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### Education as a Tool for Social Change: Case Study of an Arizona Inner-City Charter School

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**EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE:  
CASE STUDY OF AN ARIZONA INNER-CITY CHARTER SCHOOL**

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Heather Koger Devich

San Francisco, California

May 20, 2000

L.D  
4881  
S16588  
D4848

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Heather Joyce Lewis 5/20/00

Candidate

Date

**Dissertation Committee**

Alma Flu Adz 5/20/2000  
Chairperson

Rosita J. Salang 5/20/00

Susan Katz 5/20/00

## DEDICATION

This labor of love is dedicated to the children of our earth, the children of the future. I have heard their calls ringing and singing down through the years of my own joyous youth, into the shouts and laughter of our children, my shining husband's and my own beloved daughters, Lashel and Mary Grace, and into the hilarious fun and heart-bursting love we have held together for cousins Levi and Elijah. I have heard their eternal calls singing and ringing in the beautiful faces and hearts of all my so precious students and friends over the years.

It is dedicated to all the parents of our earth, my own beloved Mother Nellie and my own beloved Daddy Granville, to my husband's jovial Father Pete, and his beautiful-hearted Mother Millie.

It is dedicated to our anchors, all the grandparents of the earth, my beloved Mama Bessie and my beloved Daddy Chock, to Michael's Tree of Life Baba and his hard-working Jedo, salt of the earth, farmers and ranchers, all of them.

When our beloved Elijah died, the last words he said were "It's too late for me, but save the children."

O God, will You not take any good to be done from this doctorate degree and use it to help save the children, all our children, all the children of the world?

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How can I say thanks to the administration, staff, teachers and children of NFL/YET Academy, such examples of selfless service, of love made visible? And you, Stella Ruiz, mother, prayer warrior, the fire around which so many gather for warmth, are in my heart and soul now and always. Thank you, Stella, for living your “yes” so faithfully.

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# CHAPTER I

## THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

### **Statement of the Problem**

Adequate education which equips children to fulfill the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual demands of adulthood within a complex industrial and competitive society, such as exists in the United States as it begins the 21st Century, is a basic human need. Delivering this education to children is a difficult, complicated and multi-level task under ideal conditions. Under conditions of poverty and social oppression, this task can be overwhelming.

How well any community mobilizes to meet the educational needs of its children is an indication of both its collective strength and its access to resources.

This case study documents the results of one inner-city community's struggle to rise to the challenge of providing sound education for the sake of its children. It also provides a practical guide for other communities struggling to help its children thrive educationally in spite of adverse conditions.

## **Background and Need for the Study**

The community of South Phoenix has a history of agriculture. Many original settlers were Japanese fruit and flower growers, who moved into this arid but fertile ancient river bottom area during the 1930's to homestead farming property. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor in WW II, many of these people were interned, along with Japanese-Americans from West Coast areas, in desert prison camps outside the city limits of Phoenix (McMahon,1999).

Japanese Americans, purely out of ethnic prejudice and fear, were deprived of both liberty and property. This shameful heritage of forced poverty and ethnic degradation continued for the next half century, as this geographic area became a *de facto* ghetto for migrating minority groups of Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and European Americans. As population increased in the greater Phoenix Valley, the scene was set for the development of inner-city conditions. Yet previous geographic and agricultural community ties remained strong (McMahon,1999).

A distinct neighborhood atmosphere developed in the area as Phoenix grew, with groups coalescing around ethnic and religious ties. The community developed a composition of approximately 80% Hispanic Americans and 12% African Americans, with the remaining 8% composed

mainly of Asian and European Americans, according to 1990 Arizona census records. Catholic and Protestant groups divided roughly along ethnic backgrounds. Small local family business prevailed along with national chains (McMahon, 1999).

Over time, however, the blight of poverty and minority prejudice, spread like a pall of oppression from the dominant Anglo American society. As an affluent and socially mobile population moved into Phoenix in ever-increasing numbers, the land-locked population of South Phoenix, bounded by a riverbed on the north and mountains on the south, assumed the characteristics of most inner-city populations in urban America. Problems with poverty, drugs, gangs, violence, race riots, crime, teen pregnancy, school dropouts, suicide, and despair became acute (McMahon, 1999).

The stage was now set for either community disintegration or community mobilization. Great fortune was now also on the side of the 5-mile square Parish of St. Catherine's Catholic Church, in the form of a large and socially-justice motivated Hispanic family, the Ruiz's. Over 30 young adults and teenagers had died violent deaths in their neighborhood during the previous year, and they were desperately seeking social change.

The Ruiz family and other community members committed together to draw on the strength of family and spiritual values, as they worked with

the community at large to combat its seriously debilitating problems. This particular family group was uniquely suited for such a daunting task. The father, Reyes, worked for the Diocese of Phoenix with migrant farm workers. The mother, Stella, was an administrator for a bilingual language program at a local school district. A son, Armando, was a State Senator and Director of the local YMCA, and his twin brother, Fernando, was politically active in social issues. A third son, Ray, was active in community service and evangelization. A daughter, Becky, was a Head Start preschool director. A daughter-in-law, Letecia, was a high school Assistant Principal.

