

Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire de l'éducation
SPECIAL FEATURE / CHRONIQUE PARTICULIÈRE

The Ottawa New School and Educational Dissent in Ontario in the Hall-Dennis Era

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Bettye Hyde, pioneer teacher.¹

Deborah Gorham

ABSTRACT

This paper traces the history of the Ottawa New School, a parent-run alternate school that flourished from 1969–1972. It explores the school's history in the context of a more general treatment of educational reform in Ontario and North America during the 1960s and 1970s. The author, Deborah Gorham, was involved with the school as a parent. She employs material gathered from interviews with former Ottawa New School teachers, parents, and pupils. Her intention is to retrieve the history of this specific experiment, one of many “alternate” or “free” schools of the period. For the most part, these small ventures have left little or no trace in the historical record.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article trace l'histoire de l'Ottawa New School, une école alternative gérée par les parents d'élèves, qui a prospéré de 1969 à 1972. Il examine l'histoire de l'école dans le cadre d'une étude générale de la réforme de l'éducation en Ontario et en Amérique du Nord dans les années 1960 et 1970. L'auteure, Deborah Gorham, s'est impliquée à l'école en tant que parent. Elle utilise les témoignages d'anciens professeurs, de parents d'élèves et d'élèves de l'école. En écrivant cet article, elle entend faire revivre l'expérience particulière que représente l'Ottawa New School, l'une des nombreuses écoles « alternatives » ou « libres » de la période, qui n'ont laissé bien souvent que peu ou pas de traces dans les archives.

In January 1969 a group of parents held a meeting in a private house in Ottawa to discuss “the nature and scope of primary education in the Ottawa area.” The parents were dissatisfied with the city's public schools, which they saw as rigid and unimaginative. Constituting themselves as “the Ottawa Committee for the New School,” they boldly announced that they planned to open “an entirely new and independent center of creative learning...”²

The Ottawa New School opened in September 1969 with two teachers and eighteen children ranging in age from four to ten.³ It lasted three years, weathering a split during its second year amongst the parents but closing in 1972 because it ran out of

money. In this paper I outline the history of this experiment and place the story in the context of the wider movement for educational change in Ontario and throughout North America in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Educational Reform Movement and Progressive Education

Like most small experimental schools of the era, the Ottawa New School has left almost no trace in the public record. When historians recall radical education in Ontario in the 1960s and 1970s they are likely to mention the Toronto-based *This Magazine is About Schools* and the school Everdale Place, founded in 1966 and located near Toronto.⁴ How can we best define the educational reform movement to which the well-known Everdale Place and the relatively unknown Ottawa New School belonged? Although many participants believed they were breaking new ground, their ideas about schooling and childrearing were not entirely new. They have a history that goes back to eighteenth-century Europe, one that is commonly subsumed under the useful but flawed label “progressive.” Three major figures, J.J. Rousseau (1712–1778), Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827), and Frederic Froebel (1782–1852), the founder of the kindergarten movement, all shared a conviction that small children learn best through concrete experience rather than through rote learning. Notable figures following these pioneers include the early twentieth-century Italian, Dr. Maria Montessori, whose theory and practice continue to have an influence today. The implementation of progressive ideas began in the nineteenth century, and reached its peak in the interwar period.

In the United States, the towering nineteenth and early twentieth-century figure was John Dewey, and it is with Dewey and his followers that the term “progressive” is most satisfactorily associated. Not only did Dewey advocate learning-by-doing, he also believed that progressive public schools could and should be used as agents for fostering equality and promoting democracy.⁵

But the use of the term “progressive” has not been limited to Dewey and his followers. As historian William J. Reese comments, “Historians of progressivism encounter a mansion with many rooms, often awkwardly inhabited by individuals with diverse philosophical, political, and ideological perspectives.”⁶ Indeed, it is easier to define what progressive educators opposed than what they supported. Twentieth-century educational reformers themselves generally avoid the term “progressive” in favour of others, including “new,” “free,” “child-centred,” and “alternative,” but all those inhabiting the progressive “mansion” universally condemned traditional learning by rote. They were committed to transforming school classrooms from stark spaces inhabited by quiet rows of children whose obedience was often enforced by the threat of corporal punishment to places where children were free to move about and to “learn by doing.” Progressive educators also supported equality between the sexes, at least in theory, although a feminist commitment was never in the forefront amongst reformers in the first half of the century.⁷

The movement for progressive education included advocates of the new science of child psychology. All late nineteenth and early twentieth-century child psychology

represents a break with the past, both with the harsh “spare the rod and spoil the child” childrearing methods of Christian moralists, and with the even less child-centred view that childhood is an unimportant period in the life cycle. But while they rejected these older views, psychologists disagreed with each other. For example, followers of Sigmund Freud and followers of behaviourists like John Watson, while they might agree that there was a “science” of child psychology, had opposing approaches. The child psychologists who developed intelligence testing and promoted the positive features of classification and quantification represent still another aspect of child psychology. In creating the notion of measurable intelligence psychologists like Alfred Binet, Edward Thorndike, and Cyril Burt inevitably lent credence to the idea that “nature” is more important than “nurture,” a notion that is fundamentally at variance with the vision that “child-centred” education would ensure the development and the well-being of every child. Intelligence testing is now largely discredited, but it was enthusiastically supported by many progressive educators in the first half of the twentieth century.⁸

There were also tensions and differences over politics. Twentieth-century progressive educators are commonly assumed to be either liberal or Left-wing in their political views. But in fact some authoritarians on the Right supported the open classroom and “learning by doing” in the 1920s and early 1930s.⁹

In the early twentieth century, there was a small but significant group of reformers who identified themselves as more radical than the progressives. These were educators who believed that first and foremost, schools must respect the child’s right to autonomy and must foster genuine freedom. The most famous of these free school advocates was Alexander Sutherland Neill (1883–1973), a Scot, who founded Summerhill in 1924, and who continued to write and speak about his ideas right up until his death. Other outstanding interwar free school advocates include Dora Russell, co-founder of the English Beacon Hill School, and Carmelita Hilton, who founded the Putney School in Putney, Vermont.¹⁰ There were some brave reformers in state-funded school systems who attempted to introduce radical ideas, but most of the pioneers worldwide in the years before the Second World War were founders of or participants in independent schools.¹¹

