Editor's Notes

by Robert C. Morris

Reformers continue to call for restructuring schools, but the number of schools that are markedly different from the norm has remained very small until the mid-1990s. Most of those engaged in restructuring have not been of the ordinary public school type. They were true alternatives to the traditional. More recent contemporary alternatives have sought to develop from within the existing structures of the public schools and their funding sources. What then makes a school an "alternative," and what is it alternative to?

The early alternatives, like those of the 1980s, represented innovation; small-scale, informal ambiance; and departure from bureaucratic rules and procedures. Amid all the current talk of school restructuring, alternatives are the clearest example we have of what a restructured school might look like. They represent our most definitive departure from the programmatic, organizational, and behavioral regularities that inhibit school reform. This issues of *Thresholds* begins with the philosophical and historical and ends with the more practical, real-life situations of alternative schooling. Bill Schubert has written a short introduction for this issue of *Thresholds* which combines some of his early thinking on the topic with his more recent ideas on the movement.

Introduction: Reflecting on Educational and Curricular Alternatives

by William H. Schubert
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What are educational alternatives? How does it make sense to think about what alternatives in education means? Many meanings of the term alternatives can be possible and productive. Let us consider some.

When most people think of educational alternatives, they become mindful of alternative schools, i.e., experimental school ventures that deviate considerably from the dominant public, parochial, or private independent schools that most students attend. One thinks, for instance, of A. S. Neill's classic school in England, called *Summerhill* (Neill, 1960). Equally important, and more neglected, are alternatives within the context of public and private schools. Here we might reflect on Herb Kohl's (1969) classic *36 Children*—the alternative he created in one classroom corner of the vast and variegated complexity of the New York City Public Schools. Today, the term *alternative* invokes magnet schools, charter schools, vouchers, home schooling, and more. All of these are indeed viable alternatives that need to be reckoned with as we consider educational alternatives for the future. A small sample of extant alternatives is portrayed in the articles presented in this issue of *Thresholds*.

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The first article is philosophical and the second is historical in nature. Both focus on exemplary alternatives of the past, as well as ones that offer a progressive vision for today. The first is titled "Inviting Criteria for Democracy's Schools," a paper written by John Novak, Brock University. His work in invitational education and the development of positive connections and expectations of the school are a beginning point. Following Novak's article is Robert Morris's "perspectives" on charter and home schooling. The first part of his work reviews the history of alternatives as a lead-in to the charter school movements of the late 1990s. Robert Krajewski profiles the attempt by Milwaukee schools to institute a voucher system. His discussion outlines the questions that this 40-year old but still controversial practice raises.

Next, Gus Douvanis looks closely at "Student Rights and System Responsibilities" within the alternative school movement. Dr. Douvanis is an LLB and EdD and is one of a growing number of lawyers who seek to clarify and distinguish the underlying rights and privileges of those who attend and/or work within and for public education.

The next four articles are more practical and grassroots in nature. They have been selected to help the reader focus on the changing problems of alternative education and to get a picture of a variety of methods, activities, approaches and innovations that are working and others that can work when handled correctly. "Alternative Education: An Opportunity for Success," by Dewey Blackledge and Ann Kick, recounts one school sys-

tem's attempt to solve an ever increasing dropout rate. Through the identification of a strong set of at-risk factors and characteristics, along with an easy-to-use identification model, these authors provide us with a beginning picture for changing the traditional environment. Les Potter's article, "Providence High School's AVID Program" also focuses on one program and its successes in helping students reach their human potential. Norman Weston remembers his best year of elementary teaching, a year in which he and a colleague broke with the usual and "taken for granted" to create an alternative setting within a Catholic school. Finally, William Campillo tells of making a difference in the lives of inner-city, public high school students through developing an alternative approach to writing.

Small or large scale, these pieces capture something of the range and quality of progressively oriented alternatives to or within dominant forms of schooling. They offer the insight that, for alternative forms of education and curriculum to be meaningful, teachers and students must be actively engaged in the formulation of purposes behind those alternatives. In essence, they must keep alive fundamental questions: What is worth knowing, experiencing, doing, being, overcoming, and sharing—in short, what are lives worth living and how can we live them more fully?

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Inviting Criteria for Democratic Schools

by John M. Novak
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Schools in and for a democratic society can take many forms. Interestingly, democracy is an ongoing process of experimentation open to diverse ways of making sense of the world and constructing a meaningful life. Pluralism runs deep in our democratic society which rightly rejects monocultural imposition on the norms of schooling. The times are changing. New concerns compete for center stage. Longstanding concerns may linger but they cannot retain the urgency once given them. They may be redefined to adapt to new developments. All these factors work against finality of form and structure for schools. What may have been appropriate at one time seems out of step at another because the world will not stand still. Perhaps then, the ultimate question in a democratic society should not be "What is *the right way* to structure schools?" but "What are the alternatives and by what standards should they be judged?"

Accepting an ethos of experimentation, diversity, and change for democracy's schools, however, does not exempt educators from the responsibility to articulate criteria for evaluating alternative processes and policies. In fact, it makes the discussion of criteria more urgent, for without the struggle toward common ground and shared procedures, anything goes; and the communication necessary for democratic community is dissolved. As Gutmann and Thompson (1996) cogently show, conflict should not be avoided; rather, the task is to develop the principles and conditions conducive to a deliberative democracy.

In a democratic society, the heart of schooling is schooling with a heart aimed at personally satisfying and socially defensible goals.

This article constructs a framework for assessing alternative recommendations for schools in a deliberative democracy. The fundamental assumption is that democracy's schools value the unique individual potential of each of its members. This potential can be called forth and developed in ways that are personally satisfying and that deepen and extend the democratic spirit. This article takes the view that educators committed to a democratic education must first invite the individual and collective potential of all its members. To do this, they may be aided by following the model of an inviting family participating in a democratic society.

Schooling in a democracy, therefore, is fundamentally an imaginative act of hope (Purkey & Novak, 1996) in that it involves deep aspirations intelligently, creatively, and persistently pursued. The language we use to describe that pursuit is not neutral: It points us in a direction and opens up possibilities. As Neil Postman (1995) has sagely noted, as we weave words, we also make worlds. Thus, it is important to be deliberate about the words we use because through them, we continually make and remake the world.

Unfortunately, many business and factory metaphors are unreflectively offered as models by which to evaluate and justify schooling. "We've got to bottom-line teacher-time-on-task to get a bigger bang for our budgeted buck." "How can we become more efficient?" "How can we turn out a more uniform product?" All these familiar phrases speak the language of cost effec-

tiveness and centralized control. Although the responsibility for effectiveness and quality control is important, if it becomes the sole or dominant focus, the invitation to multiple voices is drowned out.

In a democratic society, the heart of schooling is schooling with a heart aimed at personally satisfying and socially defensible goals. Much of the heart of education would be severed if teachers see themselves as managers and students are viewed merely as products shaped to fit a competitive economic system. If we wish to develop imaginative acts of hope which build on the deeply felt commitments of the democratic heart, we would be better served by viewing ourselves as inviting families rather than as effective businesses or efficient functionaries.

Invitation

The image of schools as inviting families (homes) has been an essential premise of invitational education (Novak, 1992; Purkey, 1978; Purkey & Novak, 1984, 1996). This communicative, self-concept approach to teaching and learning well matches the democratic ethical principles of caring, community, deliberation, and fairness (Purkey & Novak, 1998). It is focused on the following five basic principles:

1. People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly;
2. Educating should be a collaborative, cooperative activity;
3. The process is the product in the making;
4. People possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile endeavor;
5. This potential can best be realized by places, policies, programs, and processes specifically designed to invite development and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others personally and professionally (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p.3).

These five principles, when seen in the context of an inviting family, provide criteria for evaluating the structures and practices of a school.

An inviting family can come in many shapes and sizes. Certainly a pluralistic, changing, democratic society nurtures families who do not fit the conventional characteristics caricatured in the movie "Pleasantville." Our ideals of what counts as family are changing. Amidst its variety of forms and structures, however, an inviting family is marked by a commitment to nurturing care and fostering development. This commitment to the care and development of all the members of the family is evidenced by the following six characteristics:

1. Respect for individual uniqueness. (Each member of the family is seen as a unique, non-comparable individual who has something to offer which is appreciated and celebrated.)
2. Cooperative spirit. (Members of a good family work together for the good of the family and seek to help those families members in need.
3. Sense of belonging. (Family members think in terms of our home, our traditions, our loyalties.
4. Pleasing habitat. (The residence is alive with color, living things, and comfort: It is a place people like to come home to.)
5. Positive expectations. (Family members are treated with mutual respect and encouraged to develop their unique talents and discharge their responsibilities.
6. Vital connections to society. (Family members share their wide and varied connections to the larger world and discuss and deliberate the meanings of these events with each other.) (Purkey & Novak, 1996, pp. 126-128).

Each of these six characteristics of an inviting family provides criteria for assessing how effective a school is in meeting its democratic commitments. A series of questions such as the following might be used to identify the level of success of each characteristic.

1. Respect for Individual Uniqueness: What is positive and unique about this school? Are evaluations made in a caring way? How are students and others offered assistance if they are having difficulty? How is uniqueness celebrated?
2. Cooperative Spirit: Is mutual support stressed over compe-

tition? How do people take cooperative responsibility? Do students, staff and parents have a say in making decisions? Is peer teaching encouraged?

3. Sense of Belonging: Is the school perceived as a caring place? Is there a core nurturing person for each student? How are people treated during and after absences? What shared social events are there in the school?
4. Pleasing Habitat: Does the school appear cared for? Who is involved in caring for the school? Are there green plants in the school? Does the school feel alive with positive things?
5. Positive Expectations: Do administrators say good things about each teacher? Do teachers say good things about each of their students? Do students say good things about their teachers and administrators? What are some imaginative acts of hope demonstrated in the school?
6. Vital Connections to Society: How active is the school in the outside community? How visible is the outside community in the school? Are volunteers encouraged in the school? To what extent are larger societal and global issues deliberated at school?

These are just a few questions to ask in assessing a school. In the spirit of calling forth the democratic ethos, those whose schools are being evaluated in this model should also be able to suggest further ways their schools are like inviting families. If such a suggestion is greeted as very strange to them, then it shows that the underlying commitment is superficial.

Creating and evaluating the alternatives among school structures and programs becomes a vital, ongoing part of a democratic school. This article has offered the model of the inviting family school as a serious basis for school evaluation. The questions should be viewed as discussion starters rather than as final, achieved qualities as "inviting" criteria. They would function to rebuild the school world along democratic lines. Novak and Purkey (1996) offer a set of criteria for support by American educators if they are to retain their commitments to diversity and community.

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Alternative Schools and Schooling Practices: Perspectives on the Charter and Home Schooling Movements

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Alternative schools and schooling practices have a long and important history in American education. Consider the establishment of independent parochial schools by the Catholics in the mid-1800s. The Catholic Church decided to operate its own schools in an attempt to provide [Catholic] children an alternative to Protestant-dominated schools. William Seward, governor of New York during that time, advocated that the Catholic schools could even become part of the state school system and still retain their private charters and religious affiliation.

By the early 1900s, alternatives to traditional schooling were being established to counter what was viewed as the more authoritarian and oppressive atmosphere of public schooling. These "alternative schools" were, for the most part, a reaction to the public school's political and economic doctrines. A more recent example of this would be the Summerhill School of the 1950s. Based on the model originated by A. S. Neill in England, it was a school organized to develop non-authoritarian personalities. Children were free to attend class, or not, as well as allowed to help run the school if they chose. This model has often been referred to as a contemporary model of alternative education.

