators, did not really know what they favoured. Similar to many alternative schools seeking to avoid hierarchy, the Sundance staff made decisions by consensus and the teachers worked as a close team.

The curriculum was organized according to a "centres" approach and students filled out

contracts specifying their daily activities. The school emphasized "self-discovery, self-direction, responsibility," and students moved freely around the building. At the end of September one reporter observed: "It's noisy and a trifle chaotic, but the pupils look happy. So do the teachers and the principal. It seems strange to hear youngsters talk naturally among themselves while they work and see them structure their own work day with the guidance of teachers."[83] Basic language and mathematics skills were not ignored, but the school was "more concerned with the affective area than the cognitive." The school de-emphasized competition and tried to motivate students by allowing them to experience success. As the school brochure stated "the core purpose of this school is to develop within each child a positive and realistic self-concept."[84]

This objective made the school difficult to evaluate and a 1975 school district report on the school criticized "insufficient marking of students' work" and suggested the school maintain "systematic records of student progress, especially in basic mathematics and language skills." The evaluation team concluded that students had to be highly motivated to achieve academically at Sundance. The report stated: "Because of a desire on the part of staff to create positive non-threatening learning situations, at no time are students compelled to get down to work. In such a permissive environment there are some students who are unable to cope with this freedom and as a result are probably wasting time."[85] In response, Mr. Olsson stated that "the success of each child attending the school is individually defined" and that progress is based on "individualized criteria agreed to by the child, the parent, and the teacher."[86] On the other hand, the evaluation report acknowledged that the objectives of the school had "for the most part been met" and the school appeared "highly successful." Furthermore, a survey of parents indicated that "they are extremely pleased with the school. Students are encouraged to be sensitive to the feelings and needs of those around them, to be independent, and to appreciate their own worth and abilities." As a result of the mutual respect and trust which exists between teachers and students, "Sundance is a very warm, open school–in every way a humanized environment for learning."[87]

Sentinel, the traditional school, received a strong endorsement from the evaluation team.

Ironically, though, it closed after several years due to decreasing demand because it was not able to distinguish itself from mainstream public schools or existing private schools in Victoria.[88] Sentinel was also weakened because some district principals attempted to send their problem students there. Meanwhile, Sundance remained popular for fifteen years, but declined in the late 1980s as the school was unable to adapt to the changing expectations of parents, most of whom wanted the school to be more academically accountable.[89] The school was never as successful academically as it had been in the affective domain. As well, mainstream schools had become more child-centred and Sundance School was largely superfluous. It closed in 1992.

While Sundance School catered to parents who wanted a more humanistic education for their young children, an independent rehabilitation school for high school dropouts also developed in Victoria during this period. The Warehouse School was founded in 1972 by two teachers at the Sisters of Saint Ann convent, Jacqueline Aubuchon and Charlotte Dauk. Both had considerable teaching experience, most recently at Saint Ann's Academy. Veronica Doyle, a teacher with an extensive background working with high school students, "street people," and prison inmates, joined the staff the following year and replaced Sister Aubuchon as co-director in 1974. Although Sister Aubuchon only remained at Warehouse for two years, her vision was the original driving force behind the school.

Warehouse School offered high school dropouts, street kids, teenage mothers, "free spirits" left over from the 1960s, and even a group of former prison inmates in their twenties an opportunity to continue their education.[90] Some lived with parents or relatives, many were in foster care or group homes, and some lived independently. Enrollment averaged fifty students most of whom were working on their grade ten credentials but some completed grade twelve or re-entered mainstream schools.[91] Some students heard about the school by word of mouth while others were referred by social service agencies and many had social workers. Tuition was free and food was often provided. The school was run by a non-profit society and financed on a shoestring through Local Initiative Project grants and funding from the provincial Ministry of

Human Resources.[92] An independent Board managed the finances and hired staff. In 1974 the staff increased to six teachers, all on minimal salaries of less than $500 per month.[93] In addition there were many dedicated volunteers such as Sister Eileen King and retired teacher Ed McKeirahan. The staff were a close-knit group, made decisions collegially, and most enjoyed the experience.[94] In 1975 the Education Ministry began to contribute "adult education" funding through the Saanich School District and in 1979 through the Victoria District.[95] In 1980 the Victoria School Board formally incorporated the school into the district.