What about progressive educational reform in Canada during the interwar decades and the period immediately following the Second World War? According to Hilda Neatby, author of the witty but tendentious *So Little for the Mind* (1953), which had an enormous influence in Canada during the 1950s, progressive ideas were all too powerful in Canada, and pupils had suffered as schools abandoned intellectual rigour. Neatby, an historian, was especially offended by the replacement of the study of history by “Social Studies.”¹² However, Paul Axelrod has pointed out that educational historians in Canada “have concluded that Hilda Neatby was wrong about the nature of Canadian schooling in the post-World War II period.”¹³ There was, in fact, little progressive practice in any jurisdiction or province. There was, however, an interest in progressive ideas amongst educational administrators and teachers at colleges of education and Neatby’s attacks were directed at their writings. These Canadian reformers were cautious “administrative progressives” rather than

radicals in favour of freedom for children.¹⁴

But then along came the political, social, and cultural ferment of the 1960s and early 1970s. The effects of opposition to the arms race and later the Vietnam War along with the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, challenges to the traditional nuclear family, new music, and experimentation with dress and with drugs all contributed to the development of a culture of dissent.

The phenomenon of the “Sixties” has been well studied, especially in the context of the United States.¹⁵ In much of the literature published since the 1970s Canada is left out, or included seamlessly, as if there were no differences between the two countries. Recently, however, most notably with the publication of Bryan D. Palmer’s *Canada’s 1960s*, (2009), and a number of other books and articles, there has been a change. A distinctively Canadian historiography on the Sixties is now emerging.¹⁶

One aspect of this Canadianist historiography involves assessing the role that 50,000 or more American draft resisters and deserters and their families played in the Canadian “Sixties.” John Hagan, in *Northern Passage*, discusses the influence these Americans had on politics and cultural life, while more recently Lara Campbell analyses the often overlooked anti-war work of American women, who for the most part came to Canada as family members accompanying male draft resisters. Palmer, in contrast, discusses Canadian nationalist and left-wing anti-Americanism.¹⁷

But these historians largely ignore the intersections between the Left, the anti-war movement and the free school movement in North America.¹⁸ That there was some connection between Canada’s free school movement and radical American immigrants remains to be fully explored, but this case study of the Ottawa New School (ONS) provides some concrete examples. Tom Mueller, one of our teachers, was a Vietnam War resister and at least four ONS families were involved in anti-war activities.¹⁹

Radical educational thinking in the English-speaking world in the 1960s and 1970s is associated with certain key writers and advocates. These included A.S. Neill and Paul Goodman, both of whom antedate the ferment of the ’60s and ’70s. John Holt, Jonathan Kozol, and Ivan Illich, to name just three others, joined them.²⁰

In Ontario, the movement for educational change became associated in the minds of most people with a government report: *Living and Learning: The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario*, published in May 1968.²¹ Government reports are not usually best sellers, but this one sold an amazing 60,000 copies in little over a year.²² In part, its success reflects a deliberate strategy. *Living and Learning* was designed to appeal to the public. As a physical object, the Hall-Dennis Report, as it is commonly known, was no drab official document. It is non-standard in size—twelve inches wide and ten inches tall—and its brightly-coloured cover features a charming photograph of six children: three boys and three girls running through summer grass. The girl in the middle, who is wearing a pink outfit and has a flower in her hair, is African-Canadian. Inside, the endpapers are reproductions of delightful children’s poster paintings. As historian Eric Riker comments, this was the “most attractively designed educational report ever produced in Ontario.”²³

What was the importance of the Hall-Dennis Report? R.D. Gidney, a leading historian of education in Ontario, believes that the influence of Hall-Dennis was overblown, both at the time and afterward. On the one hand, Gidney points out, "reorientation of pedagogy and the curriculum" was "already underway"²⁴ and had been for some years. On the other hand, the report's high profile did not bring about immediate or widespread changes in Ontario schools: neither the "open classroom" nor an end to rote learning or corporal punishment came overnight.²⁵

While Gidney's assessment of the limited influence of the Hall-Dennis report is cogent, it does overlook several factors that are of importance to the history of more radical educational experimentation in Ontario. The rhetoric of Hall-Dennis may be vague at times, but it is also inspiring, and it is definitely "on the side of the child,"²⁶ as this statement illustrates: "The needs of the child are simply stated. Each and every one has the right to learn, to play, to laugh, to dream, to love, to dissent, to reach upward, and to be himself. Our children need to be treated as human beings exquisite, complex, and elegant in their diversity."²⁷

The Toronto radical educators associated with Everdale Place and *This Magazine is About Schools* certainly took notice. When the report came out, Sara Spinks called it a "flashy document" but she also allowed "for liberal documents by governments, the Hall-Dennis Report is a North American pace-setter."²⁸

Here in Ottawa, reformers, including myself, were inspired to link our proposals to Hall-Dennis. We may have read Holt, and *This Magazine*, and A.S. Neill, but we also read and were inspired by the Hall-Dennis Report, and moreover, we saw, and rightly, that the Report itself and its reception were harbingers of changes to come, even though little may have changed in the Ontario school system in the years immediately following its publication.²⁹

The Ottawa New School

Many people were involved in the Ottawa New School, but I was the initiator. At the time, I was just about to begin my professional career as a professor of history at Carleton University. When my only child was born in 1963, I began to read extensively about child rearing and education. I provided our child with paints and blocks and homemade play-dough, offered scope for imaginative play, and the child's father and I read aloud to our child at least once a day. In short, I approached childrearing as a "thoughtful project," to use feminist scholar Sara Ruddick's phrase. But I did not qualify fully as someone engaged in "intensive mothering." As an employed mother with a strong commitment to my profession as teacher and scholar, I was deviant for the 1960s.³⁰ I was also deviant as a feminist and early exponent of women's history and women's studies in the university setting. As this paper will demonstrate, several of the Ottawa New School mothers would become active feminists in the 1970s. However, my memory suggests that at the Ottawa New School our work for gender equality was never in the foreground.