Although there has not been a tremendous flight from public education as of yet, there seems to be a deepening sense that public education is failing, that there is no real hope of a solution.

More recently, the 1970s witnessed a large number of conservative groups advocating an alternative dubbed the *magnate school*. This type of school has been viewed mainly as a type of voluntary desegregation. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the magnate schools became part of the debate about whether or not parents had the right to choose a specific school or program for their children. Since the mid-1980s, policymakers have promoted plans to increase options within public education. Although there has not been a tremendous flight from public education as of yet, there seems to be a deepening sense that public education is failing, that there is no real hope of a solution, and that other options are becoming necessary. As a result of reports from the nation's classrooms about drugs, violence, bureaucracy and poorly-educated students, there is an decreasing confidence in the "American tradition of 'common' schooling that reaches back to the early 19th century" (Toch, T., 1991, p. 66).

The Charter School Movement

Currently, 11 states, starting with Minnesota in 1991, have passed laws allowing the creation of independent public charter schools (approximately 140 charter schools exist at this time). By the late 1990s, twelve more states are attempting to get such a law passed. Rules vary from state to state; but basically, public school districts give charters

to groups of reformers or educators who want to run experimental schools. The state aid follows students to their charter school. There is a restriction in most of these states on the number of such schools that can be established (e.g., California, 100; Massachusetts, 25).

This type of alternative movement is considered by many to be the latest attempt at solving the problems of public education by creating "alternatives."

Charter schools are characterized by heavy parent involvement.

Charter schools offer an alternative to teachers and administrators who have become discouraged with the bureaucracy and restrictive atmosphere of public schools. As one California principal put it, "The charter takes the handcuffs off the principal, the teacher, and the parents—the people who know the kids best. In return, we are held responsible for how kids do" (Wallis, 1994, p. 56). At its best, this movement is an effort to give options to children and parents dissatisfied with the present public educational system. At its worst, however, it could be undermining our public school system.

Charter schools are characterized by heavy parent involvement. Some schools even require parents to sign contracts stating that they will actively participate in their child's education. This often includes hours of volunteer work at school! Basically, the charter school movement hopes to challenge the old structure of education and to place the authority in the individual school. No matter what the academic focus of the charter school – and it ranges from emphasizing science to serving a special group of students such as dropouts or discipline problems – all share an increasing frustration with the public education system in America.

That frustration has continued to build since the publication in 1983 of a federal study, "*A Nation at Risk*" claimed that American students were performing poorly compared to foreign students. As a reaction throughout the mid-to-late 1980s, school systems increased spending and teacher salaries. In spite of spending 7.5% of its gross national product on education (larger than any other country except Israel), U.S. students (13-year-olds) still lagged behind more than 10 nations in math and science by the early 1990s (Wallis, 1994). More recently, the amount of money being spent in the classroom has diminished significantly. In 1950, two-thirds of total spending was in the classroom as opposed to less than half by 1990 (Wallis, 1994). In the 1980s, the voucher movement arose which allowed parents to spend their public school money as they desired, supporting either public or parochial schools (Shankar, 1994). The charter school concept is even more controversial since it takes funds away from public schools for the private charter. In most states, the designated funding (per pupil) goes to whatever school the student attends—public or charter. This is causing opposition from public school supporters (teachers unions) and has become a political issue in California.

Proponents of charter schools make basically the same claims. Minnesota, for example, states the reasons for launching its charter schools to be the following:

- Charter schools fit with current thinking on outcome-based education and parent choice. Children with different needs and aspirations need different education settings. Parents can select a charter school that best meets the needs of child and family.
- Charter schools contribute to teacher empowerment. Teachers can manage the schools, if they so choose.
- Charter schools have student learning at heart. The entire system—its birth and continued existence—depends on student outcomes; these are the measure of its success or failure.
- Regular schools face restrictions that charter schools don't. A regular school might have to accept all students; a charter school could sharpen its focus to address needs of at-risk students only (Randall, 1993).

Although the focus of charter schools may vary, most support smaller class size, heavy parental involvement, small overall school size, active hands-on learning, and use of technology in the learning process. These are principles that have been successful in experimental schools in the past. They highlight the difficulty of putting such ideals into effect on a large scale in large public institutions.

In New York City, Deborah Meier is co-principal of Central Park East. As a veteran principal and school reformer, she is making attempts to increase the number of charter-like high schools and middle schools from 50 to 100 through a $125-million grant. She hopes to demonstrate successful methods to build a city-wide support system for independent schools. Although she objects to the term "alternative," Meier's basis for the establishment of these schools is that they put decisions about education in the hands of parents, from choice of schools to determining the degree of involvement in conferences with teachers. She also favors the building of strong relationships between adolescents and adults within the school setting. This, she believes, can be accomplished through adult meetings that include students, informal tutoring and coaching (students helping other students), and total accessibility of all adults in the school. One other important aspect of Meier's charter school is its curriculum which usually has a thematic focus that is typically interdisciplinary. Meier's main philosophy seems to be that while educators cannot be expected to inspire all students, they *do* need to avoid extinguishing the curiosity and passion for learning that naturally exists. She states that "schools have to be communities that nourish our common values and our differences" (Scherer, 1994).

Yvonne Chan, Principal of the Vaughn Next Century Learning Center in Los Angeles, was one of the first to apply for a charter status when the law was passed in 1992 in California. She has transformed a failing inner-city school by effectively using funds and administering a number of positive academic changes. For instance, when teachers work longer hours, they are paid more and given more authority, and are likewise more accountable. Chan has also been given more authority over her staff. But her faculty members, who serve on one of eight parent-teacher committees that meet weekly, are the basic force running the school. Parents are required to sign a commitment contract as a prerequisite for their children's enrollment (Wallis, 1994).

Another charter of interest is Northlane Academy in Freeland, Michigan. It is one of 9 charter schools in Michigan that opened in the Fall of 1993. Ron Helmer, principal, focuses on teaching kids to think and understand through students' actual experiences. The faculty and Mr. Helmer strongly encourage a desire to learn. He is the public school curriculum coordinator and instructional leader, but one of his main tasks is to give directions to teaching and beyond.

A few cities are experimenting with other alternative ideas. Baltimore, Maryland, and Hartford, Connecticut, hired a for-profit company to run their schools. The idea behind this move, according to the Baltimore school superintendent, will be to have a company that is truly accountable, that offers a way to get through the bureaucracy, and that has a possible solution to failure in urban schools.

A specific example is Harlem Park Community School in Baltimore. In 1992, the decrepit, failing school was among eight schools recognized as needing drastic change by the new superintendent, Walter Amprey. He proposed a "take over" by Education Alternatives, Inc., through a five-year, $125-million contract. Education Alternatives, Inc., a Minnesota-based corporation, already operated three schools in three states. The plan had initial opposition, but the success of the schools has resulted in converting some of those who originally disapproved. Besides physical improvements to the schools, the teaching program emphasizes individualized instructional plans with goals. It also emphasizes parental involvement, positive encouragement and the use of computers. The apparent success in these Baltimore schools con-

vinced the Hartford, Connecticut Board of Education to sign a contract with the same corporation, under which it will manage the entire city-wide system of 32 schools.

The Paideia School

Yet another counter example of today's public schools is the Paideia School Model in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Inspired by "The Paideia Proposal" by philosopher Mortimer Adler, Jack Murrah of Chattanooga's Lyndhurst Foundation decided, in 1993, to introduce the proposal. It consisted of a "liberal arts education to prepare students for work, citizenship and lifelong learning..." (Gettys and Wheelock, 1994). Other basic premises included inviting teachers with an appreciation for discourse, parental involvement, and didactic teaching. The curriculum includes Socratic questioning, student-centered learning, and teacher-led weekly seminars, all of which demand a great deal of thinking on the part of the students. Paideia is unique in its insistence on an education that values the life of the mind. Great stress is placed on dialogues in order to deepen students' understanding of ideas.

The success of Paideia is reflected in the increasing student demand and in the academic achievements. In 1993 and 1994, 100% of its graduating seniors enrolled in post-secondary education. In response to this success, the district opened the Chattanooga School for the Liberal Arts for grades K-6 in 1991, with another grade added each year to create a K-8 school by 1993. Word-of-mouth advertising has made these schools the most sought-after in Chattanooga. Paideia's success seems to be boosting confidence in public schools and may inspire other schools to find their own paths to academic effectiveness (Gettys and Wheelock, 1994).

Home Schooling: Another Option

Still another choice is being made by parents seeking educational alternatives. This movement is becoming more popular and organized. Approximately one-half million children are now home-schooled as opposed to 12,500 in the late 1970s, according to Gibbs (1994).

An increasing number of parents look to home schooling because they are concerned about the safety and educational quality of public schools.

Religious beliefs and spiritual values underlie the motives toward home schooling for significant number of people. An increasing number of parents look to home schooling because they are concerned about the safety and educational quality of public schools. Many proponents believe that public schools are stifling because they engage in a herd-like approach to teaching children. Most of these parents want to take responsibility for their own lives and their children's intellectual and creative development. They contend that one-on-one instruction is extremely effective, even if someone who is not a certified teacher carries it out.

A few years ago, much of the controversy centered around the legality of home-schooling. In California one school district has made definite efforts to keep the home-schoolers linked with public schools by giving them a curriculum subsidy of $1,000.00 per child/per year to purchase district-approved textbooks and other teaching materials. If the child simply enrolls in, but does not attend one of the district's schools, the district receives $3,000.00 in state aid for the child. The parents get $1,000.00 of that money, optional testing for the child, and the offer of teacher consultation whenever necessary (Natale, 1994).

Critics of home schooling are concerned with the lack of test scores and "measured" learning in general. They also point out the lack of exposure to various beliefs and backgrounds normally encountered in public education. Home-schooled children, critics say, do not receive that socialization experience. But, home-school parents argue that the social experience in public schools is not necessarily a positive one. They are focused on

providing an environment in which their children can learn through a flexible, challenging curriculum that is specifically designed for their needs and devoted to their safety and best interests. Studies have also shown that children schooled at home score between the 65th and 80th percentiles on standardized tests, as opposed to the national average which is in the 50th percentile (Gibbs, 1994).

The Importance of Alternatives for the Future

Amid the successes of the charter school and other alternative schools, there are certain problems and criticisms. One problem is the difficulty of starting charter schools because of the weak charter laws in many states. There also exists open hostility by some school boards and unions. Other problems include inexperienced staffs with no clear-cut idea about how to carry out a successful program. Many states grant charters for a maximum of 5 years. If the school is unsuccessful, the charter is not renewed. The innovation brought to the Baltimore schools by EAI has brought a mixture of rave reviews and questions about the qualifications of the company in the area of educational expertise and its lack of statistics showing results in such endeavors. Many people want hard evidence that has not yet been produced.

Some say that charter schools are examples and inspirations for what a school can become. Others, however, believe that charter schools are more of a negative influence because they attract the more talented and wealthy away from the regular school setting. In Minnesota, the state having the longest experience with charter schools, many current education officials admit that they were influenced to make reforms in their districts by the mere prospect that a charter school might open in their area. Public schools that have not been progressive enough were forced to make changes through alternative schools.

Both the charter-school movement and home-school movement seek to change the format of public education and place authority in the individual school, teachers and parents.

The most serious criticism, however, concerns educational performance. According to Baltimore School District figures, test scores have dropped in the eight Baltimore elementary schools and risen slightly in the rest of the system. Also, student turnover rates are high. The argument is also made that a private corporation has no business making profits off public schools. Overall, the problems and criticisms of the alternatives to public education are few. The positive aspects seem to outweigh the negatives so far. Charter schools now in operation are experiencing high demand. Principal David Lehman of West Michigan Academy has applications for the year 2002—and even a letter from a couple requesting space for their child not yet born.