The school's original home was the top floor of the St. Vincent de Paul warehouse in downtown Victoria. Students worked at long rough tables or sat on old couches drinking coffee. They chose the subjects they wished to work on and the teachers they wanted to work with. Although the day-to-day operation of the school was informal, there was a strict policy against drugs and students were expected to complete some work each day. Most were motivated enough that they made rapid progress.[96] All students were on self-paced "modular" programmes in mathematics, basic English, and research skills and there was no whole-group instruction. Formal attendance was limited to three and a half days per week leaving time for organized field trips, social events, ping pong games, and bowling outings. Students enjoyed the constructive environment and the sociability. Staff took a personal interest in the students' welfare, and there was a good deal of trust, caring, and mutual respect among students and teachers.[97]

After being forced to move to several different locations, including a church basement and the old Saanich firehall, the school found stability in the former Quadra Street School provided by the Victoria School District. By 1977 all the original teachers had left the school and Barbara Pelman, a former college instructor from Vancouver, became director for five years. She was succeeded by Glen Pope, a Victoria district psychologist, and later by Bill Simpson, a teacher at the school since 1976. The school remains an ongoing programme in Victoria and enrolls over eighty students. Like Total Education, the Warehouse School began in the "Social Gospel" tradition of service, as one founder expressed it "a bunch of people seeing a need."[98] Some

students continued with their education after leaving Warehouse while others did not, but the school had a positive effect on the lives of almost all participants. As Veronica Doyle put it: "They knew they had accomplished something. It broke the pattern of discouragement and despair. It was the most intense educational experience I've ever had."[99]

Despite the popularity of alternative programmes in Victoria, school trustees were far from unanimous about their value. In 1974 the School Board refused to expand Sundance School despite a long waiting list and a brief presented by almost one hundred parents.[100] A year later one trustee labeled the school a "complete circus" and plans for a similar secondary school were discontinued.[101] The Board also withdrew funding for one teacher working with the Group Home Day Programme for delinquent teenagers.[102] Moreover, despite numerous requests beginning in 1975 from the Departments of Education and Human Resources to incorporate Warehouse School into the district, Victoria trustees did not agree to do so until severely pressured by the Education Department in 1980. This reluctance of Victoria trustees to embrace alternative programmes was due to financial difficulties as well as persisting traditional educational values.

Department of Human Resources

Alternative school programmes in the 1970s had two major thrusts. Some, such as North Vancouver's Windsor House and Sundance School in Victoria, continued to offer the humanistic, child-centred education which had been popular in the 1960s. But the proliferation of a second major type of alternative programme, the rehabilitation school, was a new development in the 1970s. Schools like Total Education and the Warehouse School had less to do with child-centred theory than with attempting to address the needs of high school dropouts or potential dropouts, street kids, juvenile offenders, children from troubled families, and rebellious or counter-cultural youth who would not accept traditional school authority. As the number of rehabilitation or "therapeutic" schools grew dramatically in British Columbia between 1970 and 1975 most looked

towards the Department of Human Resources for needed financial support.

When the New Democratic Party under the leadership of Dave Barrett ended the twenty year reign of W.A.C. Bennett's Social Credit government in August 1972, there were great expectations from the educational and social services communities that many long ignored needs would finally be met. However, Education Minister Eileen Dailly was slow in meeting N.D.P. supporters' widespread hopes for major innovation and change in the education system. As Kavic and Nixon suggest in their history of the N.D.P. government "Mrs. Dailly's tenure was almost totally lacking in both action and innovation."[103] One of her few initiatives was the appointment, amid much fanfare, of John Bremer, creator of Philadelphia's Parkway "school without walls" Programme (the inspiration for City School), as Commissioner of Education in February 1973. But little came of his ideas and he was abruptly fired eleven months later.[104]

Meanwhile, Human Resources Minister Norman Levi took the initiative for funding rehabilitative programmes for school dropouts or potential dropouts. Some students were referred through the school districts while others were referred by the court system and probation officers. Mr. Levi thoroughly reorganized his department, particularly in the integration of all programmes working with children-in-need including local counselling services, day care centres, group homes, diagnostic centres, foster homes, and residential treatment centres.[105] He also created the Special Services for Children Programme which provided child care workers to families, schools, and community projects.[106] This programme grew out of a fundamental department policy to keep troubled youth in their communities and out of institutions: "to ensure that services are available to children so that they may remain in their own homes, schools, and communities."[107] A rapidly growing component of this network of children's services was the alternative school programme. Both Mr. Levi and the Department's Co-ordinator of Children's Resources, Marilyn Epstein, had a special interest in alternative education having been founding parents of the New School in 1962. Their objectives, though, were limited to rehabilitation: "to enable young people who are experiencing great difficulty at school or who have dropped out of

school to acquire basic academic skills which will make it possible for them to re-enter the school system or proceed to further training or employment" and "to promote the development of life skills and help in dealing with social and behavioural difficulties."[108]