All went well with our child's first experience of formal education at the Ottawa Neighbourhood Nursery School in September 1966. The school was more than

twenty years old. The extraordinarily gifted and creative teacher Bettye Hyde had run it throughout these years. Hyde was one of the pioneers of early childhood education in Canada. She began teaching nursery school in a private house in Ottawa in 1943. In the early years of her career, Hyde had no formal teacher training whatsoever, though she would later spend a year at the Yale University School of Child Development. Hyde was intelligent, sensitive, and by nature non-conformist, and she had an outstanding gift for teaching very young children, and also for helping their parents (which usually meant their mothers) to be better parents.³¹

The school's house on Bolton Street in Ottawa's Lowertown was a wonderful miniature child's world. The house was old, small, and comfortable. The children played in the numerous little rooms, arranged as 'activity centres' on the ground floor. There were rooms for blocks, dolls, sand, and paint. Boys as well as girls played in the doll corner. As Hyde would say later, "We must allow the children to explore and experiment with both ideas and materials, and we must tolerate the mess that such experiment brings in its wake."³² Bettye Hyde was way ahead of her time.

It was in part because of the excellence of this first experience that we were in for a shock when it became time for our child to attend five-year-old kindergarten. In the mid 1960s, kindergarten was by no means universal in Ontario, but there were five-year-old kindergarten classrooms in public schools in Ottawa.³³ At the time, there were two late-Victorian school buildings in the Glebe, where we then lived.³⁴ They are still there today, largely because of the efforts of residents to keep these fine buildings standing and used as schools. But they are not the same schools that they were in the 1960s, nor is the neighbourhood the same. Then, the Glebe was solidly middle and upper-middle class. It was quiet, respectable and pleasant, but it verged on the drab. Today the Glebe is chic and trendy. You will not easily find a spool of thread, if you should need one, but you will have your choice of coffee shops and brands of extra virgin olive oil. First Avenue and Mutchmor, the old schools, have renovated interiors that are open, airy, and child-friendly, and the play yards are equipped with cheerful climbing frames. Boys and girls play together. In 1968, in contrast, these same schoolyards were barren and bleak. As for what went on inside the schools, I cannot tell you. When I asked to be able to visit, my request was denied. It was not then the board's policy to allow parental visits.

The origins of the experiment that became the Ottawa New School began when my child's father and I decided to remove our child from the public five-year-old kindergarten after a short time because our ordinarily bright and vivid child became quiet, pale, and fearful. Bettye Hyde agreed that our child could come back to her nursery school. But she also provided the spark for the Ottawa New School, when she urged me to try to start a free school in Ottawa. "We need one here," she said. And so the project began. Hyde served as an indispensable advisor, along with Polly Hill, another Ottawa powerhouse in the field of early childhood education. I would soon discover that we had lots of company with which to share our dissatisfaction with the public schools. The Ottawa New School took shape quickly, developing from an idea to a functioning community of children, teachers, and parents in less than a year. This achievement involved recruiting a group of parents willing to send

their children to an experimental school and to pay tuition; finding suitable teachers; finding space; and securing sufficient funds.

Bettye Hyde's school provided the core group of parents, but the group quickly expanded, both through word-of-mouth, and as a result of the publicity we were able to generate.³⁵ Over the three years of the school's history, there were never more than fifty parents involved, most of them at the time intact couples. They were, for the most part, middle and upper-middle class professional people: scientists and others employed by the federal public service, university and college professors, journalists, and business people. There were few parents or children who were members of visible ethnic or racial minorities, and there were, to my knowledge, no gay/lesbian parents.

Then there were the teachers. In 1969, when we advertised for two teachers, over fifty people applied. We were extremely fortunate in whom we were able to hire. The teacher with the most experience was Mary Assaf. She would prove to be the mainstay of the Ottawa New School during its three-year history, bringing to the task her talents as a teacher, her ability to work with others, and her conviction that a teacher should always put the needs of the individual child first. Assaf had received her teacher training in England. She had taught in England, in France, and in French Africa, as well as in the Separate School system in Ottawa. Mary Assaf was not a "counterculture" person. She was married, with two, then four children, and she was—and is—a devout Catholic.

The second teacher hired for that first year was described in one of the newspaper articles about the school as follows: "Bearded, with longish hair, the young man is not every parent's ideal image of a teacher—but the kids love him."³⁶ This was Tom Mueller, who with his wife Gina brought so much to the school during our first year. He was indeed much more of a "counterculture" person than Mary Assaf. Although originally from the United States, he came to us from Toronto where he had had experience teaching in free schools. He was in Canada as a draft resister.

Two other people taught full time at the Ottawa New School for at least a year. One was Susan Russell, who had just graduated from the teacher's training program at Queen's. She brought her intelligence, training, and judgement to the job.³⁷ I have not been able to trace the fourth teacher.

Finding space for the school might sound like an easy task, but it was not.³⁸ Fortunately we did end up with suitable space at the then brand-new Unitarian Church, located on Cleary Avenue in Ottawa. The indoor space was fine and the outdoor space was wonderful.

Finally there was the need for money. Over the three years that the school ran it had two main backers. The backer with the largest amount of money left at the time of the split. The backer with less money could not continue beyond the third year, and the school, accordingly, folded. The Ottawa New School could not have functioned without these backers. We paid, for a "free" school, relatively decent salaries. We were in theory collecting \$750 per child in tuition in the first year, and then on a sliding scale thereafter. In practice, the tuition was sometimes difficult to collect, a not unusual problem for a school of this sort.

The Ottawa New School did not become an ongoing institution engaging in systematic record keeping. Therefore, in presenting a picture of what the school was like on a day-to-day basis I must rely on the few written records that exist, and on memory: my own and the memory of the teachers, parents and former pupils who generously shared their recollections with me.³⁹ The written records include statements by the school's executive, minutes of general school meetings and the school newspaper, and two useful newspaper stories from 1970 about the school's first year.⁴⁰

The hopes and intentions of the parent-run executive are reflected in a prospectus written in the first year: "There is no rigid programme. The school is ungraded ... [Much of the day's activities develop spontaneously from the children's own interests and imagination; the teachers give information and direction where needed, and always try to stimulate new interests.... Play is an integral part of the children's daily activity.... Basic skills are covered in a non-coercive and informal manner."