The movement toward charter schools and other alternatives is inevitable according to some experts. Ray Buddle, retired University of Massachusetts professor of school administration, who has been given credit for inventing the charter school concept, believes that the movement is at least a "wake-up call for the establishment" (Wallis, 1994). Also, he believes that the old system just doesn't work anymore. He confides that it will take at least 10-20 years for real change to take place in our public schools, but that this is the reason parents need to demand better choices now.

The growing efforts to find answers to the problem of public education have led people to try to break free from schooling's more traditional regulations and bureaucracy. Both the charter-school movement and home-school movement seek to change the format of public education and place authority in the individual school, teachers and parents. These alternatives are often noted to parallel closely the beliefs of John Dewey. Both favor student learning through actual experience with an emphasis on

student interests, student activity, group work and discussion. One of Dewey's basic assumptions was that ideas, values, and institutions *should change as the needs of society change*. Deborah Meier's philosophy of the school as a changing "community" agrees closely with Dewey's thinking.

Proponents of alternatives to public education continue to argue that although periodic attempts are made to reform the schools, "those breezes usually leave behind another layer of managers in the central office, another mandatory service to be provided to the needy few, another couple of hundred pages of education codes telling teachers what they should do and when. But the basic structure remains the same" (Wallis, 1994, p. 61). The establishment of schools that provide alternatives to traditional public schools is no more than an attempt to offer choice, spur improvements through competition and challenge the time-honored structure.

It seems evident that, although there appears to be a certain degree of success in many alternative schools, they offer only escape from the ills of public education, but no real solutions to the problems. In one sense, by creating another environment in which to educate only a small percentage of students, we are avoiding efforts to find workable solutions to the glaring inadequacies that exist in our public schools. But if in fact the principles upon which these schools are being established do prove to be highly effective, attempts should be made to find a way to apply them on a broader scale within the public school system.

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Vouchers: Milwaukee's Choice?

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Introduced more than 40 years ago, vouchers remain controversial because Americans are deeply opposed to plans using public money to support private schools. Public schools are perceived to be our nation's foundation so their continued improvement is crucial to the nation's future.

Equity

Although separation of church and state has been integral to our nation's constitutional development, over the years the issue has remained in hot debate- as it is today. Separatist defenders are out to protect religion from state mandates while opponents argue for school acountablility. Public schools will become better, some say, if private alternatives provide some competition. Vouchers are key to alternative arguments.

Today, private schools enroll about 12% of all school children; and about 85% of private schools are sectarian, 51% are Roman Catholic. Generally, smaller and less diverse non-public schools are likely to be comprised of students from more advantaged backgrounds. Comparisons of public/private quality continue unabated. At first glance private schools seem to be winning the excellence race. Complex factors, however, such as geography, imposed norms, selectivity (i.e., being able to accept and/or reject students), and levels of financial support serve to alter the picture.

Quality

There is great interest in the educational quality question: Are the private schools really better academically than public schools? Private schools admit and retain whomever they want, with whatever criteria they wish to use. Determining academic prowess is problematic since there are so many factors to consider. Many researchers will argue that the biggest predictor of success is family background and prior academic achievement. When these factors are considered in measuring academic success, the gaps between private and public achievement virtually disappear. Not surprisingly, overall data supports the view that voucher students attending private schools do not achieve better than comparable students in public schools (Murphy, 1998).

Inner-city schools, for example, face a quality disparity rooted in the fact that large city, per-pupil expenditures and other needed resources are scarce in comparison to their suburban school neighbors. The following example is unfortunately replicated in too many cities. Located in Chicago's south central area, adjacent to perhaps the most impoverished housing project in the United States, is DuSable, a 100% Black student high school. The per capita income there averages $5,000. The district expends only $6,000 per student each year and has a 50% dropout rate. Area gang gunfire remains a constant menace endangering students every day. DuSable's Black, male principal has an earned doctorate and is a former Phi Delta Kappa Educator of the Year. In comparative contrast, New Trier High School, located 25 miles north of Chicago, has an 86% White and 11% Asian enrollment on a beautiful, Ivy League-like campus contiguous to several neighborhoods with $500,000+ homes. The average per capita income is over $62,000 and at least $12,000 per student is expended each year New Trier's teachers' salaries average $25,000 more than DuSable's. One of New Trier's main concerns is where to have students park their BMWs, Mercedes, etc. School neighbors

capitalize on this situation by renting their large driveways as student parking lots for a minimum of $2,500 per car each semester.

Public/Private Issues

Milwaukee has long sought to redress such inequities. Alternatives to even the playing field for all students should include equal facilities, good teachers, and up-to-date technology. In the past decade, Milwaukee has turned to school choice via a voucher system. Milwaukee's Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the first large-city voucher program to make public funds available for private school tuition, began in 1990 when students were given as much as $4,700 to attend private, non-religious schools. According to *School Board News* (p.7), MCPC was designed to permit up to 15% ($15,000) of Milwaukee's poorest students to attend private, nonsectarian schools, allowing the state to pay up to $5,000 per year—with the stipulation that for each student voucher, Wisconsin proportionately would reduce Milwaukee public school aid. MPCP proponents argue that allowing low-income, mostly students-of-color, to choose which school they will attend and what they will study effects greater flexibility, accountability, and academic performance. Other advantages, they say, include enhancing parents' roles in their children's education, increasing student motivation, and better matching of student programs with student needs.

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Resolutely leading the initial MPCP charge was Polly Williams, a Wisconsin Assembly Democrat-of-color, who sought to use vouchers as a method of helping poor children—especially those of color, their parents, and the communities where they lived. Allying with and obtaining support from Republican Governor Tommy Thompson and others, she achieved her immediate goal of passing the voucher bill. Victory was hers.

Most wars have many battles. Williams soon discovered that winning initial skirmish(es) can be costly to both advocate and intended beneficiaries. As the voucher program was implemented, Williams' power waned and, as it did, the program itself began to change. In 1995, MPCP was expanded to allow parents and their children to use vouchers to attend religious schools where students could elect out of participating in religious training; and in 1998, citing unfairness to middle-class families, Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist publicly supported phasing out the program's income cap. Still fiery, but increasingly battle weary, Williams accused conservative and class interests of taking over the voucher program to benefit higher-income families. "When we take the cap off, we have lost the intent of that legislation..." (Bice & Williams, 1998).

Yet, legislation remains an MPCP ally, for in each of the years during the period from 1990 to 1998, Milwaukee area, low-income students were given vouchers up to $4,700 to attend private schools of their choice. In 1995, for example, over 1500 students participated. In fact, the 1995-97 Wisconsin state budget provided enough funds each year for 15,000 (poor) Milwaukee students to choose private schools irrespective of the religious affiliation of the schools. The private schools existing in 1995 couldn't accommodate 15,000 students. They still can't today.

On June 10, 1998, following three years of state court rulings that vouchers shouldn't be used for enrolling students in religious schools, the Wisconsin Supreme Court voted 4-2 to back MPCP on religious school choice, thus upholding the 1995 state law allowing use of public funds for religious school tuition. In deciding, the Court specifically noted that MPCP's expanded secular purpose of improving

low-income children's educational choices neither advances nor inhibits religious education since it "applies equally to religious and secular schools" (Peers, 1998).

In Fall, 1998, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction reported that 6,200 students participated in the MPCP school choice program -2,200 of whom attend private, non-sectarian schools. Of the 4,000 attending religious schools, 2,785 students attend Catholic schools, 561 attend Lutheran schools, and 654 students attend other religious schools. This pilot program will be expanded up to 15,000 students from the inner-city (*Wisconsin State Journal*, November 15, 1998). For the 1998-99 school year, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction projected about 6,000 to 10,000 students would attend fewer than 100 private and religious schools with vouchers of approximately $5,000 (Murphy, 1998). But since existing schools can't possibly handle that many students, does this mean that for the MPCP program to achieve maximum enrollment, new private schools need to be built? Not necessarily. Prudence remains key; as in any new program, problems emerge. Factors such as attrition rates of both voucher students and voucher schools must be better addressed before this question is answered. For example, a cursory look at the first eight years of MPCP reveals that some voucher schools shut down (several in mid-year), and voucher student dropout rates averaged more than 25% (Witte, 1995).

Accountability

As stated earlier, choice proponents believe competition created by vouchers will force public schools to improve. Widening choices, they claim, not only raises quality but also can, and probably will, reduce racial and socio-economic isolation since poor children will be able to attend elite private schools, thereby better leveling education's playing field. But will the voucher plan realistically open elite schools to low-income children, and will they expand available educational choices to disadvantaged families? Murphy says no, offering two major reasons: (1) Vouchers tend to favor the more advantaged families, and (2) even though vouchers began with restrictions favoring low-income families, higher-income families exerted enough pressure to expand benefits to themselves and others, potentially undermining intended MPCP benefits for the poor (Murphy, 1998).

How is the religious aspect fit into the achievement/cost argument? Opponents such as ACLU view MPCP-like programs as unconstitutional because they allow public and taxpayer money to go to schools educating children in specific religious doctrine. Don Moore, Executive Director for Chicago-based Designs for Change, also oppose such programs because they divert funds from public schools to private ones that can "pick and choose who they'll admit" and not have to publish data about their achievements (Peers, 1998). Others claim that such practices violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which prohibits state subsidies of religion.

An example of how the voucher plan's initial goal for educational equity has been undermined becomes apparent when examining the Bradley Foundation, a major funding source of Milwaukee's (and other cities') school choice efforts. The Foundation's stated goal is to facilitate high quality education for poor children. Unstated motives, however, have been yet raised by Foundation President and CEO Michael Joyce, who occasionally reveals an ulterior motive when he comments that, if MPCP legislation is to move forward, pressure for its passage must come, not from the forlorn poor but rather from "the next level." If school choice is good public policy for the poor, he argues, it ought to be good for everyone irrespective of income level (Fisher, 1995, p.6).

So, what are the likely outcomes? The poorest families will lose out because expanded voucher programs tend to favor the better-off poor families. Since families who are better-off have better information access, can afford transportation, have a higher inclination to employ educational options, and are more likely to be involved in a voucher program in the first place, Levin believes the very poor are likely

to be left behind (Levin 1997, p.13).

Murphy claims that voucher arguments are increasingly being addressed in terms of social justice, student performance, and accountability (1995). Regarding social justice, one of the most important questions regarding school choice is who really has the final choice about where a student attends school. Levin asserts that ultimately this will rest with the private schools, not with parents, since private schools are free to reject applicants, limit spaces, or choose not to participate at all in the MCPC program (Levin, 1997). Whereas the public schools must educate all students, irrespective of student ability or physical, emotional, behavioral, or other special needs, parochial schools may pick and choose whom they will admit and retain with no external restrictions (Leaven, 1998). Furthermore, those parents who do have sufficient influence will tend to be higher income and more advantaged parents. The trend is already clear. Witte (1995) reports that the MPCP program consistently favors more advantaged families over those in the low-income group. Moreover, Metcalf shows that in Cleveland (another example), the "best", brightest, public school students are the ones attracted to the private schools. This leaves behind the most disadvantaged to attend the public schools. But, the public education system has not been improved for the "left-over" poor children. Quite the opposite has occurred; vouchers have robbed resources and transferred them to the private sector. In contrast to the hopes of voucher proponents, many fear that MPCP programs will only reinforce segregation and social stratification since lower income parents and students may lack a "knowledge base" to select schools, and some schools will close. Only about 12% of students are now being served by religious schools. That leaves almost 90% in a public system with less funding to serve them (Leaven, 1998). Critics argue that trying to switch more students could deprive struggling districts of their best students and the state dollars provided to educate them.