By mid-1974 the department was contributing to forty-two alternative school programmes and Mr. Levi approved an annual budget of more than one million dollars.[109] By the end of the year that number had increased to fifty-five and by the fall of 1975 Human Resources was supporting ninety-one programmes with an enrollment of 1700 students.[110] The largest number were in Vancouver and Victoria where the department funded eleven programmes in each district, but by the end of 1975 many of the province's school districts were represented. The Vancouver programmes included Total Education and most of the rehabilitation programmes discussed earlier in this chapter. The diverse programmes in Victoria included the Warehouse School, the Group Home Day Programme established in 1973 to provide education for "severely disturbed and hard core delinquent youth," the Girls' Alternative Programme for female dropouts in the James Bay neighbourhood, the Boy's Club Work Activity Programme, the Langford Alternative Programme, the Victoria Autistic Society, the Native Friendship Centre and the Victoria West Alternative Programme. Others around the province were the Northfield Alternative School in Nanaimo, the Quesnel District Alternative Programme for "major problem" students, the Aspire Programme in Nelson, the Re-entry programme in Kamloops, Project Upgrade for foster children in Maple Ridge, the Sentinel Work Activity Project in West Vancouver, and the One Way School for "underprivileged and delinquent youth" in Surrey.[111] Two Vancouver storefront programmes were technically classified as schools: the Spring Street Programme for alienated teenagers and the East End Basic Training and Skill Development Centre offering high school upgrading to teenagers and adults.[112]

Some programmes were controlled directly by the school districts while others, such as Total Education and Warehouse School, were administered for the districts by non-profit societies. Most of these private societies had originally been funded by federal government Local

Initiatives Project (L.I.P.) grants. As most of these grants ran out by 1973, the Human Resources Department took over the funding which usually took the form of salaries for child care workers. But with demands on its budget expanding indefinitely, and under mounting political pressure to control spending, the department began to cut back on services in 1975. It established firm guidelines for alternative school funding stipulating that educational staff and facilities had to be provided by local school districts or the Education Department.[113] The Education Department and most school boards complied willingly and gradually took over the major responsibility for alternative programmes.[114] From 1975 onward Human Resources continued to offer significant support to rehabilitative educational programmes but in a supporting role only through the provision of child care staff. In a few districts, such as Victoria where the number of alternative programmes had stretched local school funds, some programmes were cut back severely to the dismay of professionals and parents.[115] For example, the Group Home Day Programme was reduced from a staff of sixteen to four.[116] Human Resources officials tried to balance the needs of the providers and recipients of these programmes with the views of school trustees and members of the public becoming increasingly concerned about government spending.[117]

The objectives of the rehabilitation programmes were a reduction of anti-social behaviour and an upgrading of academic skills so that students could either return to regular classrooms or enter the work force. In their attempt to keep marginal students in school, rehabilitation programmes were modestly successful. One North Vancouver parent wrote to Mr. Levi that the alternative programme "succeeded in helping our son become a self-confident, self-reliant boy. Previous to this time he was ready to quit school and considered himself a failure in the school system."[118] A Department field supervisor, in writing about an alternative programme in Quesnel, stated that "the improvement in the behaviour of the children is remarkable; the oldest boy is due to return to the regular school system next month."[119] A teacher in a Victoria programme wrote: "I have no doubt that without this programme to guide them, a good many of these children would have been unable to adjust to a normal life within the school system and within society."[120]

Conclusion

By the end of 1975, the educational landscape in British Columbia was considerably different from what it had been in 1968. This was particularly evident in Vancouver, the province's largest school district. Many elementary schools, such as Bayview and Charles Dickens, offered informal child-centred classrooms, secondary mini-schools were in place, mainstream high schools like University Hill offered less authoritarian programmes with more student choice, three alternative secondary schools (City School, Total Education, and Ideal) offered more humanistic programmes for students who found traditional high schools difficult, and a myriad of small programmes were available to students who were at risk of dropping out. Parents were offered the opportunity to become more involved in their local schools, consultative committees were beginning to replace the old parent-teacher associations, and community schools welcomed the public into their buildings. Teachers had also developed a more significant voice through their professional associations and staff committees, and teachers were given more latitude to experiment with new programmes. Although public education was still far from democratic, students were treated with more respect and the authoritarian nature of high schools was somewhat relaxed through voluntary attendance for older students, the elimination of dress codes and corporal punishment, greater choice of courses and programmes, and open school boundaries.