The two 1970 newspaper stories both suggest that the school functioned well. The *Ottawa Citizen* story of June 1970, which featured a number of photographs of children and teachers taken during a school day, was entitled "Pupils' Own Thing: Parents, staff assess 'free' school's first year." The journalist liked the school, and portrayed it as a warm, friendly, relaxed place, where the children nonetheless learned:

"The school operates like a family unit. There is no enforced discipline or rigid schedule. The teachers are called by their first names ... the school isn't an entirely 'free' school. Some limits are imposed. But the children do choose what they want to do. If they haven't settled down to some sort of work by 9:30 A.M., a half-hour after school opens each day, teachers Mary Assaf and Tom Mueller gently suggest some topic they might like to study."⁴¹

Joan Jonkel, who would soon become a New School parent, wrote the *Ottawa Journal* story, which appeared in August. Like the *Citizen* story, it was favourable. Jonkel explains that the school is "A co-operative experimental day school ... [whose] aim is to help each child develop his particular talents as a special individual at his own pace."⁴²

Visiting the New School is a bit like visiting a large family of charming but boisterous children.... The children are obviously proud of their school.... The school is organized around the Little Red Schoolhouse idea with children of all ages combined, pupils with similar interests working together. The children study what interests them rather than what the teachers think should interest them.

My own recollections suggest that the school functioned well throughout its three-year history largely because we had excellent teachers who were kind, skilled, and creative, but also able to teach reading, writing, and math. In addition, we benefited from other people, some paid, some volunteer. And the school exemplified in practice the benefits of good parental involvement. From history teaching to making jewellery, churning butter and carding wool, parents brought their personal and professional skills. Political scientist Jon Alexander helped the kids run their election for the

Executive Committee representative the children had requested. Toby Brooks helped them run their newsletter. I made a medieval village with them, constructed out of *papier-mâché*, and we discussed serfdom and the open field system.

A 1972 issue of the *New Schools Exchange Directory*, an experimental schools journal of the period, states that “Schools come and go. We have included all those we could track down. But we have no doubts that new ones, by the time you read this, will have appeared. Others will have vanished.”⁴³

The difficulties that arose in the second year of the New School's history, which resulted in a split and the establishment of another school, “Counterpoint,” involved a struggle among the parents about the amount of freedom a “free school” should allow. “We were learning about ourselves,” one parent involved in the split remarked to me recently.⁴⁴ The break-up involved the teachers to a lesser extent, and the children even less. Heated feelings were certainly present, but tensions could have been much more painful than they were. Such disputes were common among parents and sometimes among teachers in experimental schools during this period.⁴⁵

Counterpoint, the second school, was up and running by September 1971, when the *Centertown News* ran a story about it: “Relaxed atmosphere at experimental Counterpoint School,” reads the headline:

Counterpoint School, located at ... Elgin and Lewis, was started by three families who didn't want their children to be educated amid the restrictions of public schools or the unchecked freedom of a free school.

Since one of the founding Counterpoint families was the chief financial backer of the Ottawa New School, this split did signal the end for the Ottawa New School. We made efforts to obtain partial funding through the Ottawa Board, and they did make an offer, but it did not come soon enough.

Information Provided by Ottawa New School Participants

To build on what I knew from the scanty written record and my own memories, I sought information from former teachers, parents and children. I was extremely fortunate in being able to reconnect with teachers Mary Assaf and Tom Mueller.

When Mary and I caught up with each other, she had retired after a long career, spent mainly in the Ottawa Separate School system. Thinking about our conversations and her answers to my questions, I would describe Mary Assaf's approach to education as thoughtfully and deliberately pragmatic. She did not and does not today dismiss or ignore educational theory, but for her, the most important thing about “child-centred” education is that you start with the individual children in your classroom.

In response to my questions about how she became interested in progressive ideas about education, she emphasised the importance of the teacher training she received in England and the teaching she did there. She explained that she applied for the New School job because she “did feel that Canada was lagging” and she was intrigued by the challenge.

Mary spent most of her teaching career in the Separate School system. There, she says, the Hall-Dennis Report definitely had an influence. Its effectiveness was limited, however: “there is only so much you can do in a class room system with a ratio of 30:1.” But, she says, “over the years the attitudes definitely shifted and I believe the atmosphere in the elementary schools today is definitely one that shows the influence of the [Hall-Dennis] Report. The respect for different learning styles and learning pace, the importance of children working together and learning from one another. The role of the teacher as an empathizing instructor. Naturally, discipline and structure are very necessary for this type of learning to take place.”

Mary has good memories of the New School itself. She enjoyed working with all of the other teachers. The space was fine, especially the outside space which was “superb.” She remembers the Dienes Blocks used for teaching mathematics⁴⁶ and she emphasizes that she and the other teachers used the project method: “For those able to read, reading and writing were all interrelated with the project. Not a separate subject. We also did teach basics to the young ones.” Advocacy of the project method, in which the child focuses on a topic of study—global warming, for example—and develops her/his basic skills through work on the topic has been a mainstay of progressive education for almost a century.⁴⁷

I caught up with Tom and Gina Mueller in November and December of 2007. It was Tom who was hired by the New School, but in fact, Gina participated fully during the first term. This was before the birth of their first child in December 1969. The children were very much aware of Gina’s pregnancy, reporting in the *Pyramid*, the school newspaper, that “Gina Mueller’s baby has not been born yet. It was due for the first week of Dec. It is now the **third** week of December.” The children included a “Late News Bulletin” for December 17th, announcing that Gina and Tom now had a baby boy.⁴⁸ Like Mary, Tom Mueller has positive memories of the New School: it had a “nice atmosphere” and the children “were good and cooperative, the atmosphere was relaxed, positive.” Like Mary, Tom remembers that they used the project method.

Tom’s only negative memories concern the teaching of mathematics. They are important because they reflect the development of his thoughts concerning freedom and choice in the education of young children over more than three decades. At the Ottawa New School in 1969, using the Dienes Blocks, he started off assuming that if the children played with the blocks, they would, by a “natural progression,” be led to doing math. He was convinced of this in part because of the “philosophy of the 1960s era.” Even though the Ottawa New School was no “unrefined Summerhill,” he and others did believe that if “people have a choice, they’ll choose the right thing.” But now he feels that a certain amount of discipline or self-discipline must be acquired if people are to make genuine choices. It made a difference that he was not a parent then. “Parenthood makes one more realistic.” “Half the population would never want to do math at all if they had a choice.” Moreover, even at the New School, Tom reflects, many parents were “quick to get nervous that things weren’t happening.”