Regarding social justice, one of the most important questions regarding school choice is who really has the final choice about where a student attends school.

As voucher systems expand, the debate continues to heat up. Catholic groups, on the one hand, favor the voucher system since it provides a steady source of academically inclined students to their own schools. The National Council of Churches, representing the nation's mainline Protestant churches, on the other hand, argues that we have a moral responsibility to support public schools since they are the primary route for poor children to receive an education. Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, People for the American Way, and a growing number of African-American churches and liberal Jewish groups who want public school funding increased concur with this Protestant view (*Chicago Tribune*, November 11, 1998, p.7).

Finally, the accountability issue will become increasingly urgent. Private schools may not be able to retain complete autonomy in admitting students, hiring and firing teachers or determining what teachers teach and how academic achievement is measured. In Wisconsin, new amendments have already been added to the MPCP voucher law. First, schools must randomly admit students (except for special needs children) if demand exceeds available slots. Second, voucher schools must submit a yearly, independent, financial audit. However, the new law does not call for annual program performance evaluations, thereby avoiding the possibility of comparing student achievement in voucher and public schools. But, this could change as more public dollars go to private institutions.

Another accountability hot button will certainly become costs. Levin (1997) estimates that, if a national voucher system

is implemented, the vouchers themselves will cost at least $48 billion in addition to $25 billion for current private school students who would be entitled to receive vouchers. The figures would be staggering if vouchers are extended to anyone who cares to participate.

As we close this discussion, the title of the article becomes more of a question than ever. Will the developers of voucher systems turn out to represent the choice Milwaukee once thought they had made?

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Alternative Education: Student Rights and System Responsibilities

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The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 contained provisions for removing students with disabilities from regular education for school violations of drug or weapon possession. The removal of disabled students who present a danger to themselves or classmates was also mandated. This policy direction underscores the importance of schools and school systems developing effective alternative schools. This article is a review of the law which can provide policy guidelines for determining public school and student obligations.

The legal bases for alternative education policies are state constitutions, statutory law, and court decisions. Most state constitutions contain clauses to the effect that all citizens of a certain age range are entitled to a free public education. Common phrases that define the extent of the state's obligation to provide that educational opportunity are "an appropriate education" or "an efficient education" sufficient for the graduate to be able to function in society. These provisions have been held to include students who are disabled, exhibit behavioral problems, have social problems, and those who may have a temporary condition, such as pregnancy, which may cause problems in the regular educational setting.

Several states have passed laws to ensure that alternative educational opportunities are established by local education agencies so that no student is deprived of a meaningful education.

Both state and the federal legislatures have passed laws which mandate that all students receive educational opportunities that may not be limited by the student's disabilities or social or behavioral actions. The IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act) mandates that all students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate, public education designed to meet the individual needs of each student. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 forbids discrimination in educational opportunities against any person with a disability, including behavioral disorders or drug or alcohol addiction when that person is in treatment.

Several states have passed laws to ensure that alternative educational opportunities are established by local education agencies so that no student is deprived of a meaningful education. Some of these laws, such as the California statutes, are very detailed and cover twenty sections of the California Code. Others, such as the Georgia Code, are very brief and, as such, are subject to much interpretation. The Georgia Code simply states that alternative schools are a permissible part of the school's in-school suspension program. Section 20-2-155(b) of the Georgia Code creates an in-school suspension program for which state funds are allocated. The law states, inter alia:

> The State Board of Education is authorized to create an in-school suspension program. The in-school suspension programs may be housed in the regularly assigned schools, schools specially organized for such programs, or

alternative schools provided the students are isolated from typical school activities until they demonstrate sufficient adjustment to warrant their returning to their previously assigned classes.

This type of enabling legislation raises the issue of what type of alternative school is most appropriate for a given situation. Raywid (1990) has established a system of classification of alternative schools that separates them by type. The type of alternative school envisioned by the Georgia legislation would come under what Raywid characterized as a Type 2 school. Type 2 schools tend to be judgmental in their basis and punitive in their orientation. Kelmayer (1995) called such programs "soft jails." They are created as a last chance prior to expulsion and are often "highly structured, tightly regulated, and employ behavior correction strategies, along with firm and aggressive disciplinary policies." These programs are contrasted with Type 1 programs which are characterized as "liberating" or "more humane, responsive, more challenging." The Type 3 program has as its objective "therapy rather than reform school." The underlying assumption is that the basis of the student's troubles lies somewhere within the student. The type of program, or hybrid of these programs, will be based on the needs of the population and the administrator's personal philosophy of what is an appropriate education for students at risk.

Some other state laws creating alternative schools differ in form and intent from the Georgia Code. For example, Oregon's statute states that school districts may adopt resolutions to establish and maintain alternative schools that:

1. Have the purpose of serving students who are on suspension, are having a truancy problem, are experiencing academic failure, have a history of class disruptions, or are exhibiting other academic or behavioral problems.
2. Serve grades K through 12.
3. Develop a plan to be administered by the board of education that:
   a. specifies the reasons for accepting for assignment to the school and any criteria for admission that are to be used to approve or disapprove assignment.
   b. specifies the criteria and procedures for students assigned to the school returning to the regular education program of the district.
   c. evaluates the effectiveness of the school and its educational program.
   d. requires that students attend each day for a period equal to the minimum school day.
   e. restricts student participation in extra-curricular or inter-scholastic activities.
   f. requires that students wear uniforms prescribed by the board of education.

It should be noted that the Oregon law provides for the permanent exclusion of students from school for cause (See *C.B. v. Driscoll*, supra.). Louisiana's Code provides that the State Board of Education shall adopt guidelines for alternative schools that shall provide for:

1. Identifying the needs of students.
2. Using group and individualized courses of study.
3. Providing assistance with social skills and work habits.
4. Using alternative teaching methods.

The law further provides that teachers in the schools shall be selected from a list of volunteers. Eligibility shall be determined from a list of students with discipline problems whose behavior is disruptive.

Current Case Law and Alternative Schools

Though there is not a substantial body of appellate case law dealing with alternative schools, an examination of the cases that do exist may provide helpful guidelines for defining the rights and obligations of both public school systems and students who may be candidates for assignment to alternative schools.

Jordan v. School District of City of Erie. 583 F.2d 91 (1978):

This is one of the earliest cases dealing with the right of school systems to create alternative education programs and to

assign disruptive students to them. The parents of James Jordan objected to his removal from his regular school and his transfer to another school designed to meet the special needs of disruptive students or students with behavioral problems. The parents argued that their son's right to an education, as guaranteed in the Pennsylvania Constitution, was violated as were his due process rights. The court established clear precedent that the public schools have the right to establish alternative schools and assign students to them as long as minimal due process procedures are followed.

The minimal due process required is that the assignment be made on the basis of valid and clearly stated criteria; that the assignment not be arbitrary or capricious; and that the student be given notice of the school rule or law s/he is alleged to have violated and the opportunity to be heard on his or her version of the incident by a fair and impartial tribunal (may be a single individual). In the absence of a showing that due process was violated, the school may assign or transfer the student to an appropriate, alternative, educational placement over the objections of the student or parent.

The importance of following due process procedures is evident in a recent case from Alabama:

Dothan City Board of Education v. V.M.H. 660 S.2d 1328 (1995):

A student challenged the school board's decision to place him in a long-term alternative school as discipline for possessing an item that could conceivably be used as a weapon in violation of the student code of conduct. The student (V.M.H.) had an air rifle locked in his car in the parking lot. He argued that the air rifle was unloaded and that there was no ammunition for it in the car. He claimed that he had been denied due process because the student code definition of weapon was "unconstitutionally ambiguous and vague" and because the principal unilaterally made the determination that the air rifle met the definition of a weapon.

In a split decision, the court agreed stating that the definition of weapon was vague noting that a sharpened pencil, a tennis racket, or a baseball bat could be used as weapons. The court stated that the school board had violated the student's due process rights by substituting the school principal's judgment in determining whether the item was a weapon within the meaning of the school's code of conduct for its own.

In another due process appeal the issue of using waivers before assignment to alternative schools is discussed. The use of waivers to disciplinary hearings is becoming more popular because of the time consuming nature of formal hearings.

Buchanan v. Hardeman County Board of Education. 1996 Fed. App. 0352P:

A student was alleged by the principal to have violated school rules and was allowed to choose between serving a ten day, at-home suspension or attending an alternative school for ten days. The parent and her son opted to attend the alternative school and signed an agreement indicating her consent to her son's attendance at the alternative school. She later filed a complaint alleging deprivation of property (an education) and violation of due process because her son had not been given a hearing. She further alleged that the alternative school form she signed was insufficient to waive her son's rights to procedural due process.

The school argued that the form, in and of itself, constitutes a consent to the discipline imposed and thereby rendered notice and an opportunity to be heard unnecessary. The court determined that the minimal due process requires notice and hearing and that the agreement does not state a waiver of notice or the opportunity to be heard. Therefore there was no waiver of the right to refute the conduct alleged and the discipline imposed.

Another due process issue is whether assignment to an alternative school in and of itself violates students' rights.

Doe v. Bagan. 41 F.3d 571 (1994):

In this case a student was charged with the sexual abuse of another student. He was placed in an alternative school while the investigation of the charges was pending. His mother argued that his due process rights were violated by the transfer to the alter-

native school because his reputation was destroyed, and he was humiliated because other students knew about the reason for the assignment thereby denying him the state's, guaranteed right to a public education.

The court denied the student's claim because the only thing he had been denied was the right to attend the school of his choice. The court found that no such right exists. There is no constitutional right to select a school or change schools. The court in Bagan relied on two earlier decisions:

Zamora v. Pomery. 639 F.2d 662. (1981):

The court held that there may not be a right to be heard on a disciplinary action when the only sanction to be imposed is attendance at an alternative school without some showing that the education received at the alternative school is significantly different from or inferior to that received at the regular public school.

Lujan v. Colorado State Board of Education. 649 P.2d 1005. (1982):

Students must be given the opportunity to receive a free public education. There is no authority indicating that the right to a public education encompasses a right to choose one's particular school. The statement that students must be given the opportunity to receive a free public education raises the issue of whether that opportunity may be lost. The Georgia Court of appeals held that is, in fact, the case. The court stated that the permanent expulsion of a student for disciplinary reasons did not conflict or violate a student's constitutional right to a free public education because the right could be limited by statute and the applicable statute did not prohibit permanent expulsion. The court went on to state that the right to a free public education is not unlimited (*D. B. v. Clark County Board of Education, 469 S.E. 2d 435. (1996).*

Criteria for Establishing Alternative Education Programs

Reflecting on the dispositions of most courts' and school districts' boards' of education findings, the following criteria should be used:

1. When your school or school system has been having a problem meeting the needs of special populations of students who have not responded to traditional school programs: These populations may include the disruptive, violent, gifted, or other student population who are not succeeding in the regular placement;
2. When you are interested in creating an alternative learning environment to address the individualized needs of these students;
3. When you want to create a program to comply with state and federal mandates to educate all students and want to comply within the constraints of limited resources;
4. When you care about helping special student populations, regardless of how difficult their behavior may be; and you want to do this without being punitive or unduly isolating the students; and
5. When you want to preserve the learning environment for other, non-disruptive or non-violent students.

Who Should be Considered for this Program?