The special abilities and connections in education, politics, and social services possessed by this family, as well as by the other professionals who were recruited, actually represent the great strength of human resources that abound in every community. Motivation for change, combined with personal skills and organization, are the key catalysts for such social action. Formation of a community empowerment preschool through high school, with a Montessori based philosophy of hands-on education, was the result.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Success in combating hopelessness, with positive outcomes for students and their families, were the prizes this community sought. This

case study sought to describe how these prizes were gained, and how they were materialized into a school by the communal work and sacrifices of many individuals. The story of the unique combination of all of the above outlined factors, coming together in a step-by-step fashion which resulted in a community-based, community-supported, and community-empowering school, offers a powerful model available for emulation by other groups with similar problems and challenges. The example of this successful inner-city school is truly a model worth studying. It is a powerful example of communal hope worked into reality, hope made real for the sake of the children.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to present a description of the program developed through this school's successes and failures, in a fashion that is clear and usable by other similarly disadvantaged communities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Paulo Freire's theories regarding the vital role of education for deep social change can be used to describe both the causative oppression, as well as the growth in political awareness, which resulted in this inner-city school. The study was also supported by the social reform and practical hands-on educational theories of Dr. Maria Montessori, which form the basis of the

school curriculum.

Use of Charter school public funds to develop this inner-city school with a predominantly minority population, opened up another theoretical arena of thought. The economic theory of *market demand* determining the quality and type of *product* produced, based on demand by the *consumer* in a *free choice* market, could be argued for the development and survival of this Charter school. The parental demand (consumer) for quality education in this depressed area, to replace existing community availability (free choice) of drugs, crime and gangs for their children, resulted in the development and survival of this school (product) in this particular school district (market).

“Market based” school reform expectations from the Charter school movement, and its eventual passing some degree of the “market test” is an important topic for evaluation. This market demand view is discussed to some degree in the literature review under the topic of “market based” reforms, by G. Walford in his Oxford University Studies in Comparative Education, and by B. Fuller and R. Elmore in their Columbia University study called Who Chooses? Who Loses? Culture, Institutions, and the Unequal Effect of School Choice.



## **Research Questions**

This study focused on five questions in the areas of important concern for anyone contemplating undertaking the task of opening a school in a similar poverty community.

- 1) Community and Historic Process: Why did this community begin to develop a school?
- 2) Philosophical and Theoretical Process: Why did they choose and implement a Montessori theory of education?
- 3) Implementation and Operational Process: How did they implement and maintain a 650 student preschool through high school?
- 4) Evaluation of impact on Community Process: How do they evaluate the impact of all their efforts on the students and the community over time?
- 5) Generalizability to Other Inner-city Communities: How useful is this school's unique experience of unique staffing and funding, as a model for other disadvantaged communities?

## **Significance of the Study**

This case study can be useful to other communities who have a desire to undertake school reform. It also adds useful data to the area of growing

studies concerning inner-city Charter schools. The fact that this school exists in a poverty area serving minority children is a powerful statement of hope for all oppressed communities, regardless of race, creed, or color. It stands as a potential beacon of hope for the future.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

This section deals with three areas of literature: the works of Paulo Freire, Maria Montessori, and Charter schools will be discussed.

First, the body of literature written by Paulo Freire during his career as an education reformer, is germane to this study. His seminal works, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1990), as well as Education for Critical Consciousness, (1994), originally published in the 1940's, are both relevant. However, perhaps his more mature works, coming from the end of his eventful and committed life, may be even more relevant. Pedagogy of Hope (1994) and Pedagogy of Love (1994) revisit his earlier themes and reexamine their tenants, yet exhibit the richer fruits of the wisdom of age and experience. The deepest essence of this case study is also love and hope made visible.

Second, the collected works of Maria Montessori, M.D., are also informative in relation to this study. The Secret of Childhood (1996), The Discovery of the Child (1967), and The Absorbent Mind (1994), explain the genesis of her theories. As with Freire, works coming from the end of her

extraordinary and focused life seem to this researcher to be even more germane. These works include To Educate the Human Potential (1989), The Formation of Man (1989), and Education for a New World (1989).

It is worthy of note that by the end of the lives of both of these visionary and towering humanitarian figures, other forms of disseminating their works developed. These last works of Maria Montessori were collected and published from lectures, and were compiled by listeners (Standing, 1984). In order to validate dialogue as a form of generating knowledge, Freire “talked books” by dialoguing with others while being recorded, and these dialogues were later transcribed into book form (Collins, 1997). Although others wrote about their work, Freire and Montessori both were too busy with direct engagement with people and issues, to spend extensive time writing.

The third area of literature to be reviewed is that available on the development of Charter schools. Sources include books from the Sociology of Education Series (Fuller and Elmore, 1996), and an Oxford University study (Wallford, 1996), a University of California at Berkeley dissertation (Rolfes, 1999), education journals (Wells, 1998), as well as reports from the U.S. Department of Education (Berman, 1999). However, data from periodicals, government reports, and journal articles were also included,

since this is a new area of scholarship, the first Charter school having opened in the United States in fall of 1992 (Rolfes, 1999).