Of the parents I could contact (some fifteen people), four were kind enough to answer a questionnaire I circulated. Some of the questions ask the respondents to recall their relationship to the intellectual, political, social, and cultural ferment of

the 1960s. I wondered to what extent our group of Ottawa New School parents were radicals in educational thinking. What about their political convictions and level of political activism? To what extent were they involved in the Canadian anti-war movement, in anti-racist and or civil rights activism, or in the women's movement? And were some of these parents involved in the "counterculture," either during 1969–1972, or before and after those years? I include here some extracts from these responses.

Respondent I, "T.," was born in the United States, but has lived in Canada since 1970. She had studied at a progressive Department of Education at a university in a large New England city: "At that time, I was very taken with child-centred learning. My interest was in teaching developmentally delayed children and I was sure that less authoritarian methods would be effective." This respondent also recalls: "I had read A.S. Neill, Paul Goodman, and *This Magazine is About Schools*."

On politics she comments: "From the early 50s until we came to Canada in 1970, we were deeply involved in the American Civil Rights movement." "We were both outspoken against the Vietnam War..." The father of this family lost his high-level government job in the United States because of his opposition to the War. The family then came to Canada, where their political activism continued but with less intensity at first.

In response to my question about her involvement with the counterculture, she says: "We did not consider ourselves members of the counter-culture, although we were supportive of it."

On the women's movement, T. says: "Since I had been an advocate of human rights since childhood, the notion of "women's equality" came naturally to me. I had no idea how feminism could turn society around until I started going to the Ottawa Women's Centre in the little house off Elgin Street ... I really did not know how oppressed some Canadian women were until I took a job in a shelter for abused women. That was the real eye opener."

Respondent II, "C.," is a Canadian who has had a long and successful career as a teacher and educational administrator. On educational reform, she says: "... We read and espoused all of the publications mentioned. I had written a paper on Summerhill the year before [their child] entered the school, and I still have my copy of the Hall-Dennis Report. I am still, as a grandmother of seven, a frustrated supporter of "child-centred" education. If the ONS that I envisioned existed today, I would want my grandchildren to attend." Their son attended for two years, but they did then withdraw him. "When asked if [the Ottawa New School] had 'worked' for [their child] our response was that he was a free school child but we were too anxious to be free school parents."

On political convictions and level of activism, she comments: "We were involved in anti-war demonstrations and I did hear at one point that I was on an RCMP watch list ... a notion that I find laughable."

On the counterculture: "I think we were pretty straight. We wore beads, poet shirts ... went to rock concerts in the park, loved Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and the Beatles, but also Beethoven." But they did not experiment with drugs or communes.

And on the women's movement: "I was very active as a feminist in the school system. I organized women to seek positions of leadership, was active in the Women Teachers' Federation..."

T. heard about the Ottawa New School through friends. C. heard about it on the radio:

I distinctly remember the exact moment when I heard of the school. I was working in the kitchen ... and heard a CBC radio report on the school. At that time we were feeling frustrated with [our child's] public school experience which we found restrictive and punitive compared to the goals and style of our parenting.

Respondent III, "S.," is a Canadian who has been active as a lawyer, an activist, and a philanthropist. She and her husband were involved with plans for the New School very early on: later she was involved with Counterpoint School. Two of her children attended the Ottawa New School. S. had read A.S. Neill, Paul Goodman, Jonathan Kozol, John Holt, *This Magazine is About Schools*, and the Hall-Dennis report well before her involvement with the New School. She was definitely a supporter of progressive education, and her oldest child attended Everdale Place for a year. She was also involved in the women's movement. In the decades since the New School, S. has advocated for women's issues in the professions (especially law) and for women's health.

S. reports that she listened to all kinds of music, from Brahms to Pete Seeger and country music, but she was not involved in the "counterculture," never took drugs or lived in a commune. On motherhood, she commented firmly: "Mothers are people. Children should not be put first. They matter, but so do mothers."

Respondent IV is Mary Assaf, who was a parent as well as a teacher at ONS. Assaf was delighted that she could bring her young child to school with her. Both have positive memories of the school.

I also wondered about the people who had been children at the Ottawa New School. I contacted several of them, and have received full answers from three.

Ottawa New School former pupil Respondent I, "J.," is a successful businessman. He is the son of the parent who is *Respondent II*. I include one comment from his responses: "I loved it.... Yes, overall I think it was a hugely important experience, frankly it entirely fucked up the rest of my education because I just couldn't blindly accept authority anymore—maybe that was more me than ONS but I think it really showed me (us all) that the 'model' was artificial and not the only way."

His mother (who herself has lots of formal education—she earned a PhD) concurs: "I believe that he remembers his time at ONS with great fondness and although he was never particularly successful in public school or high school, he went on to be a very successful architect before moving into [his present] business. I always felt that ONS helped him keep school in perspective and [thankfully] not take it too seriously." *Ottawa New School former pupil Respondent II*, "D.," is also a successful businessman, active in the Ottawa community as a supporter of sports, culture, and the arts. A "Red Tory," he is committed to such social issues as environmentalism. As

a child, he attended two alternate schools, the Ottawa New School and Counterpoint School, for two years each. He was nine years old in September 1969, when his New School years began. He has positive memories of his years at the New School and at Counterpoint: the former, he says, was indeed more “free” than the latter, where there was more structure. At the New School, and at Counterpoint, he was free to learn at his own pace, and study what interested him. He commented that such schools “are not necessarily for every kid” but said “I as a child benefitted. [Both schools] challenged me in a way that public school would not have.” He believes that the two alternate schools encouraged a breadth of interest that he still has. “Having more than one dimension” is something he very much values.

D. has warm memories of teachers Mary Assaf and Tom Mueller. His memories of Tom are especially strong. Tom was open with the youngsters about the fact that he was a draft resister. D. says, “I think Tom’s background led me and the other students to be more knowledgeable about the Vietnam War. I remember vivid discussions about this war.”

D. also fondly remembers the freedom and sense of adventure afforded by the outdoor space. There were, for instance, lovely trips to the shores of the Ottawa River, usually, he remembers, with Tom.