1. The habitually disruptive student.
2. The disinterested or disaffected student.
3. The student who has been committed to a juvenile or adult justice system.
4. The chronic truant or non-attending student.
5. The student who is a chronic disciplinary problem.
6. The gifted student.
7. The pregnant student.
8. The homosexual student who, because of their sexual orientation, may be at risk from other students.
9. The student who has dropped out.

Who is the At-Risk Student?

Courts are holding schools to a fairly rigorous standard when it comes to identifying students whose mental or physical disabilities may entitle them to special educational services, including alternate placements. Fair, impartial, and accurate identification and early and appropriate intervention can be crucial in the education of potential problem students. The classroom

teacher is the first line of identification of students who may need special services or placements. Some of the characteristics of such students include the following:

- Students of low family socioeconomic level
- Students of low sense of self-esteem
- Students having poor goal orientation
- Students who are apathetic or withdrawn
- Students who are angry, defiant, or disruptive
- Students who come from single parent or broken homes
- Students with low standardized test scores
- Students with low aspirations and parents who have low expectations for their children

Phi Delta Kappa compiled a weighted list of specific behaviors which indicate that a child may be at-risk. Some of these behaviors, in rank order, are:

- Attempted suicide during the last year
- Used drugs, sold drugs, or engaged in substance abuse
- Negative sense of self-esteem
- Pregnant
- Was expelled from school in the last year
- Consumes alcohol regularly
- Was arrested
- Parents have negative attitudes about education
- Has siblings who have dropped out of school
- Was sexually or physically abused in the last year
- Was suspended from school twice in the last year
- Was absent more than twenty days in the last year
- Was retained (held back) in grade
- Average grades were below "C" in the last school year
- Mother is the only parent living in the home

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Alternative Education: An Opportunity for Success

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Why can't schools be the way they used to be? How many times have we heard that statement or similar statements from people in the general public? "When I was in school, things were different." Yes, they certainly were. In the 1940s, only about 25% of students graduated from high school (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1994). These figures reflected a philosophy that was designed to sort out and select groups of students to be educated and was never intended to provide quality education for all students. Today the national graduation rate is at 85% according to *The National Education Goals Report* (1996). In the 1940s, students who remained in school through high school had high standards set for them because their parents pushed them to excel, and most students were attentive to their teachers because of the rigid disciplinary process during that time. Today public schools must serve a diverse group of students, many of whom have little support from home and little desire to be in school at all.

Inadequate housing, inappropriate diets, and low achievement levels of caretakers all lessen the likelihood that students' educational endeavors will be successful. Many students who enter school from culturally diverse backgrounds are at a disadvantage. They do not respect or understand the culture of the classroom because it is radically different from the culture of their home environment. Many school administrators and classroom teachers are not prepared to meet the societal and behavioral expectations they face.

A recent study indicates that rural students may be as much at risk of dropping out of school as those in urban environments.

Gandara (1989) contends that many of these students often attend school without the benefit of support from home. Their parents do not understand the school curriculum, how the students are evaluated, or even the quality of education offered to their child. They do not know how to work within the framework of the school system to properly intercede on behalf of their child so that success can be attained.

When we think about at-risk students and high dropout rates, we tend to think of urban, inner-city, young people exposed to the dangers and lures of the street. However, a recent study indicates that rural students may be as much at risk of dropping out of school as those in urban environments (Blackledge, 1997). Poverty, dysfunctional families, crime, drugs, and learning problems are not reserved for students in inner city schools. When students in schools serving rural areas are faced with the same problems as urban students, they are just as likely to drop out of school. Blackledge (1997) found that when race, poverty, and familial characteristics are statistically controlled, urban and rural students have an equal chance of dropping out of school.

According to Jordon, Lara, and McPartland (1996), the dropout problem in high schools across the United States has

reached crisis proportions. In schools where high concentrations of poor and minority-classified students are enrolled, over 50% never finish high school graduation requirements. The national push for higher standards for graduation may, for these students, have the unintended consequence of placing a high school diploma beyond their reach.

A survey of early high school dropouts reported by Jordan, et al. (1996), states that a "push" factor from the school is more instrumental in encouraging students to drop out than is a "pull" factor from family, society, and employment. The school-related reasons for leaving school usually occur when the educational environment becomes frustrating, punishing, or a place of avoidance. Many times these students are "pushed" or encouraged to leave. Often school, for these students, is a series of academic failures, conflicts with staff and peers, disciplinary hearings, suspensions, and expulsions. Dropping out for these children certainly seems to be a solution rather than a problem.

The increasing school dropout rate is a local, state, and national problem. It is reflected in the assessment of a poor or excellent school, in the workforce of a community, and in the economy of the state; and, it is certainly a concern of the nation. The dropout problem is not limited to densely populated urban areas. According to *The National Goals Report* (1996), 44 states have made no progress since 1990 toward increasing their high school completion rates. The study conducted by Blackledge (1997) was carried out in Mississippi in both an urban and a rural school district. This study concluded that geography is not an issue in determining which students will drop out of school.

In another study in 1997, Garnier, et al. found that dropping out of school is a process that occurs over time and results from a combination of individual, family, and school experiences. This current research described dropping out of high school as a long-term process beginning in childhood. This process encompasses the effects of family, child, and school factors on a child's development. The model which emerged from this study emphasizes the importance of including longitudinal data and family factors that create composite sets of multiple risk factors which greatly enhance the likelihood of school failure. This idea is also strongly supported in several other studies by Wells (1990), Frymier and Gansneder (1989), Frymier, et al. (1992), Purvis and Jacobs (1996), Yungman (1993), Sheppard (1991), Evelo, et al. (1996), and Weber (1989). These studies are illustrative of the interrelation of independent variables in the family, community, and school environments that cause students to become educational failures and drop out of school.

Once the possible composite and individual dropout predictors are available for school administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and support staff, some recommendations for increasing the graduation rate for any school in any geographic area can be made. Those recommendations include a counseling program for potential dropouts that includes a student profiling instrument. That profiling instrument should be developed and implemented in a counseling program so identification of potential student dropouts could be determined at an early stage in the educational process. Identification of potential students who may be at risk of dropping out of school helps educators develop prevention/intervention strategies.

The three, broad, composite sets of data which should be included in the profile instrument developed are student characteristics, family characteristics, and school characteristics. Following is a list of the risk factors and characteristics identified in a review of five studies which research shows contribute to the profile of a potential dropout:

Student Characteristics:

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Age
- Attendance
- Retention
- Socioeconomic status
- Grade enrolled
- Citizenship/discipline

Family Characteristics:

- Type of Family Unit
- Teen Parent
- Family Trauma

It is important to note that, while any student may at one time or another exhibit some of the characteristics described above, it is the pattern that emerges which identifies potential dropouts. By clustering the factors that contribute to becoming a dropout into three composites of student, family, and school, the educator can begin to determine the degree to which a student is at risk of dropping out.

Once potential dropouts are identified, alternate methods of delivering an appropriate education to these students can be developed. These students may not be motivated by the traditional values imposed in the past by families and may often see no relation between education and a better lifestyle. They must be presented the material in a different method that stimulates, motivates, and gives them reason to change their behavior and to establish education as a priority. As educators plan for and administer alternative education programs for at-risk students, they need to be aware of the factors that contribute to a student's dropping out. Only then can programs be developed that provide students with a reason to stay in school and the will to combat the forces working to encourage them to drop out.

Even as the need for alternative education increases, so do the solutions available to educators today. Students who are unable to function in the traditional classroom often respond well to instruction that is individualized and targets their specific needs. Computer software is readily available that can do the labor-intensive task of developing an individualized program for every alternative school student and free the instructor to become a coach and cheerleader as students move through the program.

Alternative schools should provide not just a different place for disruptive or non-conforming students but a different environment for students with unique needs.

Often students must cope in the "real world" with such grown-up problems as taking care of young children, finding enough food to eat, and dealing with irresponsible and sometimes abusive adults. For these students, the everyday, school-related activities like recess and lining up to go to the lunchroom or library or raising your hand for permission to speak may seem totally unrelated to their world. Alternative schools can provide an environment that treats them like young adults while fulfilling an innate need for structure and support. Alternative schools should provide not just a different place for disruptive or non-conforming students but a different environment for students with unique needs.

The one thing that a true alternative school can provide is hope for a better future. In our society no child should see dropping out of school as a solution to a problem. For the student who cannot remain in school during a regular 8:00-3:00 school day, on-line schools offer a unique choice. Through such programs, students can be issued laptop computers with modems through which they can dial in to school from home and complete the requirements for carnegie units toward graduation. Some programs even offer on-line support from certified teachers, while others allow students to check in with their teachers through the telephone during specific hours.

Some high schools across the country have instituted a "credit recovery" program for students who have failed so many courses that graduation seems out of reach. Students are allowed to complete the work toward graduation through on-line instruction and must pass competency tests approved by high school teachers to receive credit. Once these young adults realize that there is hope for a diploma, many of them will apply themselves with a surprising intensity.

No child wants to be a failure, but many children have failed for so long that they cannot see themselves in any other light. Alternative education should be the place where they learn to succeed.

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Providence High School's AVID Program: A Unique Educational Alternative

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What is AVID? It means *Advancement Via Individual Determination*. This is a relatively new program geared to help a selected school population. Like many high school systems in America, Providence does a very good job of getting motivated students into the colleges of their choice. The school has vocational, school-to-work, and half-day work programs for the student not considering college right after high school. Students who are interested in the armed services can see their local recruiter during lunch and/or attend informative sessions to pursue their careers. Special education students have programs to help them adjust to the transition from school and after graduation. Students considered to be at-risk with the potential of dropping out of Providence High are provided incentives, special counseling, and programs to keep them in school. Even athletes who are considered Division I prospects can receive guidance to assist them in their college plans. Woe to the school principal who does not get that "star" athlete into a major university. Parents, community, and the media will condemn the administrator for not ensuring Johnny or Judy Jock's placement in college as a result of low test scores, low grades, or non-college courses attempted. The staff works very hard to make sure this does not happen!

Unfortunately there is a group of young people whom most high schools forget. I call them the "mid-kids" – students caught between day and night—not eligible for any existing programs and forgotten by most educators.

Providence High School is very fortunate to have 2,239 seemingly well behaved, motivated, young people in a 9-12 suburban setting. Over eighty percent of the students attend four-year colleges. The school is a Blue-Ribbon School recognized for its academic excellence. Advance placement records show Providence leading the District (in public and private schools) in the number of students enrolled, tested, and scoring above a three (five being the highest) on the test. Providence High School leads North Carolina in the number of students in the National Honor Society. Overall this school does very well for college prep students.

Unfortunately there is a group of young people whom most high schools forget. I call them the "mid-kids" students caught between day and night—not eligible for any existing programs and forgotten by most educators. They are the solid "C" students who don't cause many problems—unmotivated students who have potential but don't use it; they just blend into the woodwork in the average high school. Counselors don't see them because they may not know who they are. We administrators don't see them either. There are hundreds of students who fit the AVID profile at Providence. The staff needs to identify them and help them achieve to their maximum.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District has had the foresight to recognize this waste of human potential. It looked around to see what could be done to help all students reach their untapped potential. This led the District to establish AVID, a

program specifically for this type of student. In the 1997-98 school year, the AVID program was started in a limited number of middle and senior high schools. It was so successful in its structured curriculum and pedagogy that it is now required in all secondary schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Providence High School welcomed the opportunity to help the forgotten student.

The summer of 1998 saw hundreds of secondary principals, teachers, and counselors attend an Eastern conference on AVID in Newport News, Virginia. The conference lasted five days but was worth every minute spent there! Although most of the information on teaching, content, course integration, parental involvement, tutoring, organization, and providing feedback was not new to any experienced educator, the structure of the program was unique.