Literature on the new phenomenon of Charter schools was seen to change over seven years. The literature changed from reports of the early period of quick reforms not materializing, to an increasing awareness of surfacing problems, to eventual evidence of some anticipated reforms resulting, and finally to some apparent successes, especially in poverty communities. These four chronological areas of differing emphasis were found to change from fall of 1992 to spring of 2000, a relatively short span of time in which to accurately assess educational trends.

These chronological developments in perceptions of Charter Schools over seven years, will be discussed under the following headings:

- 1) Unfulfilled “market based” reforms
- 2) Problems encountered
- 3) Eventual “market test” successes
- 4) Tentative poverty community successes.

### **Paulo Freire**

Freire first worked and wrote as an educator in his native Brazil during the middle of this century. But his profound humanity and sweeping

brilliance found resonance with educators, politicians, intellectuals, and social reformers worldwide. His death in spring of 1997, while this researcher was taking a USF class on his life and work called “Education for Inclusion”, felt like the globally-momentous passing of a Titan of the Human Spirit. He left us all richer for his contributions, but bereft without his love’s global power for good.

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1990), Freire describes with literary beauty and passion, that his education theories are based first and foremost, on love for humanity. He sees the ultimate purpose of pedagogy to be the transformation of individual lives, and thereby society itself, through the praxis of informed social and political action. However, such action must be based on informed critical reflection. Development of this critical consciousness is the path that can lead to useful and lasting education.

Yet, it is still love that keeps scientific management approaches at bay as this education proceeds over time (Freire, 1990). To teach love in tangible form, while at the same time as conveying cultural, scientific, political and economic facts and theories, Freire states in his final work, The Pedagogy of Love (1994), is the ultimate educational goal.

The initial name to be given the Charter school under study was “Esperanza Montessori Academy”, which means “hope” in Spanish. This

name was chosen because the whole project was to exist to give children hope, hope for their families, hope themselves, hope for the future, hope for the world. This hope for the future was to be given form in real work, which provided not only information, but which taught skills to build self respect, independence, cooperation, self discipline, and values. All of these values were to be based on love.

Freire states in his volume Pedagogy of Hope (1994), which he considered Pedagogy of the Oppressed revisited, “I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream.” (p.8). By this, he did not mean wishful thinking, but what he called “critical hope”, through education that equips people to understand political and social realities and then fosters the ability to formulate and work for change. Such hope gives us “the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will re-create the world” (p.8).

But according to Freire, the source and the sustainer of all hope in the human condition is finally and *only Love* (Freire,1994). This truth was the ultimate message given to the world by this great man and this great educator.

It is this researcher’s personal belief that the great power exerted over associates and readers of his work originated from this powerful wellspring

of authentic love. His brilliance and skill of communication were the servants of his true gift, the gift of love that motivated his life. This gift he then gave freely to others through both his actions and his writings.

### **Maria Montessori**

Dr. Montessori was similar to Frerie in the universal expansiveness of her wisdom and intellect, and in her humanitarian contributions to the fields of education and social reform. This similarity explains the researcher's great respect for them both. Her theories and methods were universal in their sweep and depth, as well as in their total practicality of application to how all children learn, worldwide. This researcher believes that Montessori's ideas are indeed multicultural and international, and that saving the earth from war, poverty, hatred and pollution must begin with the children. This conviction was her reason for embarking on a Doctorate of Education degree at USF.

Maria Montessori was the first woman to receive a Medical Doctor degree in Italy in the early 1900's, graduating at the head of her class, and was the first woman to practice medicine and surgery in Italy (Standing, 1984). In her early works, The Secret of Childhood (1966), The Discovery of the Child (1967), and The Absorbent Mind (1994), she documented the



development of the methods and materials which her scientific training and observation had led her to produce (Standing 1984). In this researcher's opinion, the latest brain research coming from many sources, such as the Carnegie Institute, backs up both Montessori's medical observations and her ensuing developmentally-appropriate materials and methods.

In The Absorbent Mind (1994), Dr. Montessori described a quality of the brain, from birth to 7 years, which takes in all stimuli without differentiation or judgement at a prodigious rate, never again to be duplicated during the human life span. This period is also punctuated by periods of heightened interest and learning capacity, which she called "sensitive periods". Cognitive development, she theorized from careful observation, proceeded according to hormone driven biological stages identifiable from changes in teeth.

The most important tools for perceiving, learning from, and operating on the environment are the hands, Dr. Montessori postulated. "The hands are the instrument of man's intelligence" (p.27). Refinement of all the senses at this early age is essential, as sensitivity will be permanently lost if not stimulated and developed before 7 years. Free and unrestricted movement is essential to the development of the mind, as well as to the development of fine and gross motor control.

It is only during this period of the absorbent mind, Dr. Montessori concluded, that several languages can be effortlessly and flawlessly learned. All the nuances of culture, character and values are also absorbed and made part of the basic fiber of being during this period (Montessori, 1994). Is it any wonder that Dr. Montessori considered early childhood as the very foundation for the construction of the human being?