The transformation of public school districts like Vancouver in such a short period was due to several factors: parental demand, professional innovation, increased self-confidence of youth, and the political and cultural transformations of the times. By the 1970s many parents were demanding choice in the school system, particularly if they perceived that their children were not being well served by traditional classrooms and schools. Peter Bullen, school board chair from 1972 to 1974, cites parental demand as the most significant factor in the growth of alternative programmes. "Many who complained were on the west side and had children who

were being picked on for long hair. The parents I talked to were thinking 'why is Vancouver so stodgy?' They wanted the whole thing loosened up."[121] As well, a significant number of teachers, influenced by liberation values of the 1960s or through their experiences with students, desired to implement a more humanistic and less authoritarian style of teaching. High school students, also influenced by counter-culture values and rock music, were far less docile than they had been just a decade earlier, and if schools had not relaxed their standards of control to some degree the tension would probably have become unbearable.

Lastly, the political mood that brought The Electors Action Movement to power in Vancouver and the New Democratic Party to form the provincial government was rooted in principles of participatory democracy, de-centralization of institutions, individual freedom, and responsiveness to individual needs. Educational reformers rode this political wave that originated in the 1960s. Peter Bullen says: "there was something in the air at the time; people were dissatisfied." John Wiens explains the popularity of Victoria's Sundance School this way: "Sundance was doing something that was in tune with the times; there was a lot of excitement about the flower children."[122] Jim Carter describes alternative schools as part of a "broad movement of cultural and social change in which people ceased to be rule followers."[123] And as Olive Johnson puts it:

> The sixties had a big impact on everybody. Parents were demanding change. They felt emboldened to have expectations. Teachers were also emboldened by the sixties: the whole notion of getting away from authoritarian relationships to more respectful democratic relationships, greater self- expression, and more knowledge of child development."

Although the alternative schools of the 1960s were in severe decline by the early 1970s, they did inspire pioneers within the public system to adopt some of their ideas. As Olive Johnson suggests regarding the influence of the 1960s schools: "They certainly had an effect on me. They provided a kind of beacon. They contributed to the critical few. Enough parents, enough kids became familiar with these concepts, they helped change peoples' expectations."[124]

NOTES

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7. V.S.B. Education Committee minutes, March 10, 1970.
8. Dr. Ian Ross provided considerable support according to Jim Carter, personal interview, December 13, 1996.
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AFTERWORD

By 1975 few independent alternative schools remained. All the Romantic schools of the late 1960s–the Barker Free School, Knowplace, and Saturna Island Free School–had closed by 1971. Craigdarroch School closed in 1969 and, although other Progressive schools were longer-lived, the New School would eventually close in 1977 as would the Argenta Friends School in 1982. Total Education, Ideal School, and Windsor House had all joined the public school system by 1975. Only the Whole School in the Slocan Valley would remain independent and continue to serve its self-contained countercultural community for many years. Alternative schools were short-lived for many reasons. They were weakened by parental divisiveness, financial instability, too many special needs students, the lack of realistic educational theory, absence of professional training, the decline of the counterculture, and the rise of alternative programmes in the public school system.

Many alternative schools experienced difficulty securing agreement among the adults as to the kind of education they wanted to offer. This was particularly true of schools governed by parents, who could not agree whether they favoured Progressive or "free schools"–whether their children should take some direction from the adults or remain free to do whatever they pleased. At the New School and Craigdarroch School, for example, the lack of agreement among parents was never resolved. Other schools led by professional educators, such as the Barker School and the Saturna Island Free School, were weakened by disagreement among staff members. Without a common vision among participants it was difficult for alternative schools to develop and grow.