I am going to describe the mission, goal, and achievement of AVID, and what Providence is doing to implement this program. AVID is the brainchild of Mary Catherine Swanson who taught English for twenty years. She developed AVID in California in 1980 as a program for underachieving, secondary students to prepare them for the rigors of a four-year college. So far, more than 93% of AVID students have enrolled in four-year colleges, and 89% of them are in college two years later. At the summer institute in Newport News, educators were privileged to hear many success stories of students who clearly said that they would not be where they are today without the AVID program. It gave them structure, help, and hope for the future.

By definition, "AVID is a staff development program for educators and a college preparatory program for all students, especially those underachieving who have not previously succeeded in college preparatory curriculum" (AVID Notebook, 1998). Although AVID can work with all students, it appears to work best with the underachieving students.

> The sorting practices of schools constitute the very identities of the students they touch. It is not that dumb kids are placed in slow groups or low tracks; it is that kids are made dumb by being placed into slow groups or low tracks. And, as demonstrated by AVID, students can be made smart by being placed in challenging courses when they have a system of social scaffolding supporting them. (Mehan, 1996).

The purpose of the AVID program is to identify these students caught in the middle, prepare them for the college preparatory path for four-year college eligibility, and restructure teaching methodologies to ensure that this happens.

I was able to obtain a summary of AVID research findings that helped me decide that this was a good program for our mid-kids. Although I was more persuaded by the many practitioners from around the country who have successfully tried and used AVID, they were universally sold on the concept. Briefly, here are some of the findings of AVID:

- AVID serves over 20,000 students throughout California, Nevada, Kentucky, Virginia,North Carolina, Missouri, Colorado, Arizona, Europe, the Far East, and Central America.
- The AVID network of schools includes nearly 500 sites.
- Since 1990, over 5,000 students have graduated from AVID programs.
- Over 90% of AVID graduates enroll in college.
- AVID graduates persist in college at an 89% rate.
- The longer students participate in AVID, the more likely they are to indicate they would enroll again.
- Classes average around 25 students.
- The AVID team consists of teachers of English, math, science, social studies, and a guidance counselor. Students wanting to participate in AVID are more likely to have higher academic grades after enrolling in the program.
- AVID students participating in free and reduced lunch programs (i.e. lower socio-economic students) were more likely to indicate that the student, tutor, and teacher support was useful.

Conclusions reached through surveys and research were that AVID blurs both racial and economic boundaries and gives all students equal educational opportunities. Grades, attendance, participation, and parental involvement increased through AVID. AVID teachers also took a special interest in the mid-kids now that they were identified as AVID students.

The AVID Student Profile:

- Underachieving
- Average to high test scores
- Average GPA
- College potential with support
- Disadvantaged and underserved
- Low income
- Historically underserved in four-year colleges
- First in family to attend college
- Special circumstances
- Desire and determination by both student and parent

Obviously all students will not perfectly fit into this profile, but many students do fit into several of these categories. These are the ones looked at first. (I was surprised how many students fit this profile.)

The program components include:

- Eligible students (selected by the school staff), and their parents elect to participate in the program. On-going communication with the parent is vital to the success of the program.
- Tutors work with AVID students both individually and in study groups. (Providence recruited its tutors from the retired population and colleges. These are paid positions supported by the school district.) Tutors assist students in all academic areas to make progress commensurate with college expectations.
- The AVID teacher will instruct students in lessons derived from maximum competency materials, originally developed collaboratively in AVID by high school and college instructors.
- The AVID Site Team consists of teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and can include students and tutors. The Site Team supports the efforts of the AVID Coordinator (a teacher who volunteers to lead the initiative, who can be rewarded by an extra planning period) and helps the AVID program succeed in the school. Regular meetings are held to involve the team in planning, assessing, and problem-solving.
- Seminars are offered in note-taking, study skills, test-taking, time management, SAT and college entrance and placement exam preparation, effective textbook reading, and library research skills. Students receive help in preparing college applications and financial aid forms.
- Guest speakers from colleges, the Military, business, and the community visit the AVID class. Students take field trips to museums, historical sites, theaters, colleges, businesses, and cultural events.
- AVID program implementation and student progress must be monitored, and results must be analyzed to ensure progress. Parents must be involved through the entire process while the student is in high school. This is a commitment that must be kept by the parents.
- There is a notebook that students use with a particular note-taking device.
- Specific teaching methodologies have been utilized in AVID with great success. These are called WIC, which stands for Writing, Inquiry, and Collaboration. AVID teachers, Site Team members, and tutors are trained to use these methods successfully with all students to make rigorous curriculum more accessible.

The sociological effects of AVID, as described by Hugh Mehan (1996), are that AVID assists students and families in :

- navigating the hidden curriculum of schools,
- acquiring cultural capital and overcoming SES (socio-economic status),
- discovering the social scaffolds that facilitate their academic progress,
- "crossing borders" to develop a new peer group while maintaining old friendships,

- developing an achievement ideology, and
- engaging in academic discourse.

AVID works because it:

- places low-achieving students in rigorous curriculum and gives them the support to achieve.
- provides the explicit "hidden curriculum" of schools that isn't being taught in schools but is learned anyway. (See the work of educational writer, Elliot Fisher, for the definition and explanation of "hidden curriculum.")
- provides a team of students for positive peer identification.
- redefines the teacher's role as that of student advocate.
- provides opportunities for teachers and parents to work together for the students' sake.
- focuses on academic success of low-achieving students as a school-wide issue, with significant portions of the school culture mobilized toward their success.

Providence High School identified 50 rising 8th- and 9th-graders last Spring. Parents and students met with the Site Team members. The program was carefully explained to them. Over the Summer, the AVID counselor and coordinator kept in touch with the families and helped when necessary with schedules, personal problems, and various other issues. The AVID team went to a summer workshop in Virginia. Students had one period a day together, in our case, English. The rest of the day they were with AVID teachers but not necessarily at the same time because of the scheduling nightmare this would have created. Meetings were scheduled several times with parents as a group and often individually.

Teachers are excited about AVID and helping these identified students. Involved staff are waiting for the first report card; AVID officials have told us that students may actually drop in GPAs as a result of being in more demanding classes. Providence will not lower the standards nor expectations for these or any students, but it provides the necessary help in order for students to be successful. The 9th- and 10th-graders will go on to the next grade, creating an 11th grade and increasing student numbers to 75. So far, no students have requested to be dropped from the program. As a matter of fact, parents are now hearing about AVID and are making inquiries into the program. The staff sees only positive things ahead for our AVID students!

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One Bright and Shining Year

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I work with practicing teachers in an accelerated, evening, master's degree program. Since we stay together for two years as a cohort group, I get to know more about their personal and professional lives than many university teachers might. Each week I watch as these teachers come into class at 4:30 after a long day at school – often tired, frustrated, and sometimes angry. I can relate. These are the symptoms of what, years ago, Philip Jackson (1986) called the "daily grind" of teaching. Though I have been out of the classroom for nearly 20 years, some things have not changed. In fact, from my current perspective, the intensity of the "grind" seems to be increasing year by year. So, I routinely set aside the first 45 minutes to an hour of each class to let the group share their good and bad experiences and unwind from the day.

While I enjoy my current work, I sometimes despair at what the future of teaching and, with it, public education holds. I left the classroom in 1980 feeling that the options for creative solutions to everyday teaching problems were closing down all over. The educational climate was becoming reductive. Back-to-basics talk, an emphasis on accountability, and prescriptive learning models were on the rise. It was time to leave.

After a number of years working in university libraries, I returned to education in 1994, this time as a university professor. Why did I return? When teaching conditions had not become better over the years, what hope could I offer teachers? Why should I even continue this work? The answer is: one good year.

This article is about one "bright and shining" year I had as a teacher when I felt and experienced all of the exciting possibilities that teaching can and *should* offer. I have experienced teachers and students working together to chart the course of their own learning, and I know how good that can feel. I also know that it works. I know that it works better than externally prescribed curricula and "by the book" teaching methodologies. When feeling low, I am continually brought back to that one good year for a sense of inspiration and hope that things *can* be better in schools for teachers and students alike. And, that with a little *imagination, daring,* and *faith,* students and teachers working together can create a living curriculum that provides both meaning and shared direction to their lives. What follows is the story of that year.

Looking back, I believe this agenda crystallized for me during the days of the Vietnam War when many young men my age were forced to make some very troubling decisions.

Beginnings

During the summer of 1974, I was preparing to begin my fourth year of teaching at a Catholic elementary school in southwestern Michigan. While talking in the backyard with a friend and colleague about our plans for the upcoming school year, we realized that we shared some common beliefs about the ends and means of education. We agreed that students should be encouraged to think for themselves and should thus be allowed to make meaningful decisions about their

lives and learning within the school setting. After all, wasn't this what they would be required to do after leaving school?

We also believed that students should be involved in decisions not only about what they study but when they study. Making 5-year decisions and choosing from alternative commitments is an inescapable part of adult life. Children need to have the opportunity to test their ideas and beliefs in the here and now setting of the school. We were concerned that engaging students in decision-making was the best way to prepare them for responsible adulthood. One must not only choose but also learn to choose wisely and take responsibility for one's choices. As a personal attribute and positive social value, learning how to make responsible choices was of primary importance to child development.

Looking back, I believe this agenda crystallized for me during the days of the Vietnam War when many young men my age were forced to make some very troubling decisions. For many, the choices were either to participate in the war passively, acquiescing to fate and hoping for the best, or to actively protest the war. Much to the consternation of my family, I chose to protest: I resisted induction into the army. My teaching colleague, also a protestor, was one of the first nuns in our school to stop wearing the traditional nun's habit, start speaking her mind openly on affairs of the church, and joined a local women's liberation group. While we came by our beliefs via separate pathways, we found we had much in common. Grounded in our shared set of beliefs (which became our philosophy of education), we agreed to merge our two classrooms and experimentally team-teach the entire fifth grade during the upcoming school year.

Setting and Space

Our building was an old high school with plenty of room for the school's K-8 population. Since there was no shortage of room, we were given an upstairs wing of the building including three classrooms connected by a long corridor with girls' and boys' washrooms at either end. Our wing was completely separated from the rest of the school. We had, in essence, a school-within-a-school just for the fifth grade. In late summer we eagerly set about rearranging this space to help foster the kind of learning we hoped would go on there.

As it turned out, we would later extend our landscape for learning to include the world outside the school walls.

Before the students arrived in September, we had designated each of the three rooms for a special purpose. Our goal for space use was to create and maintain a flexible and open learning environment where students could move and interact freely with one another and with the available learning materials. In the beginning, our vision of the learning space and environment consisted of the long corridor and the three adjacent rooms. As it turned out, we would later extend our landscape for learning to include the world outside the school walls.

We set up Room One as an all-purpose meeting room and large group instruction area. This was where we would gather each morning to begin the day. Desks were removed and, in their place, each student was provided with a cubicle for personal items. Fifty to sixty students seated in folding chairs fitted with attached writing boards could easily fit into the room. The chairs could alternately be rearranged for small group discussions, or stacked at the back of the room to open the whole space for other large group activities if need be.

Room Two was outfitted with long tables for small group project work and science and art activities. This room would also contain three or four learning stations stocked with subject-related materials to be changed on a weekly or monthly basis.

Room Three contained faculty desks, individual study carrels, a listening center, and a small library furnished with a couple of couches and an easy chair. This room would be our after school office and a place for the children to study and find some quiet during the day.