Dr. Montessori then elaborated in depth on her teaching methods and the development of materials which facilitate balanced and proper human development in both The Secret of Childhood (1966) and The Discovery of the Child (1967). She developed hundreds of precise and very beautiful materials, designed to move children through language, mathematics, practical life exercises, sensorial development, science, culture, geography, music, and social graces.

Montessori then spent the rest of her life speaking internationally on global education, training teachers, and developing materials and methods to teach comprehensive academic subjects for students 6 to 9 and then 9 to 12 years of age. She theorized on the ideal educational setting for adolescents from 12 to 18, and from 18 to 24 years, but left its implementation to future generations (Standing 1984).

Social reform, indeed survival of the human race, Montessori

believed, was up to the proper education of the children. In Education for a New World, the 1989 edition, she stated “If salvation and help are to come, it is from the child, for the child is the constructor of man, and so of society. The child is endowed with an inner power which can guide us to a more enlightened future” (p.1). She believed that education held the power to allow “ the unfolding of the human soul and a New Man who will not be the victim of events, but will have the clarity of vision to direct and shape the future of human society” (p.3). She traveled and spoke tirelessly with this message until her death in 1954.

Maria Montessori’s noble goals for the development of all human beings and all cultures through the loving education of our children, embody the force that drives this dissertation, and the force that drives the development of the school described herein.

### **Charter School Literature Definitions**

Charter schools are a very recent development in the United States. They are part of a national effort for school reform over the decade of the 1990’s, the first one opening for students in 1992 (Rolfes, 1999). Little comprehensively significant scholarship is yet published in book form concerning inner-city Charter schools. Thus, “the debate about a school

choice continues in the absence of much data on its effects on student achievement—or on anything else” (Fuller and Elmore, 1996, p.1).

Charter schools are defined by the U. S. Department of Education in a report from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, as:

a contract with a state or local agency that provides the school with public funds for a specific time. This contract frees Charter schools from a number of regulations that otherwise apply to public schools. In exchange, the Charter schools are accountable for improving student performance and achieving goals set out in the Charter. (Berman, p.1).

The New Republic provided a clear definition of Charter schools in their October issue of 1999, in an article titled “Lessons Learned”.

Charter schools can be created by parents, teachers, non-profits, and for profits with 3 to 5 year Charters – “performance contracts” with the government organizations that authorize them; local school boards, city councils, county boards, state Boards of Education, or even colleges or universities. They are schools of choice, and public funds normally come to students who choose them from the districts students leave. To succeed, they must attract and keep enough students to finance operations (p.1).

The focus of school reform has been a drive to improve ‘failing schools’, *i.e.* those in low income, predominantly minority communities (Tach, 1998). Albert Shanker, the influential and late president of the American Federation of teachers, supported Charter schools, but public schools resisted. However, voters prevailed with overwhelming pressure to

try to prod complacent school districts into improving, precisely because of competition with Charter schools (Tach, 1998).

This is a very controversial idea, as in the United States historically, “Public education is the very backbone of American society,” according to the NEA Today in their November 1999 issue. Public educational opportunities, open to all citizens alike, it is argued, has opened up the achievement to everyone willing to work and play by the rules, of the “American Dream” - home, job, success, happiness, and an even better future for one’s children.

Thus arises the controversy over allowing the competition of “free market demand” to function openly in the arena of education, as in the economy at large. Competing “free market demands” would allow the consumers, the parents, choice in where to send their children to school (Perry, 1998), thereby forcing public schools to change, improve, offer more “marketable” and responsive programs, or face loss of revenue, or even failure and closure. Such job-threatening possibilities are quite logically viewed with suspicion and fear by existing public school districts, teachers, and administrators (Wells, 1998).

As indicated in the previous introduction, review of the literature on Charter schools has revealed four views, changing over time, on their

successes or failures to fulfill a need in American education, or on their ability to damage or to improve public education. These views are categorized herein under the following headings.

1. Unfulfilled “market based” reforms,
2. Problems encountered,
3. Eventual “market test” reforms, and
4. Poverty community successes.

### Unfulfilled “Market Based” Reforms

Initial hopes for Charter schools were that they would follow positive trends brought by competition within a free-market economy. It was hoped they would:

allow parents to exercise choice, match pupils to schools, improve existing programs, bring innovation in programs, increase private sector participation, reduce public spending, improve school efficiency, decentralize governmental control, and lessen issues of socioeconomic status in school funding (Walford, 1996, p.2).

These hoped for reforms seemed not to materialize in the early history of educational choice brought by vouchers and Charter schools. In a comprehensive study done by Oxford University published in 1996, “market based reforms” were studied in the U. S., Germany, France,

Australia, Sweden and the U.K. The overwhelming findings in each country were similar, and were not supportive of initial expectations (Walford, 1996).

It was found that equity issues were paramount in each country. Student safety rather than program quality seemed to be the determining factor in parental choice. In each case, data seemed to indicate that schools have an incentive to exclude students with an under-performance background (Walford, 1996).