Mary and Tom together helped this respondent to avoid smoking cigarettes. They explained to him that cigarettes were bad for your health, but they emphasised that he would have to decide whether to be a smoker or an abstainer *as an individual*. “You must decide,” they said. “Don’t be influenced by peer pressure.”

Ottawa New School former pupil Respondent III, “DK,” is a scientist with a PhD in physics who works on climate change in a university setting. DK, who was six in 1969, and entering grade one, attended the Ottawa New School during all three years of its existence. He has good memories of the school, and of the teachers. His most vivid memories are of the “wonderful outside space” and also of the arts and crafts activities, for example “jewellery making with a parent who was a jeweller and who had a studio with real tools.” He also remembers that an older child (it was D.) taught him perspective drawing. For DK this serves as an example of the fact that in this experimental school “teaching” was not the preserve of teachers: children could and did learn from other children.

Concerning the teaching of more mainstream subjects, and the question of whether or not the New School prepared him adequately for his subsequent education he comments: “Yes and no. Some science questions were much better presented than in an ordinary school. Nuclear reactors for example.” He recalls that he knew the school was special: “I guess we knew it was a “free school” and we were proud of that.”

Respondent II, D., remembers many of the other children who were his age or older from the New School and from Counterpoint. (For example, he has warm memories of *Respondent I*, J.) DK who was the youngest of my respondents, remembers both D. and J., and has remained in touch with one other boy who was his own age.

All three respondents remember mischief. J. remembers teasing the music teachers and D. recalls the “running battle” he and his friends had with the Unitarian Church custodian who was no fan of the school, and who was continually chasing the New

School kids away from parts of the indoor premises that were off limits. DK recalls some rough play that went beyond mischief: “Some kids getting dragged around by their hair by other kids.”

In addition to these three respondents, five other New School children shared brief memories with me or through a parent. Mary Assaf’s child, for example, remembers that ONS prepared her well for her further educational experiences in an Ottawa Separate School in all areas except one: mathematics, with which she did have some difficulties. All of my respondents were enthusiastic about the school, though I am sure that with a more persistent search I would turn up some negative recollections.

Conclusion

What did we accomplish at the Ottawa New School? Differing, though not necessarily conflicting goals often motivate individuals and groups of people who start schools. First, there are the concrete short-term goals: to provide a good atmosphere—for autonomy and freedom in the case of “free schools”—for a specific group of children, teachers and parents. On the other hand, many people who start schools also wish to create an institution that will go on beyond one generation of children and teachers.

Freedom in education and “free schools” may be fundamentally at odds with such institution-building. Teachers and parents committed to freedom in education are anarchists in the philosophical sense: people who are opposed to bureaucracy.⁴⁹ Seen from this perspective, the fact that the Ottawa New School functioned for only three years does not detract from its achievements. They live on through the individuals who participated. As Mary Assaf commented to me, “although the Ottawa New School never became well known, its work was important”; we were, she says, “quietly working it out,” that is, figuring out how to implement the ideals of freedom in education.

In addition, the experiment did leave some mark on the public school system. We had direct contact with the newly-reorganized Ottawa Board of Education in 1972, where two progressive Trustees supported us, and wished to incorporate the school as an alternative within the Board. On March 6, 1972, at a full meeting of the Board, which Ottawa New School teacher Susan Russell and I attended together, Trustee Jane Dobell asserted that the school “might prove to be ‘a lighthouse school’—a model for change in the public system.” Other Trustees, of course, were opposed. One individual suggested that “the New School was not preparing pupils properly for future life. If children decide what they want to do when they want to do it, then I can’t support it.”⁵⁰

Today the Ottawa-Carleton Board schools are much more open than the Ottawa Board of Education schools of the 1960s and early 1970s. The classrooms tend to be flexible and fluid rather than rigid, and while the children do not customarily call the teachers by their first names, teachers are no longer scary authority figures. And there is some choice. There are some six “alternate” schools within the board.⁵¹

Did the Ottawa New School have something to do with this? Perhaps. I would like to think we were a “lighthouse,” even though our light did not last all that long.

Notes

- 1 I presented an oral version of this paper at the Ottawa Historical Association on March 19, 2009. Thanks to the OHA for this opportunity, and to those attending for their helpful comments. Many thanks to the journal's two anonymous readers, who offered helpful and generous suggestions, and to the co-editors. My greatest debt is to the former teachers, parents and children of the Ottawa New School. This research was funded in part by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- 2 Copy of the flyer from the Ottawa New School file kindly lent to me by J. Anthony Keith. The flyer is undated, but is definitely from the winter of 1969.
- 3 Joan Jonkel, "The 'Ottawa New School' Offers an Alternative," *Ottawa Journal*, Saturday, August 22, 1970. This clipping is one of the documents in a file on the Ottawa New School that Joan Jonkel kindly made available to me.
- 4 E.g., see R. D. Gidney, *From Hope to Harris: The Reshaping of Ontario's Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 42.
- 5 There are many sources for Dewey and in general for the history of American progressive education, see the invaluable Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876–1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 135 ff. See also Susan F. Semel and Alan R. Sadovnik, eds, "Schools of Tomorrow," *Schools of Today: What Happened to Progressive Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999). The introduction to this fine book gives an excellent overview of the history of progressive education. Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), is a recent polemical attack on the progressive school movement.
- 6 William J. Reese, "American Education in the Twentieth Century: Progressive Legacies," his forward to the special issue of *Paedagogica Historica* 39, no. 4 (August 2003): 416. For Canada see also George S. Tomkins, *A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum* (Vancouver, BC: Pacific Educational Press, 2008: new edition with introduction by William F. Pinar. First published in 1984); "In North America, progressivism was a loosely applied label, a complex reality that had both liberal and conservative dimensions." 174.
- 7 On attitudes towards gender equality among early reformers see: Deborah Gorham, "Dora and Bertrand Russell and Beacon Hill School," *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, n.s.25, (Summer, 2005), 73–4 and *passim*.
- 8 Helpful information about Binet, Burt and intelligence testing can be found in entries in the *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, Paula S. Fass, Editor in Chief, (New York: MacMillan Reference, USA and Thomson Gale, 2004, 3 volumes).
- 9 I found examples of Fascist support in the British *The New Era*, the journal of the New Education Fellowship, in the issues in Volume 15, January to December 1934. E.g., an article by an Italian Fascist, Ernesto Codignola, "The Aims of Fascist Education," September–October 1934, pp 178–80. The journal was peace-loving, and certainly not Fascist, and soon ceased to run such articles.
- 10 On Neill see Jonathan Croall, *Neill of Summerhill: the Permanent Rebel* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), and A.S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (New York: Hart Publishing Co., 1960). On Russell see Gorham, "Dora and Bertrand Russell," 39–76. On Putney see Susan M. Lloyd, *The Putney School: A Progressive Experiment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987).
- 11 See Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*; W.A.C. Stewart, *The Educational Innovators, Vol. 2, Progressive Schools 1881–1967* (London: MacMillan, 1968); Gorham, "Dora and Bertrand Russell."