A second factor in the decline of alternative schools was economic. Alternative schools relied on favourable student-teacher ratios to supply the individual attention that made their programmes work. Most had ratios of one teacher to ten students or fewer. At the same time alternative schools were reluctant to charge tuition fees that would make it difficult for a wide cross-section of students to attend. The result was that teachers worked for almost nothing and

it was difficult for them to sustain the considerable energy required for long periods of time. The schools were financially vulnerable to any kind of setback, whether it be a fire, a visit from the Health Department, or the unexpected withdrawal of students. Several schools simply went bankrupt while others lived on the edge for years.

Another factor that weakened almost all alternative schools was an inordinate number of what today would be called special needs students. There was little choice available in the 1960s for students with learning disabilities, emotional and family problems, or mental health difficulties. Public school districts had few programmes in place to help them and such students often ended up at alternative schools as a last resort. But alternative school staffs had little expertise with which to help them, and difficult students became a drain on teachers' time and energy, further weakening whatever educational programmes were in place. This was not a new problem as the desperate parents of needy children have always sought out experimental schools. As early as the 1930s Bertrand Russell stated regarding Beacon Hill School that they were "not properly prepared to handle such lively and destructive children."[1] Many of Summerhill's early students were delinquents[2] and New York's City and Country School had many students requiring therapy.[3] Special needs children weakened Ontario's Everdale Place as well and the school's 1969 brochure stated: "the only entrance requirement for students is that they be emotionally stable enough to cope with our combination of freedom and community."[4] An emphasis on special needs students detracted from the schools' original purpose which was to develop a new style of education for typical children.

Alternative schools were also weakened by the lack of a comprehensive and realistic educational theory. Leaving students to their own interests and motivation was not a sufficient foundation upon which to build a functional learning programme, and too many of the adults were afraid or unwilling to demonstrate leadership. Furthermore, at least half of the staff members were untrained teachers who did not have the skill or understanding with which to motivate students or generate excitement about learning. This absence of professionalism, while refreshing

initially, was severely limiting to alternative schools in the long run. The teaching programmes depended too much on the inclination and skills of each individual staff member to develop any sort of consistency. As a result the overall educational programmes suffered.

Last, and perhaps most important, was the decline of the counterculture. With the fading of the 1960s, alternative schools lost their innocent appeal. The 1960s schools depended too much on the special spirit of the times; when the times changed most schools were not adaptable enough to change with them. At the same time the public school system began to offer a wider choice of programmes. Furthermore, by the mid-1970s most "progressive" parents wanted their children to learn academic skills. As some school districts developed child-centred programmes of their own by the mid-1970s, there was little demand for private alternatives. By then parents and students could usually find the kind of education they wanted in the public system.[5]

Although curriculum development in the traditional sense was not usually a priority of alternative schools, the school produced significant innovations. They experimented with individualized learning programmes, thematic approaches, and integrated subject material. They emphasized co-operative and group learning, human relations, and the creative arts. Some encouraged students to explore subjects that interested them in more depth than they could have done in a traditional school. Some alternative schools demonstrated the value of small classes and increased teacher attention while others showed how a relaxed and informal atmosphere could encourage nervous or alienated students to approach learning without stress. Some schools had a political dimension, and all attempted to make their students into critical thinkers questioning widely accepted social and intellectual values. Perhaps the most enduring contribution arose from the extensive field trip programmes developed at virtually every alternative school as students spent large portions of time interacting with the outside community.

Alternative schools accomplished their curricular objectives to some degree, but they proceeded in too haphazard a manner, rarely developing systematic or lasting pedagogical tools. There was an unrealistic emphasis on students initiating their own learning, and not enough

direction from adults. Alternative school proponents valued "creativity" and neglected "skills," even the skills necessary for developing musical or artistic abilities. In some schools very little activity resembling education occurred at all. As Jim Harding, an original supporter of Knowplace, wrote in 1970: "We do not have to abandon intellectual curiosities to have human freedoms, in fact, the two are very much intertwined. In letting the kids do what they please and being supportive passively, rather than in a challenging way, something quite different from education is allowed to go on."[6] It was ultimately left to mainstream schools, several years later, to incorporate the valuable features of alternative schooling into their own programmes.

There can be little doubt that the skill-based education provided by most alternative schools was deficient. However, most students at the Progressive schools early in the 1960s eventually returned to the public school system, went to university, and entered a variety of careers. Although many of these students missed basic skills such as spelling, grammar, and times tables, their reading and writing ability remained intact. Furthermore, many former students report that they gained substantial benefits in areas such as critical and creative thinking, problem solving, taking initiative, self-confidence, and responsibility.