Such academic segregation is linked to socioeconomic inequality in educational opportunity. Thus market mechanisms applied to schools allow producers of education to begin to choose the consumers, instead of vice versa (Walford, 1996).

The hunt for registration puts pressure on teachers and administration for layoffs or firings. This increases socioeconomic polarization because economically deprived schools lose well-motivated and well-funded students. Educational choice leads to construction of a hierarchy of schools into which children can be fitted to best equip them for pre-ordained roles in society (p.60).

A study of California schools by Amy Stuart Wells, published in the Phi Delta Kappan journal in 1998, reported similar findings.

These schools have not lived up to the assumptions propelling them. Charters fall short on accountability, administration, autonomy,

funding, efficiency, infusion of competition, and instructional innovation. (Wells, 1998, p. 312)

Thus early evidence of market driven reforms did not seem to materialize during the first several years of the advent of Charter school funding. Later findings, however, seemed to point otherwise, and perhaps market forces took more time to surface.

### Problems Encountered

After what seemed to this researcher to be a Charter school honeymoon period in Arizona of two years duration, from 1995 to 1997, critical national media articles began to surface, even mentioning the school under study. It was then reported to millions of Americans in U.S. News and World Report in an article by Thomas Tach, entitled “Free Market in Action “ published in April of 1998, that Charter schools were both better and worse than public schools in specific areas. Nepotism in a family-run and family-employed administration was even sited for the NFL/YET Academy in this article. All day kindergarten programs were praised, and smaller, safer campuses were seen as positive outcomes, as were dress codes and strict “zero tolerance” discipline policies. More than 20 Montessori Schools and performing arts schools were given high praise in Arizona.



At the same time, similar successes, but even more problems, were beginning to be increasingly catalogued by scholarly studies. A nationally respected and recognized scholar and author, Amy Stewart Wells, found many of the same problems seeming to recur in most Charter schools that she studied. In her study of 17 California schools, she found high staff turnover, neophyte teachers, low supplies, no laboratories, no libraries, and student attendance were recurring abuses which merited citation as serious problems. It was recommended that a uniform testing system must be instituted to assure that basic academic standards be met, as well as a system of accountability for administrators (Wells, 1998).

However, even by October 1999, The New Republic reported that “it is hard to prove anything related to performance because little meaningful data exists. In the few areas where test scores are available to allow comparison between Charter schools and surrounding districts, the data usually measures absolute test scores, not student gains from one year to the next” (p. 33). Thus, documentation of both successes and failures were quite difficult to prove at this point in time. The phenomena of using public funds for Charter funding and the development of ensuing programs were both so new in the American educational system, that there just had not been enough time to accumulate sufficient data.

## Eventual “Market Test” Successes

Paul Berman reported that since the passage of school choice laws in 1988 in 16 states, there were 1684 Charters in 32 States and the District of Columbia as of October 1999 (Berman, 1999). This figure was reputed to have risen to over 1700 by mid January of 2000 by President Clinton in his State of the Union address (Clinton, 2000).

Arizona was reported to have the “highest percentage of Charter school students”, almost 3.5%, over twice that of its closest rival, Colorado (Berman, 1999, p.19). The percentage of minority students in Arizona Charter schools was reported to be “equal to or higher than that of public schools” (Berman, 1999, p.31).

Regarding failures of Charter schools, the Center for Educational Reform reported that only 28 schools, or 2.3%, have been closed by their Charter granting authorities. Yet approximately 70% of operating Charter schools have waiting lists, as of 1999 (Berman, 1999), indicating that the market demand of parents remains strong.

“Public schools exhibited first fear, and then an urgency to compete for student \$’s, to market, and to undo past complacency” (New Republic, 1999, p.33). Public schools charge that “Charters are inviolate and enjoy unfair advantages,...micro-politics of autonomous schools act as an

obstructionist influence”, making cooperation and goodwill between public and charter schools difficult (Wells, 1998, p. 308).

However, more recent reports of reforms apparently stimulated by the Charter school movement have provided an initiative for improvements within the public school system. These changes have included attention to performance on standardized test scores, more teacher training, all day kindergarten programs, curriculum changes, attention to parental involvement, increased foreign language instruction and more after school programs (Rolfes, 1999). It was also reported that:

Charter schools add power to public school choices, creating new choices and excess capacity in the system...just as reformers predicted, but only when State Charter laws unleash true competition for funds and students (New Republic, 1999, p.31).

Thus it tentatively appears that after only seven years of operation, as of the writing of this dissertation, Charter schools may have begun to pass the “free market demand” test. They have indeed apparently begun to exert some arguably positive influence over the American education system.

### Tentative Poverty Community Successes

Initial reports were that freedom of choice in school affiliation exacerbated socioeconomic oppression (Walford, 1996). Historically,

Hispanic minority students already had very serious academic problems. The Hispanic student population in the U.S. has had the highest drop out rate of any minority. Few Hispanic students are prepared for college the way Anglo and Asian students are (Wells, 1998). Yet U.S. Census Bureau information indicates that if the current rates of Hispanic population growth continue, which are five times more than any other group, it will be the largest minority group in the United States by 2020 (Wells, 1998). Serious search for solutions is imperative for the successful survival of minority students within the dominant society.