Curriculum Growing Pains

While arranging the learning space, we were also thinking about curriculum – what and how we would teach. We knew we would be expected to teach reading, mathematics, science, religion, language arts, and social studies. *How* we taught these subjects was not set. As soon as the students arrived, guided by our set of beliefs, we began to develop and test procedures and activities which, we believed, would serve to encourage individual growth, self-direction, and responsibility.

We were not immediately successful. The going was hard at first. We spent many hours after school and on weekends wrestling with organizational, curricular, and philosophical matters such as: Do we need reading groups? What purpose do they serve? Do we need to have a formal spelling program, or can we somehow integrate spelling and writing? Does individualized instruction serve merely to cast students adrift, or does it release them to develop at their own pace? Will their "own pace" be acceptable to us, to their parents, and to the school principal? How much direction and control over the student's learning experiences and curriculum content should we as teachers assume? Are we really fostering self-direction and personal responsibility using this classroom procedure, or is something else (some other value) being transmitted?

As we struggled, so did our students. They were not used to planning and organizing so large a part of their daily and weekly activities. For a long time many had difficulty getting started, following through, and meeting some minimal requirements for skill development that we had set.

Through a conscious and systematic effort to build in choices and options for activities in each of the required subject areas, we gradually managed to shift the locus of responsibility for learning away from us and onto the students.

Up to now the students had learned to be almost entirely dependent on the teacher to specify, direct, and control all aspects of their learning in school. Through a conscious and systematic effort to build in choices and options for activities in each of the required subject areas, we gradually managed to shift the locus of responsibility for learning away from us and onto the students.

This is not to say that we gave up our responsibility as teachers for structuring the environment; we simply built into the curriculum an allowance for student input, interaction, and personal choice. Over time, as they began to take on more and more responsibility for their learning. Student input began to play an integral part in shaping and directing the curriculum.

Means and Methods

We routinely taught to both large and small groups of students depending on whether we were introducing a new topic in a subject area or working with just a few students to reinforce a needed skill. However, individualized instruction and student, self-directed, project activities comprised a large part of the learning that went on. Topical learning centers, math and language arts activity card boxes, and continual progress math and reading skill centers were all part of each student's, contracted, weekly, learning activities. Mondays began with the students planning their daily and weekly activities, which were turned in, in the form of a contract. We thus provided them with choices but within a structure. Boundaries are important and necessary for children to practice exercising freedom.

Over time, our teacher-planned activities became more open-ended, prompted by the needs and interests expressed by the students. The curriculum-in-action seemed to grow and evolve not in a linear, preconceived fashion, but organically – thrusting itself forward in re-

sponse to the purposes and interests of the students. We did not know where we were heading, but were confident that we were on the right path. In retrospect, the curriculum gradually became what I would now call a "lived curriculum "one infused with personal meaning and purpose. (I later learned that L. Thomas Hopkins (1954) referred to this as the "Is" curriculum as opposed to the "Was" curriculum.)

For example, we set aside a Project Period during the last hour of each day where a student or group of students might pursue a unique interest. Aside from encouraging self-directed learning, the idea of the projects was to promote experience with long-range planning and sustained inquiry. Projects ran the gamut from straight-ahead written reports, to home experiments, classroom demonstrations, and artistic projects. As an unforeseen side benefit, we observed much out-of-school collaboration going on among students as a result of their shared project work.

At about the same time, we began to expand our conception of the learning environment to include the world outside the classroom by taking numerous field trips to local businesses and nature settings. (This necessitated my obtaining a license to drive a school bus – a learning experience in itself!) The bowling alley, the beach, a nearby nature center, an apple orchard, and the pool at the local YMCA (where I helped teach 6 or 8 of our students to swim) all became places of learning. Not only did we go into the community, we brought the community to us.

For example, Thursday afternoons were set aside for Sharing Period when students from other grades, parents, and community members were invited into the classroom to share their interests and hobbies. Both students and teachers participated in inviting and scheduling these visitors. I will never forget the father who came in to talk to us about Poland. He told us what it was like to grow up there before World War II, and how painful it was to leave his homeland and come to America after the war. Since that day many years ago, I have carried with me a new respect for the Polish people. I often wonder how this single afternoon has stayed with me through the years. I also wonder how many events, which took place on these informal afternoons, have stayed with those former fifth grade students.

Unexpected Effects and Result

As the year progressed, I looked forward to school each day because something new was bound to be taking shape. Since I did not have to plan for them every minute of the day, I could let myself be surprised at what the kids were up to. I knew I was truly growing in my profession. New opportunities for personal and professional learning were always emerging. No longer did I see myself as the one responsible for doling out bits and pieces of disparate knowledge to students in hopes that they would, or could, make some overall sense of it. As responsibility for learning shifted increasingly to the students, I took my role as a member of the learning community, albeit a senior member. Granted, as senior members and teachers, we provided structure and organizational routine, but within that structure there was wide latitude for individual student growth and expression.

By year's end, we were convinced that we had accomplished much. The climate we had created felt right—less restrained and more open to possibility. We could see how actively involved students were in their learning. They exhibited self-confidence and a new sense of pride in their work. Though we had not "covered" a pre-specified amount of subject matter, we had journeyed down many unforeseen and productive pathways led on by our evolving interests. It was not until the results of the year-end achievement tests arrived, however, that we realized just how much these students had grown.

To our amazement, scores on the Stanford Achievement Tests showed statistically significant growth in *all* areas measured. With 9 months considered normal growth, our mathematics scores averaged 14 months growth; reading, 16 months; science, 15 months; language arts, 20 months; social studies, 24 months; and spelling, which we had not systematically taught during the year, grew an average of 12 months! Needless to say,

we were pleased, although a bit shocked by the magnitude of changes in the scores. In previous years these same students had averaged only 6 to 10 months' growth in most areas. School scores for other grade levels who had followed the traditional curriculum, stayed at the average 6 to 10 month growth level. What specific factors could explain this level of improvement?

Using a pass/fail system of grading, we had tried to maintain certain minimum standards for quality and achievement in student performance. Assigning grades for everything, we had decided, wasted much time and effort better used to maintain enthusiasm and momentum for further learning. Never was our intention to focus solely on academic achievement as a measure of our program's success. All along, we had sought something much deeper and, we hoped, more lasting. We hoped to instill a sense of confidence, self-direction, and purpose in the lives of our students. We wanted them to become independent learners for a lifetime. Compared to other school classrooms with standard grading procedures, our program had proven to be more academically successful than we had originally dreamed possible.

Looking Back: What Happened

Over the years, I have tried to identify influential variables, which might have accounted for our success. One could point to a number of things: the amount of physical space in which teachers and students could maneuver and create; the freedom granted us to teach how and when we chose; or to the strength, focus, and flexibility of our teaching brought about by the symbiotic nature of team teaching. Our own personal teaching styles and the skill and ability to translate our ideas into action must also have played a part. Each of these was certainly an important influence, and, as aspects of the program, could be investigated in their own right. However, I believe that each was uniquely realized, put into play, and amplified by a deeper, more pervasive component which constituted the program's "deep structure"– that being an explicitly stated, evolving, shared philosophy about the means and ends of education that we believed fostered self-directed learning and personal responsibility within and among students.

The curriculum acknowledged and built upon the needs, interests, and abilities of the students. This meant that the students themselves provided, in large part, the substance and ultimate direction for the curriculum. As teachers, our philosophy and our educational values and beliefs conveyed to form a living "blueprint," a shared guide for learning. Thus, we provided an evocative, necessary structure for an evolving curriculum. By providing a structured environment, which required students to take responsibility for their learning, we aimed to prepare them to become responsible, self-directed adults. This required concentrating, not on the future, but on the present, on the "here and now." We agreed that to foster true and lasting learning, we had to make learning meaningful now. Accordingly, one of our most basic criteria when planning a learning experience is to "make it real" (Kelley, 1947).

Making It Real

Making it real meant engaging students in activities and social consequences in the world around. Examples included creative and expressive writing, or writing to clarify a point of view.

"Making it real" meant starting with each child's expressed interests and concerns, and then helping him or her to stretch and connect experiential knowledge with the various worlds of disciplinary or structured knowledge.

All sought to uncover student voice. Letters to the opinion page of the local newspaper, a Pen Pal program with a school in Maine, and writing for our own magazine were encouraged to this end. I recall one of our students being

called to testify in court as a result of a letter she had written to the local newspaper about a large pothole she had noticed on her street. She wrote that the pothole was dangerous and should be filled in before there was an accident. As fate would have it, a few days after her letter appeared in the newspaper, there was a serious car accident involving the pothole. I found out about this one day when the girl's mother called to say that her daughter would not be in school for a couple of days because she had to go to court to testify. Talk about a real learning experience!

In mathematics, "making it real" could mean learning how to bowl (a class field trip), keeping our own score, and playing as a member of a team. At other times students charted food prices at the local food market; laid out foot-race courses and clocked and charted their running speeds; monitored their own heights and weights throughout the school year; and as a group, designed and built kites from scratch (some of which even flew!).

"Making it real" meant starting with each child's expressed interests and concerns, and then helping him or her to stretch and connect experiential knowledge with the various worlds of disciplinary or structured knowledge. John Dewey called this approach moving the child from the "psychological" to the "logical." By adopting the "make it real" philosophy, we felt we were moving each child toward an immediate sense of purpose, cohesiveness, and continuity in his or her learning.

We did not set out to increase our students' test scores; yet I suspect that if we had begun with this stated objective (like so many curricula today), we would have become blinded to, and stifled, the latent learning power of our students.

Our philosophy, then, was alive and in the forefront of every curricular and pedagogical decision we made. It served not only as a guide for curricular planning, but for on-the-spot, pedagogical decisions made either in the classroom, in the corridor, or away from school. We were concerned with subject matter, but more importantly we were concerned with the growth and development of the *desire* to learn within the child. We believed that the internalization of feelings of self-worth and personal efficacy were more important, more crucial, and more truly educative for the child in the long run than to have merely "covered the material." We were seeking to develop both strength of intellect and strength of character. This goal meant creating situations and structures for learning in which students would be required to test and expand not only their knowledge, but also their attitudes and beliefs. Dewey (1938) believed that teaching, which can foster those attitudes within students that will help them prepare to meet the future with hope and confidence, lies at the heart of all educational endeavor. It is attitude, perspective, and the ability to think that count in the end – not a pile of disconnected information. Dewey talks of education as being the proper preparation of attitude to meet the future. Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or the lesson in history or geography that is learned (Dewey, 1938, p.48).

Dewey goes on to say that the most important attitude that can be formed in a student is the desire to learn and to go on learning (p.48). I believe that in our program we had achieved the conditions that Dewey's termed "collateral learning." Much learning went on that we, as teachers, did not necessarily know about. There was so much individual and group project work going on all the time that we simply could not monitor it all. I cannot begin to speculate on how this may have contrib-

uted to the academic growth shown by the test scores. It was as though we had tapped into and released the latent power of the student side of the teacher/student learning equation. We did not set out to increase our students' test scores; yet I suspect that if we had begun with this stated objective (like so many curricula today), we would have become blinded to, and stifled, the latent learning power of our students. Instead of rocketing ahead, veering off when and where they did, the curriculum-as-experienced may well have become dead-ended, encapsulated, and impotent – that is, normal. As it was, I believe the increased student performance, as measured by the tests, grew out of our efforts to create the kind of creative, cooperative, and responsive learning environment we had envisioned together in the backyard the summer before the school year began.