But for students who attended Romantic or free schools, this period marked the end of their formal schooling in almost all cases. They fell too far behind and experienced too much freedom to return to public school. Those who tried became demoralized and frustrated. Most of these former students believe their education and professional opportunities were seriously limited and many have had difficulty realizing their potential. Some students also became sidetracked by drugs and sexual promiscuity to a greater degree than they might have in more traditional schools. In the end, the theory was too simplistic, the young staff members were too unskilled, and the ethos of the times did not value formal or academic education.

However, there were exceptions. Some students eventually obtained high school diplomas, several are musicians, and a few attended university. One Knowplace student eventually earned a Ph.D. in psychology, another is a self-taught art historian, a third a computer

analyst. Furthermore, many students report having developed attributes such as self-reliance, ingenuity, tolerance, adaptability, and assertiveness as a direct result of their experience in alternative schools. Others appreciated the lack of academic pressure. As well, for students who had already decided to drop out of public school, alternative schools provided a refuge safe from the underworld of crime and drug addiction.

One of the principal goals among the founders of alternative schools was to create organizations that were more democratic and participatory than was the norm in mainstream society. Alternative schools gave rise to a variety of governance structures and leadership styles. Several schools, particularly the New School, began as experiments in co-operative governance. This was successful in involving many parents in decision making and volunteer activity, and in providing a sense of excitement and ownership. However, the co-operative model gave rise to some serious problems. The decision making structure did not define the respective roles of teachers, Board, and general parent membership clearly enough. Parents spent too much time "micromanaging" and supervising teachers when they had little or no expertise to do so. The unreasonable scrutiny from parents made alternative schools difficult places to teach and staff turnover at most schools was high.

Schools founded by educators were more likely to provide continuity and experienced less dissension than schools run by parents. However, school directors often had to endure pressure from staff members who expected decisions to be made in a democratic manner. At the Barker School, for example, the founder was pressured by staff to adopt an even more laissez-faire attitude than he had originally established. The founders of Saturna Island and Ideal Schools also sometimes found themselves at loggerheads with the teaching staff. At some schools, such as the Argenta Friends School and Total Education, staff members (and in some cases students) attempted to use a consensus model with some success. However, this kind of decision making was lengthy and emotionally draining, and took its toll on the participants. Except for Argenta, few schools had individuals experienced in the difficult art of achieving consensus.

As in any human organization, some individuals were more forceful, eloquent, or insightful than others and those individuals usually got their way regardless of the governance structure. Jonathan Kozol, a writer with years of experience with alternative schools in the United States, concluded in 1972 that most compromise structures did not work. He wrote: "there should either be a total commitment to full democratic participation of all people in the school or else there should be a straightforward, small, and honest power structure."[7] In the end, most alternative schools adopted compromise procedures with all their resulting ambiguity. The 1960s ethos made people reluctant to show leadership.[8]

The close adult communities that developed around most alternative schools were important in the participants' lives. However, though idealistic and well meaning, these communities did not usually provide a stable environment for education. Schools founded and run by parents were exciting experiments in participatory democracy but parents were too unclear about their educational goals and what constituted good teaching. Parents and teachers in alternative schools were better at articulating what they did not want, than they were at agreeing about what they favoured. Schools run by educators had a more unified sense of purpose, but in most cases the adults were unwilling to demonstrate the leadership necessary to inspire the children. Jonathan Kozol argued in *Free Schools* that children deserve "teachers who are not afraid to teach." Although he still believed that education should be "child-centred, open-structured, individualized, and unoppressive," he wrote:

> There has been too much uncritical adherence in the free school movement to the unexamined notion that you can't teach anything. It is just not true that the best teacher is the grown-up who most successfully pretends that he knows nothing. I think we must be prepared to strive with all our hearts to be strong teachers, efficacious adults, and unintimidated leaders in the lives of children.[9]

John Dewey had written much the same near the end of his long career thirty-five years earlier: "Many of the newer schools tend to make little or nothing of organized subject matter of study; to proceed as if any form of direction and guidance by adults were an invasion of individual

freedom."[10] Above all, the participating adults in alternative schools were too caught up in the times to provide effective leadership. They sought out alternative schools for their own needs of political expression, community, or personal exploration. They were often busy sorting out their own lives. In the end, the educational goals were often not a priority.