Hispanic Education in America: Separate but Unequal by Amy Stuart Wells, published in 1989 for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in Washington D.C., stated that “Hispanic parents and leadership believe that Hispanic children are better served in a predominantly Hispanic school with extensive bilingual services “ (Wells, 1989, p. 73). This finding supports the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Keys vs. Denver School District* that Hispanic students have a right to both de-segregated education and bilingual education (Wells, 1989).

In contradiction, however, are Wells’ findings that “Hispanic parents desire to protect their common culture, language and values, and also may fear loss of political and economic power as a result of diffusion” (Wells,

1989, p.71). Desegregation may destroy attempts to protect the integrity of existing bilingual programs, as well as destroy positive cultural identity.

Yet gaps in education attainment and earnings between Hispanics and non-Hispanics offers strong evidence that “segregated schools are not preparing the rapidly growing Hispanic student population to succeed in a predominantly non-Hispanic society “ (Wells, 1989, p.71).

Thus, Charter school funding and the resulting freedom to develop culturally sensitive programming may be a very important solution to a growing social problem. Programs that allow for both high academic standards, represented by both globally proven Montessori hand-on education and by culturally nurturing bilingual education may contribute to solutions.

Even though data is scanty at this point, it may be that anecdotal data indicate that for some minority poverty communities, Charter schools may point to successes, rather than additional problems. In 1998, U.S. News and World Report sited that it appeared success in operating schools dedicated to targeted populations with special needs, such as minorities, was related to a “*charismatic leader or administrator, such as a clergy member or a committed educator, who held a clear mission*” (p.33) (italics added).

This statement seems to this researcher to be a very important finding, even if it is not yet clearly substantiated. The mission of saving minority groups from education failure, and thereby associated social and economic failure later in life, seems to be indeed both a clear and vital mission for American society. Leadership that strives to provide such reform also seems to be vital.

The school under study in this dissertation has an almost 92% minority population, 80% of which are Hispanic American, 12% African American, with the remainder Native, Asian and European American (Ruiz, A., 2000). Poverty conditions in the community are high, and inner-city conditions can be said to prevail. The original Arizona Charter grant was for a Montessori theory based school with a Sustainable Systems Ecology program to help address the educational and social conditions prevailing in this community (McAlister, 1989-1999). The leaders of the community came together with the common mission of addressing the pressing needs of its children. These facts seem to conform to the profile indicated by the above source, as those needed for success.

One such example of a special needs group with a mission, and also with charismatic leadership, obtained a Charter grant in 1994. New Schools and New Communities reported in fall of 1994 on a school for teens on

probation in Massachusetts. Due to their ongoing Charter funding, “school administrators are responsible only to the State and thus can begin the task of designing the school they completely believe in and have always wanted to run” (Clinchy, 1994, p.27). This school reports the vital importance of financial support from the local school district, freedom to create a program they truly believe in, and the opportunity to become a model for other new schools for students with similar problems. Charter funding seems to be vital to address the special needs and solutions existing within this community (Clinchy, 1994).

Again, data seems to indicate that over time, using public funds to allow for alternative programs, while slow to mature, may ultimately be stimulating positive change in public education. Of course problems of appropriate State over-site for academic standards appears to be on-going. (Patterson, 1995). But the Charter system has allowed financial viability for the development of competing alternative programs, which in turn has allowed at least some successful programs, especially in some disadvantaged communities.

Perhaps success in one Hispanic school could indicate that it is indeed possible to 1.) build culturally sensitive schools with bilingual instruction, as well as to 2.) build Montessori theory based hand-on schools with high

academic standards, 3.) while using public education funds through Charter grants. Success in other Hispanic or diverse minority groups could possibly be indicative of the future of education. However, as is indicated by the changes in perception over time as evidenced in this review of literature, final judgement of success or failure will most certainly take more time and study.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

The design and methods used for this case study followed methodology extensively outlined in the Applied Social Research Methods Series, Volume 5, by Robert K. Yin, titled Case Study Research Design and Methods (1994). Yin postulated that five components of design are essential to have a sound case study. These components organize what data is collected and how they are interpreted to draw final conclusions for the study. This study was thus organized around these components (Yin, 1994, p.20).

1. Questions to guide inquiry
2. Researcher's personal propositions
3. Study's units of analysis
4. Logic linking of data to the propositions
5. Sound criteria for interpreting the data

Data collection, and the requirements of the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects are topics to be discussed, as are the researcher's entry into the community and the researcher's personal background

## **Data Collection**

Data collection was a monumental task for this case study. The historical context over time was deemed important, as many changes and problems over time followed the pattern that emerged from the literature review on Charter schools. Data were collected in three ways. Interviews, observations, and document review were all forms of data collection which were used. But extensive reliance was placed on in-depth interviews with project Administrators, who had labored with the school from its beginning.