- 12 Hilda Neatby, *So Little for the Mind* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin & Co., 1953). For her critique of “Social Studies” see 159-86. On Neatby see, among others, Tompkins, *A Common Countenance*, 262, who characterizes the book as “a root and branch critique of progressive education which attracted unprecedented public attention.” See also R.S. Patterson, “The Canadian Response to Progressive Education,” in Nick Kach et al, eds., *Essays on Canadian Education* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd, 1986), 62. Patterson says: “Canadians were relatively late in recognizing and endorsing the doctrines and practices associated with progressive education.” See also Nadeem Memon, “Contextualizing Hall-Dennis: The Rise of Progressive Educational Practices in Ontario, 1968–1972” (master’s thesis, University of Toronto, 2006).
- 13 Paul Axelrod, “Beyond the Progressive Education Debate: A Profile of Toronto Schooling in the 1950s,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d’histoire de l’éducation* 17, no. 2 (2005): 228.
- 14 See David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 188, on “administrative progressives.” Such reformers called for changes in the curriculum, in the name of “science and social efficiency,” but they supported rather than challenged race and ethnic stereotypes, and eschewed a vision of freedom in education. And see Tompkins, *A Common Countenance*, who characterises these reformers as supporters of “Progressive-Conservative” change. See his Chapter 10. Amy von Heyking, “Selling Progressive Education to Albertans, 1935–1953,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d’histoire de l’éducation* 10, nos.1-2 (1998), 67-84, provides an illuminating discussion of the progressive educationalists in Alberta’s Department of Education and provincial normal schools. Like Tompkins, she sees these people as social conservatives.
- 15 On the 1960s and 1970s activism and the counterculture in the US see among many others Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ’70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002). One of the few works on educational dissent in the context of the counterculture is Ron Miller, *Free Schools, Free People: Education and democracy after the 1960s* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2002), 115. But Miller deals only with the US. For example, he mentions only in passing that *This Magazine* emanated from Toronto.
- 16 See Bryan D. Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Dimitry Anastakis, ed., *The Sixties: Passion, Politics, and Style* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008); and Karen Dubinsky, et al, eds., *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009), an outstanding new collection which seeks to place the “the Sixties” in a global context, and which includes Canada. See also the excellent John Hagan, *Northern Passage: American Vietnam War Resisters in Canada* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), along with this earlier work: Roger Neville Williams, *The New Exiles: American War Resisters in Canada* (New York: Liveright Publishers, 1971).
- 17 The 50,000 figure comes from Hagan, 3. See Lara Campbell, “‘Women United Against the War’: Gender Politics, Feminism and Vietnam Draft Resistance in Canada,” Dubinsky et al, *New World Coming*. And see Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s*, 289-97, on Left-nationalist Canadian anti-Americanism.
- 18 A notable exception is the work of Ontario Institute for Studies in Education scholar Nadeem Memon, but while Memon explores the connection, he does not establish it. See Memon, *Contextualizing Hall-Dennis*, 7 ff.
- 19 Parent respondents I, II, III, myself, and my then husband J. Anthony Keith. I was born and raised in New York City. (J. Anthony Keith was born in the UK.) For example, we housed draft resisters and deserters assigned to us by the Ottawa group Assistance with Immigration and the Draft (AID). See Williams, *The New Exiles*, 70-71, for an account of AID and its main movers, Jim and Joan Wilcox.

- 20 For Neill, see above, note 10. Paul Goodman's best-known book for our period: *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System* (New York: Random House, 1960); John Holt, *How Children Fail* (New York: Pitman, 1964); Jonathan Kozol, *Death at an Early Age: The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967); Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).
- 21 On the influence of Hall-Dennis, see Gidney, *From Hope to Harris*, 71, and Memon, *Contextualizing Hall-Dennis*.
- 22 Sales of *Living and Learning* topped 60,000 copies within "sixteen months of its publication." Gidney, *From Hope to Harris*, 75.
- 23 Eric Riker, "Teachers, Trustees and Policy: The Politics of Education in Ontario, 1945–1975" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1984), 487.
- 24 Gidney, *From Hope to Harris*, 77.
- 25 See *Ibid.*, 75–77. See Eric Riker, "Teachers, Trustees and Policy," 488, 490, on this point: "about half the teachers polled in one survey opposed abolition of corporal punishment." "If the minister's reports are a fair indication, acceptance of the Hall-Dennis philosophy was not nearly as widespread as media coverage seemed to suggest." For example, by the 1970s, "only 4 % of the province's primary schools had open classrooms." 490. See also Memon, "Contextualizing Hall-Dennis."
- 26 An expression used by Neill and also by Homer Lane, the American educational pioneer who founded the Little Commonwealth, a school for troubled children, in Dorset. On the phrase, see http://collopy.net/projects/2006/libertarian_education.html (accessed October 5, 2009).
- 27 *Living and Learning: The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Education, 1968), 47.
- 28 Sara Spinks, "Participatory Bureaucracy and the Hall-Dennis Report," *This Magazine is About Schools*, 2, no. 3 (1968), 144. See Memon, *Contextualizing Hall-Dennis*, 18, who interviewed Lloyd Dennis, for Dennis' interest in the pedagogy of freedom.
- 29 See Mark W. Novak, *Learning and Living in the Free School* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd, 1975, #88 in the Carleton Library series), Chap. III, "The ASPE School" for the Hillsborough, Ontario parents who approached their board for changes demanded in the name of Hall-Dennis.
- 30 For mothering as a "thoughtful project" and "intensive mothering" see Terry Arendell, "Conceiving and Investigating Motherhood: The Decade's Scholarship," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 (November 2000), 1194.
- 31 "Mrs. Hyde ... played a key role in revolutionizing how Canadians think about early childhood education." "Education pioneer Bettye Hyde dies at 88," *Ottawa Citizen*, Sunday November 26, 2006. The obituary outlines her career, including her twenty-five years with the Ottawa Neighbourhood Nursery School, followed by her work with the Algonquin College Early Childhood Education program from the late 1960s for thirteen years. She founded that program.
- 32 From a 1964 speech Bettye Hyde made to the Ottawa Nursery School Association, which she had founded, quoted in the *Ottawa Citizen* obituary, *Ibid.*
- 33 The Hope report of 1950 had recommended them. Gidney, *From Hope to Harris*, 155.
- 34 Mutchmor was constructed in 1895 and First Avenue in 1898: see <http://www.bytowne.net/glebe.htm> (accessed October 5, 2009).
- 35 Publicity included radio programs (of which I have no record) and newspaper stories including Judy Barrie, "Dissatisfaction: Ottawa parents planning to open their own school," *Ottawa Citizen*, Thursday March 27, 1969.
- 36 From Maureen Johnson, "Pupils' own thing: Parents, staff assess 'free' school's first year," *Ottawa Citizen*, Wednesday June 3, 1970.