Ideas and values popularized by the social, cultural, and political movements of the 1960s had a profound effect on the development of alternative schools in British Columbia. The life cycle of the alternative school movement was remarkably parallel to that of the 1960s era generally. Following a period of optimism and reform in the early part of the decade, the late 1960s, sparked by the growing Vietnam crisis and the emergence of the counterculture, were characterized by a deepening radicalism and immersion of participants in the "life of the movement." Eventually though, 1960s radicals had to come to terms with the power and pervasiveness of the state.[11] The ideals remained alive into the 1970s, but their practical application became diffuse. Similarly, the alternative schools in British Columbia began as moderate and reformist before evolving into radicalized transformative communities in the late 1960s. In the 1970s the goals of alternative schools became more pragmatic and eventually most still in operation joined the public school system. One weakness of all 1960s movements was the unwillingness of activists to generate sufficient analysis to serve as a guide for action, not wanting to be too intellectual or elitist. The same could be said about the alternative school movement.

In *The Sixties Experience* Edward Morgan identifies four central values at the heart of all 1960s movements–equality, personal empowerment (participatory democracy), moral politics (compassion), and community.[12] All of these played a central role in the visions of those who founded alternative schools. Even more significant were the more personal goals of freedom and transformation popularized by the counterculture. Many 1960s ideas and values were brought to Canada by the thousands of young Americans escaping the Vietnam war. A significant number of these became staff at alternative schools. They exemplified the idealism and optimism of the 1960s. American ideas and individuals played a significant role in the alternative school

movement. But the American participation was only part of the story. American influence combined with Canadian democratic socialist traditions represented by individuals who had been active in the C.C.F./N.D.P., co-operative enterprises, or religious organizations devoted to peace or humanitarian social action. The rich diversity of British Columbia alternative schools was due to all of these influences.

The most enduring legacy of alternative schools was the adoption of certain of their values and practices by the mainstream school system. By the end of the 1970s public schools had become somewhat less authoritarian, less rigid, more imaginative in their teaching methods, and more accommodating of individual student needs and learning styles. Public school districts began to offer students and parents a wide range of choices including a myriad of alternative programmes. Some of these alternatives were rehabilitative in nature while others were informed by loftier educational goals such as integration across the curriculum, co-operative learning, and a deeper involvement of students in their learning. The development of alternatives in the public school system was due to a combination of factors: parental demand, new directions in the teaching profession, and the ambiance of the times. Parents were no longer willing to leave all the educational decisions regarding their children to school officials. Many teachers were excited by new humanistic trends in education such as child-centred learning and curricular integration. A significant number of high school students refused to accept authoritarian schools that left them feeling bored and alienated. Public school officials recognized that a serious need existed and, in time, responded. William Stavdal, education writer and former British Columbia education official, says: "It was beyond question a response to pressure from all sides for a more innovative kind of education. Everything was in ferment, everything was being questioned. Much that is occurring in today's education system can be traced to the challenges thrown up by the alternative schools of the sixties."[13] The example of the independent alternative schools of the 1960s and early 1970s was a significant factor in inspiring educational change and provided a catalyst for the creation of more options in public education.