### Interviews

First, interviews were conducted with administrative staff, teaching faculty, support staff, parents, and students. Four interviews were conducted with the Principal, the Superintendent, the non-profit CEO, and the Curriculum Director. Three interviews were conducted with teachers, three with support staff, three with parents, and three with students, with their parents in attendance. All of these interviews took place on campus, usually in the school offices, during or just after school hours. Administrative interviews lasted approximately two hours, and shorter interviews were repeated, if necessary, to clarify large areas of data. All other interviews lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Administrative interviews proceeded first, as they included most of the crucial hard facts and data for the study. The questions were given to participants ahead of time, and followed the five original research questions. Extensive and specific questions to guide the interviews were asked of the appropriate administrator, and were used to gather and organize all the data. The organizing principle was always “What information would a prospective administrator find vital for starting a school of their own?” A complete listing of all interview questions is given under the Questions to Guide Inquiry section.

Teacher, staff, student and parent interviews occurred last, as they were shorter in nature, and consisted of personal opinions and evaluations of their experiences at the school. Interviewees were all asked the same open-ended questions.

- 1) What have you found beneficial from your experience with this school?
- 2) What would you change if you could?
- 3) How has your experience met or not met your expectations?
- 4) What role, if any do you see this school playing in this community?

These interviews were tape recorded, after receiving written

permission, and written permission was obtained when necessary, to reproduce portions in writing in the body of this work. Interviewees retained the right to edit or change the content of their statements before publication. One copy of the consent form was left with interviewees, and one copy was retained for study records. Tapes will be destroyed one year after the document is published.

### Observations

Secondly, direct observation over a three-month period of time was done. This included observation of the student body, in the classroom, on the school grounds. Observation of teaching faculty, support staff, administration personnel also occurred, as well as observation of equipment, teaching materials and programs. Written permission was obtained from administrative personnel. These observations were documented with photographs and examples of student work when deemed useful. Again, consent in writing was obtained from administrative staff.

### Document Review

Lastly, written documents and publications of this case study's "contemporary phenomenon with-in its real life context" (Yin, 1994, p 7),

were examined. These documents included budget materials, State Charter materials, school calendars, student and parent handbook, administrative program and procedures manual, and administrative program evaluations. Written permission to review and/or to reproduce any of these documents in the appendix was obtained. Records of a personal nature, which could invade student or family privacy, were strictly avoided.

### **Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Guidelines**

All of the board's guidelines were complied with. All subjects were informed in writing that this case study project was in partial fulfillment of requirements for the researcher's Doctorate of Education Degree, and that it had been approved by the University of San Francisco's Review Board for Human Subjects. Copies of all signed consent forms were forwarded to this Board, as was a letter from the school Principal authorizing use of data for this case study. All subjects were informed that they could contact this University of San Francisco agency in writing or by phone, should they desire.

Confidentiality was assured in that signed informed consent forms specified that all tapes, photographs, and notes would have no other use, and will be destroyed one year after the publication of this dissertation. All

subjects had final review rights over any quotes, and final editing allowed subjects to add to, to amend, or to delete their own interviews. All subjects were given a copy of their signed consent forms to be interviewed or photographed.

Administration consent for all observations, interviews, and photographs was obtained in writing, and copies were retained for the duration of the research, writing and editing process within the researcher's records. Copies were given to the Administration.

All subjects were informed in writing that their participation was purely voluntary, and that no monetary remuneration was given to the researcher or to them. (See Appendix A for copies of all IRBHS materials.)

### **Yin's Components of Research Design**

According to Robert Yin, "five components of design are especially important for case studies" (Yin, 1994, p.20). Based on this premise, the following five listed components guided this study. Each one of these components of research design are defined and discussed in relation to this study in sequentially following sections.

#### **1. Questions to guide the inquiry**

2. Researcher's personal propositions
3. Study's units of data analysis
4. Logical linking of the data to the propositions
5. Sound criteria for interpretation and analysis of the findings

### **Questions to Guide the Inquiry**

The following practical questions guided this case study. They were used to guide interviews with administrators in order to organize data collection and to assure complete data collection. Copies of them were given to Administrators before the interviews so that they understood the organization and scope of the data to be gathered. They are exhaustive of material covered, and data gathered from each question was used for reporting in the Findings section of this document. The questions are grouped to delve into the five basic research questions.

#### 1. Community and Historic process: Why did this community begin to develop a school?

What was the critical impetus that finally mobilized this particular community into action? What were the first steps taken toward developing a school? Why was a school chosen as the target focus of action? How was the community engaged into supporting the project? How was a Non-profit governing Board developed? How was the decision made to apply for a

State Charter grant, and what was the process? How were funds and resources gathered and maintained? What type of Board accounting forms and policies were practiced? How were Board insurance and taxing policies established?

2. Philosophical and Theoretical Process: Why did they choose and implement a Montessori theory of education?

How was an educational theory embraced? Why was a Montessori hand-on educational system embraced? How was community education and support for this system sought? Were there differing theoretical challenges in application to differing grade levels? How did theory apply to the decision made concerning which grade levels to begin serving? What challenges arose because of philosophical choices guiding curriculum? What role did finances play in gathering classroom materials, and in training and retaining Montessori teaching staff? How have theory applications changed over time? Would different choices be made in retrospect?

3. Implementation and Operational Process: How did they implement and maintain a 650 student preschool through high school?