- 37 I know where Susan Russell is, but unfortunately illness prevents her from participating fully in this project.
- 38 I told reporter Maureen Johnson that it was “our worst problem,” which in a way it was, at least before we opened. Johnson, “Pupils’ own thing.”
- 39 See the Appendix on “Methodology.”
- 40 For the survival of these records, I am grateful to J. Anthony Keith and to Joan Jonkel, and also to Toby Brooks, who provided related material.
- 41 Johnson, “Pupils’ own thing.”
- 42 Joan Jonkel, “The ‘Ottawa New School’ Offers an Alternative,” *Ottawa Journal*, Saturday, August 22, 1970.
- 43 “The New Schools Exchange Continuing Directory of New & Innovative Schools in the U.S. and Canada,” *New Schools Exchange*, June 30, 1972, issue 81.
- 44 Respondent III in interview by telephone, February 4, 2009.
- 45 On “crises” in public (and private) alternative schools in Ontario during our period see Michael Freedman, David Quinlan and Michael Tabor, *A Brief Look at Public Alternative Schools in Ontario* (Toronto: Consortium of Ontario Public Alternative Schools, 1980), 17-18.
- 46 For information about the Base 10 Dienes Blocks, developed by radical mathematician Zoltan Paul Dienes, visit his website: <http://www.zoltandienes.com/>
- 47 See e.g., Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* on the project method, and Deborah Gorham, “Dora and Bertrand Russell.”
- 48 Thanks to Gina and Tom Mueller for sending me a copy of this edition of *The Pyramid*.
- 49 Sociologist Ann Swidler would, I think, agree, though she is sceptical about experiments that abandon “authority.” See Ann Swidler, *Organization without Authority: Dilemmas of Social Control in Free Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).
- 50 Information primarily taken from *Ottawa Citizen*, Tues., March 7, 1972. “New School Takeover rejected by OBE.” The trustee with negative views was Eileen Richardson. Later on, the OBE’s education committee considered and approved the rental of four rooms at Crichton Street School, in New Edinburgh to the Ottawa New School, for the 1972–3 year. The board did agree to this at its meeting of September 25, 1972. However, there were objections: Trustee Bushfield commented: “This is not suitable.... He thinks the Board should consider very seriously whether or not they are headed down the road of establishing unsupervised uninhibited schools within our school system. How will the Principal of Crichton School cope...?” Minutes of the Ottawa Board of Education, 1972 volume, 596. The Ottawa-Carleton Board of Education holds these bound, printed volumes now. Thanks to Louise McCutcheon for helping me to find them in August 2007.
- 51 The oldest, Lady Evelyn, became a “primary alternate school” in 1982. The school has a website which includes its history: <http://www.ladyevelyn.ca/>. For the link between experimentation in the era of Hall-Dennis and alternative schools, see Memon, *Contextualizing Hall-Dennis*, 5: “From counterculture to free schools and from the Hall-Dennis Report to the Alternative school movement, the linkages of influence are apparent.”

I see an influence at first hand. Since 2005, I have had the privilege of being a school volunteer, through the Ottawa-Carleton School Board’s “Ottawa Reads” program, and Carleton University. At McGregor-Easson school (the Principal is Catherine Pearson), I read to children in Sandra Caldwell’s Grade One class. This K-6 school is a delightful, welcoming place, with an admirable balance of openness and order. As a group, the children are happy at school, and the teachers are dedicated to their work and do all they can to meet the needs of the individual children. I do not sense any fear of the kind my child experienced, or that Paul Axelrod remembers from his own public school days. See Axelrod, “Beyond the Progressive Education Debate,” 228.

Note on Methodology:

This paper attempts to recapture the history of the Ottawa New School. I used two kinds of sources; written records from the period, and recollections. The majority of the written sources were from two files kindly supplied to me by two former parents, Joan Jonkel and J. Anthony Keith. These were supplemented by my own research in newspapers and Board minutes.

The second major source for the history of the ONS is memory. My own recollections are central to the paper, but in addition I sought out others who would share their memories with me. These recollections are too fragmentary to be defined as oral history of the kind described in, for example, Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (Oxford: OUP, 2003); or Thomas L. Charlton et al, eds., *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2007), but I did use some of the methods outlined in the oral history literature. I sent each possible respondent a letter, in which I explained my project, solicited their help and promised them anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time, and a chance to vet my use of their comments. In the case of the two teachers, who are named, I conducted face-to-face interviews with one, Mary Assaf, and telephone interviews with Tom Mueller and his wife Gina. In the case of the parents and children, I prepared a questionnaire for each, but explained in the covering letter that the questionnaire was only a guideline, and that I welcomed any comments they would like to make. I interviewed one former parent by telephone. Two parents responded in writing. The fourth parent was teacher Mary Assaf, whom I interviewed face-to-face. I had extended face-to-face conversations with two of the former pupils. The third responded in writing. The five additional former pupils commented either in writing or on the telephone.