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5. See, for example, Starla Anderson, "Mainstreaming Progressive Education," in *Working Teacher* 2:3 (1978), p. 12.
6. Jim Harding, "Freedom From *For* Freedom To: Ideas for people in free schools," in *Free School: the journal of change in education* (Saturna Island: Free School Press, 1970).
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8. Michael Lerner describes a similar "cult of antileadership" in 1960s political organizations in "The Legacy of the Sixties for the Politics of the Nineties" in *Tikkun* (January, 1988).
9. Jonathan Kozol, *Free Schools* (Boston: Houghton Miflin, 1972), pp. 31, 61.
10. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 22.
11. For similar periodization see: Edward Morgan, *The Sixties Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973); Richard Flacks, *Youth and Social Change* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1971).
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Starla Anderson, teacher, Total Education, City School
Lloyd Arntzen, teacher, New School
Simon Andrews, teacher, Craigdarroch School
Anonymous, student, Saturna Island Free School
Emily Axelson, student, Saturna Island Free School
Jim Anderson, student, Saturna Island Free School
Pat Armstrong, parent, Whole School
Jacqueline Aubuchon, teacher, Warehouse School
Garth Babcock, student, Floating Free School
Don Babcock, parent, Floating Free School
Olive Balabanov, parent, New School
Bob Barker, teacher, Barker Free School
Kate Barlow, teacher, Barker Free School
Bobby Barker, student, Knowplace
Hugh Barr, teacher, Ideal School
Barbara Beach, parent, New School
Mervine Beagle, teacher, New School
Tony Bertelsen, student, Barker Free School, Floating School, Total Education
Mona Bertelsen, parent, Barker Free School
Galen Bellman, student, Barker Free School
Cathleen Bertelsen, student, Barker Free School
Susan Bertelsen, student, Barker Free School
Brenda Berck, teacher, Argenta Friends School
Alex Berland, teacher, Whole School
Alan Best, student, Ideal School
Lyn Bowman, teacher, Saturna Island Free School
Ruth Boyd, parent, Argenta Friends School
Marcia Braundy, teacher, Whole School
Don Brown, parent, New School
Julia Brown, parent, New School
Colin Browne, teacher, Saturna Island Free School
Diane Brown, student, Craigdarroch School
Susan Brown, parent, Windsor House
Jackie Bradley, teacher, Sundance School, Windsor House
Peter Bullen, trustee, Vancouver School District
Don Burbidge, parent, New School; trustee, North Vancouver School District
Bett Bugslag, teacher, Craigdarroch School

Charles Campbell, student, Ideal School
Scott Campbell, student, Total Education
Monica Carpendale, student, Knowplace
Jeremy Carpendale, student, Whole School, Floating School
T.C. Carpendale, parent, Whole School
Phillip Carpendale, student, Whole School, Argenta Friends School
Bernd Carrosseld, student, Craigdarroch School
Marilyn Carson, teacher, Barker Free School
Michael Carson, student, Barker Free School
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Christina Cepeliauskas, student, Windsor House
Catherine Chamberlain, teacher, New School
Charles Christopherson, parent, New School
Betty Clark, parent, Craigdarroch School
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Liz Cochrane, teacher, Total Education
Doug Cochrane, teacher, Total Education
Rita Cohn, parent and teacher, New School
Gwen Creech, parent, New School
Jeff Creque, student, Victoria Free School
Jim Cruikshank, Bishop, advisor, Total Education
Geoff Cue, administrator, Company of Young Canadians
Sandra Currie, parent, New School
Lynn Curtis, teacher, Saturna Island Free School

Eileen Dailly, Minister of Education
Erica Dancer, student, Floating Free School, Relevant High
Bob Davis, teacher, Everdale Place, Ontario
Caitlin de Jong, student, Whole School
Beth Dickman, parent, Craigdarroch School
Garth Dickman, student, Victoria Free School
John Dickman, parent, Craigdarroch School
Pip Doheny, student, Knowplace
Rob Douglas, student and teacher, Relevant High
Pam Douglass, teacher, Windsor House
Veronica Doyle, teacher, Warehouse School
Jono Drake, student, Whole School, Ideal School
Tom Drake, parent, Whole School
Sally Drake, parent, Whole School
Steven Drake, student, Whole School, City School
Miles Durrie, student, Saturna Island Free School
Tom Durrie, teacher, New School, Saturna Island Free School
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Virginia Eckert, teacher, Total Education
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Laura Elderton, student, Windsor House
Meghan Ellis, student, Ideal School
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Aurie Felde, parent, New School
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Jonathan Gregory, student, Craigdarroch School, Argenta Friends School
Betty Griffiths, parent, Knowplace
Lloyd Griffiths, student, Knowplace
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Margot Hansen, student, New School
Ron Hansen, parent, New School
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Jim Harding, teacher, Knowplace
Ananda Harris, student, Whole School,
Erin Harris, student, Whole School, Ideal School
Joel Harris, teacher, Whole School
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Margaret Hewitt, parent, New School
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Helen Hughes, teacher, Windsor House
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Patricia Hummel, parent, Craigdarroch School
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Martha Jackson, student, Knowplace
Mark James, student, New School
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Laura Jamieson, student, New School
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Dan Jason, teacher, Barker Free School
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Wendy MacLean, student, Barker Free School
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Else Wise, teacher, New School
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Cathy Woodward, parent, Whole School
Katanya Woodruff, parent, Windsor House
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Gordon Yearsley, teacher, Barker Free School
John Young, principal, Campbell River Senior Secondary School;
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