How the desire to learn was felt and experienced by any particular student still remains a mystery to me today. What seems clear though is that much incidental or collateral learning happened out of our sight as teachers, taking place in the classrooms, in the hall corridor, or after school at home when many students got together on their own to work on projects. Learning went on that we did not direct or initiate. In the end, we followed not a plan, but a set of beliefs, a philosophy, which became actualized in the learning experiences of the students.

As a postscript to this "bright and shining" year, because of family and financial reasons, I left the parochial school system the following year and moved to a rural community where I found a job teaching third grade in a public school. Hoping to duplicate my recent exhilarating experience, I approached my new colleagues with some possibilities and got this response: "Well ... we can't do that because of ... and ... besides, we have to follow the textbook because the fourth grade teachers expect us to have covered the material, and now, we have to write these behavioral objectives ..." They were right, I could not recreate my experience of the year before. I closed my door and struggled on my own managing to stick it out in teaching for another three years. During this time I was judged by my peers and the community as being a good, if not exceptional, teacher. However, I eventually decided to leave teaching altogether and soon found myself in graduate library school hoping to recapture my excitement for learning on the university campus but in an entirely different profession.

New Directions

Ten years later, as a doctoral student in education, I became involved in the Teacher Lore Project at the University of Illinois at Chicago under the guidance of Professor William H. Schubert. Over a period of five years, Teacher Lore researchers conducted a series of investigations into the teaching lives of Chicago area teachers. Through conversational interviews, we tried to find out from these teachers what they had gained through experience that provided meaning and direction in their current lives both in and out of the classroom. The goal was to not only understand how good teaching comes about, but also to build up an experiential knowledge base about teaching to pass along to prospective teachers (Schubert & Ayers, 1992).

My experience as a Teacher Lore researcher brought me back again to thinking about my best and most successful year in teaching back in 1974. What I learned from interviewing a number of teachers who were considered exemplary by their peers, and what they had to say about their teaching and their lives resonated deeply with my own past experience. What I heard from them, and now recognize to be true from my own teaching experience, is that to be a good teacher:

(1) One must be his or her own *authentic* self in the classroom; that is, one must be "present" to the students, bringing all one's feelings and emotions into the classroom. With this comes real life and real learning.

(2) One must provide students with learning experiences which are seen and felt to be *real and meaningful.* Making it real means fostering and strengthening the connections between the child's out-of-school experiences

and that which he or she studies in school.

(3) One must be *responsive* to the student. This means being able to see individual faces when one looks into the classroom. It does not mean teaching a body of subject matter to the hypothetical "average" student.

(4) One must perceive of oneself not only as a teacher, but also as a *learner*, as a member of a classroom community of learners. The good teacher never knows his or her subject matter, students, community, or inner motivations well enough.

(5) One must have a sense of *purpose and direction* in one's teaching. This comes about by deep and continual reflection about the goals and purposes of education and how these are or are not being translated into action and reality in the classroom.

(6) One must help the child *integrate* his or her learning. This relates to making learning "real" and to being responsive to the individual needs and interests of the child, while at the same time, helping to expand his or her intellectual horizons into the various fields of disciplinary knowledge.

(7) One must create an atmosphere of *trust* and personal *responsibility* in the classroom. To meaningfully learn, the student must feel free to risk exposing his or her ideas and feelings in the presence of others without fear of ridicule. In order for this to happen, the classroom must be perceived as a safe and welcome place in which to explore and express one's ideas creatively and imaginatively.

(8) And finally, *responsibility*, as a desired human value can only be taught in an atmosphere of trust. Students can act responsibly only when they are given the opportunity to do so. It has been said, "the world works to the degree that we keep our promises."

Thus, the good teacher tries to link the freedom to do and say with the responsibility to follow through. What does this mean for teaching and learning? More importantly, what does it mean for the lives of those who live in classrooms – teachers and students? We know that good teaching sets the stage, but experience has shown me that student involvement in directing their own learning has powerful consequences for instilling the desire to go on learning. While having witnessed the exponential power of Dewey's attitudinal and collateral learnings on educational outcomes, the processes involved in the formation of these learnings have, for me, remained concealed in a kind of educational "black box." What meanings do students derive from the curriculum? How do they interpret or make sense of school learning? To gain insight into these questions, we have to turn to the students themselves. Only through them can we be reminded about what and how children learn best in school and, thus, provide them with curricula that are effective and meaningful.

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Writing to Make a Difference

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First Day of Summer School

I'm taking twenty-five high school kids on a six-block walk to fill out forms as part of the summer jobs program we are working for. Our job will be to learn how to make a publication. We manage the journey there and back to school with no problem. The students are anxiously eager to find out what is going to happen during the program. They are told that they will all be expected to work together to produce a publication to be used by freshmen coming to school in September. We spend the rest of the day deciding what to write about. I stand on one side of the room; the kids sit around tables in a large meeting room. Each table becomes a working group. The task is to put together a list of topics useful for freshmen coming to an inner-city high school in Chicago. I ask them to think about what would be most helpful and interesting for students. Our final list looks like this:

- Gangs and gang violence
- Relationships with the opposite sex
- Family problems
- The law
- Sex
- AIDS
- How to succeed in school

There are three meeting rooms. In one of them, students learn to use computers to write and edit their work. In another, they write in journals and work on the process of writing. In a third, they talk about how to research the topics they are writing about. During the morning, students spend an hour in each of these three classes. They eat lunch, and then everyone meets in the computer room for a "lab" period. There, kids break into smaller groups and do many different things: They watch movies, listen to music, and there are a number of interesting discussions going on. At least eight students are doing something on the computers. At the beginning, this lab period is not related to our task; but, as time went on, this became the most productive and creative period of the day.

First Week of Classes

I'm working with the students on the computer portion of the project. I want to start with word processing and work up to desktop publishing. I start with the idea of writing and using symbols or letters to represent words and ideas. We talk about the evolution of the alphabet and how the printing press revolutionized communication. Our first class assignment is to take a newspaper and condense it into a four-page newsletter. The class is divided into two, small, working groups, and the discussions begin. What articles are important enough to be included in the four pages?

A big discussion of abortion heats up between Rocio and Evelyn. The whole class eventually gets involved. Some are against it, and some aren't. But, what is more important is that this is the first time most of these students are having an opportunity to voice their opinion about abortion. The discussion begins with the students. It is never prompted or moderated. They find that they do have an opinion about things they read about in the newspaper or hear adults talking about. Rocio decides to research and write about teenage pregnancy. There are advantages but also disadvantages to these possibilities.

Second Week of Classes

The scope of our job has become much broader. We search for material to write about. We find that all issues are complex and intricate. Everything has two sides. We debate gangbanging, the law, sexual activity, the school system, and teachers. Everyday it's another issue. We are arguing a point but also listening to other points of view. It's open, and anyone can say what they want at any time. Most of the students have chosen a topic and begun to write a draft by this time, but there are about five kids who are not getting involved.

Finding out that the school can't always be a safety net seems somewhat of a betrayal, as if the school does not care about the students' well-being.

Our best discussions happen during the lab period. I've invited some guests to come visit us and share some of their experiences. During the eight-week period, we talk to a public defender, an engineer, a director of personnel for a corporation, and some alternative high school students from another part of town. Talking to these people, who seem to have nothing in common with the lives of these students, proves to be enlightening for us all. The interviews with these people are to be used as part of our research. We talk about what was said after our guests left. On other lab days, some students watch movies and video-taped programs. Others are experimenting with graphics and page layout on the computers. Other groups are writing or reading. We're in a large computer lab with plenty of room allowing many different activities to go on at the same time.

Fourth Week

It's time to start thinking about what our final product is going to look like, but there is something else going on—a dose of reality. The school counselor comes in to be interviewed by the third period research group. We decide to do some role-playing as a way to find out how a counselor deals with different problems a student might have. One girl pretends she is pregnant. Another student is in a gang. Another, a runaway...a drug problem...a problem with a teacher, and so on. These students are truly disturbed when they come out of this class period. Regardless of what the problem is, the school counselor has the same answer: I am only here to help you with academic related issues. The role playing is close to home. Many of the kids in the class have related kinds of problems, and we all know many other students who have these same problems. It begins to sink in. There is nothing the school can do. The school gives many students a feeling of security in their otherwise unstable lives. Finding out that the school can't always be a safety net seems somewhat of a betrayal, as if the school does not care about the students' well-being. This leads to thinking about how a young person is supposed to deal with these things. What are the consequences? From that moment on, we have a mission. We begin to talk about changing the situation.

We always eat lunch together—just our group. We share or put money together when the free lunches aren't edible. This has really helped to make us feel like a family. The talk at the lunchroom table is more personal, often humorous. I learn that Lisa is having a serious family problem. Her parents have split, leaving Lisa and her sister to find their own way. She is staying with a cousin but doesn't know where she might be the next day. Lisa decides to use the public library as a temporary shelter during the day. During the regular school year, she is labeled an underachiever with low motivation. Over the summer, she reads everything she can find about AIDS. Her article contains more research than anyone else's in the class. She smiles and seems happy when she is with the class.

Sixth Week

Some students are serious about mastering the Desktop Publishing software. Some have already produced fine work using

the draw and paint programs. Computer time becomes intense and serious. They confidently maneuver through the most complicated, professional software programs. We have a production team together; and everyone is writing about something with the exception of Veronica, Evelyn and Brian. Veronica and Evelyn have not taken the project seriously. They manage to put off choosing a topic for six weeks. They don't seem to like working with the computers. Brian is trying hard not to be a part of the group. The rest of the group is focused on finishing the publication before the summer term ends.

The Mayor's Summer Jobs Program has sponsored these students for the summer. They want to publicize some of the more interesting projects going on this summer. During the week, they send a reporter from *The Tribune*. He interviews some of the students after reading the material. He brings a photographer as well. The next day we find ourselves in *The Tribune*. Students' quotes appear in an article describing our mission:

> At Wells High School, a survival manual for freshmen tells much more than how to choose the correct courses and what to do if you forget your locker combination. The manual tells quite literally how to survive. It maps out gang turf and discusses weaponry. It details what happens to dropouts and warns the freshmen...

After this report comes out, we get a visit from the major television news programs in the city. A local, Spanish language, news reporter comes down to do interviews as well. We're starting to get used to all this attention. We never realized how much these issues needed to be addressed. The students' work is being scrutinized by the public which is a very uncomfortable feeling at first. After they read about themselves and look at the news reports, they know that they have something very important to say. Evelyn, Veronica and Brian get charged up. They scramble to finish something to be included in the book. They too have something to say.

Eighth Week

During the final week, I talk to the students for a while. I congratulate them for seriously taking on the responsibility of helping other students like themselves. I remind them about how the skills they have learned will be valuable later on. These kids have a few things in common. Their households are below the poverty level, and they are labeled "at-risk" of dropping out by the high schools they attend. We talk about taking control of our lives, changing, doing what has to be done to get through high school. I stop talking, and there is only silence. Our last few days together are filled with so much work that there is little time to talk about the experience we've had. We plan a party for the last day, hoping the book will be finished by then.

The final day comes quickly, and we are finished. More photographers show up during our party. It is a potluck that turns out to be a feast. The moment has come to look back at our work and say goodbye. The book looks professionally done with graphics and expertly laid-out pages. We all love it. As the party ends, the students come to say goodbye. We look into each others' eyes and sincerely congratulate each other. Handshakes and hugs, tears—it's over. For the first few weeks of school, this New Freshman Survival Manual becomes the focus of attention citywide. The principals of the school accept the book as the official freshmen orientation manual. The kids are interviewed on radio and television. They take ownership. They defend the controversial parts and proudly accept credit for the project. It's all theirs.