What administrative form was developed and why? How was a teaching faculty assembled and what were hiring criteria? How was a physical plant of classrooms, bathrooms, cafeteria, playground, and outdoor equipment assembled? How were classroom teaching materials reviewed and obtained? How were maintenance and support staff assembled? What types of Special Education services were offered? What type of school nursing and counseling staff was retained? What type of sports program was developed and how? What after-school or summer programs were developed? How was the school calendar determined? How were discipline policies developed and why? What hiring and firing policies were developed?



How were students recruited? How was a budget formed, and for what time period? What guidelines determined student placement? What instruments were used to determine student progress and promotion? What type of teacher training and in-service programs were developed? What types of teacher evaluations were used? What State Department of Education guidelines were required and how were they complied with? What types of safety guidelines were developed? What type of parent-student Handbook of school policies was developed? What type of legal council was sought? How were lines of communication established between parents and the school? How were channels of communication established between school personnel and administration?

4) Evaluation of Impact on the Community Process: How do they evaluate the impact of all their efforts on the students and the community over time?

How has student performance changed or improved? How is student performance documented, evaluated and compared locally and nationally? How were any unforeseen challenges met? What is seen to be the school's current greatest assets and greatest challenges? Have initial expectations been met? Have goals changed over time and if so, why? How would the school be evaluated by the community? What are any current long-term goals and how might they be met? What other advice could be offered to those desiring to start a school?

5) Generalizability to other inner-city communities: How useful is this school's unique experience of staffing and funding as a model for other disadvantaged communities?

How unique is the commitment of founders and staff? Is

success or failure tied to the charisma or mission of administration? How available might funding be to other communities? Is the convergence of opportunity, effort and mobilization too unique to be duplicated by other communities?

Interviewees were thus prepared for the volume of data to be collected, and were aware of depth of material to be discussed before answering questions. Other words were occasionally used when asking these questions as the case study developed, but a logical flow, which sought to answer the practical operational questions of future prospective administrators, was always highlighted.

### **Researcher's Personal Propositions**

Researcher's personal propositions are very important as they form an underlying screening process for what data is collected and how it is interpreted (Yin, 1994). This author's personally developed theoretical propositions guiding data collection and data analysis are as follows:

1. This educational phenomenon can be duplicated by other disadvantaged communities.
2. This educational phenomenon can be adapted to suit their particular community needs.

As this case study proceeded, analysis of data should confirm or refute these theoretical propositions (Yin, 1994). However, “case studies seek to expand and generalize theories, not enumerate the frequency of their application”, again according to Robert Yin (1994, p.10). Thus the possibility existed that data analysis could refute the researcher’s propositions, leading to the conclusion that this school is a one time happening of non-reproducible favorable circumstances. Such findings would conclude that this community’s experience would thereby be of no use to similar communities facing similar challenges, no matter their resolve or their assembled personnel.

### **Study’s Units of Data Analysis**

Units of analysis are used to evaluate the information a researcher collects (Yin, 1994). The data were analyzed in response to the five research questions. Thus, the following five units of analysis arose from the five original research questions, here stated in short form.

- 1) Why did this community begin the development of a school?
- 2) Why was a Montessori theory chosen and implemented?
- 3) How was a 650 student school implemented and maintained?
- 4) How is the impact on the community evaluated over time?
- 5) How useful is this school as a model for disadvantaged communities?

If this study is to be of any use to other communities, they must have

a similar need for similar educational programs. Thus, two units of analysis were the first two research questions. What was this community's 1) need and why did they choose to meet this educational need with a 2) Montessori theory based program? The third and fourth units of analysis are how was this chosen program of study ultimately 3) implemented and what was the resulting 4) impact on the students and the community? The fifth and final unit of analysis was the following question, of how 5) transferable is this experience to another community?

Using the original research questions as units for analysis of data helped to keep the study focused on issues, not just on masses of information.

### **Logical Linking of Data to Propositions**

In order to analyze the results of the data gathered, logic must link what is collected to the original purpose, or propositions (Yin, 1994). Thus the need, the theoretical answer to the need, and how the need was met through theoretical program implementation had to be considered first. Next, evaluation of the effectiveness of the results of this implementation was necessary. Finally, evaluation proceeded to determine if this implementation was generalizable to meet similar needs in similar

communities. This step by step linking of the data to the researcher's propositions thereby produced a logical and organized chain of thought.

### **Sound Criteria for Interpretation and Analysis of the Findings**

Analysis of all data collected for a case study in a manner that may be useful to the educational community, depends on having sound criteria for assessment and for drawing conclusions (Yin, 1994). Thus, conclusions drawn from the review of the literature seemed to be the most sound and verifiable basis for the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Accordingly, this researcher based the formation of criteria for analysis on the three areas of literature which were reviewed. Any conclusions were weighed against the structure of theories for education laid out by both Paulo Freire and Maria Montessori. Then, the conclusions were also analyzed and evaluated in comparison with the four areas of conclusions drawn from the review of Charter school literature, which were categorized in the following manner.

1. "Market based" reforms
2. Problems encountered
3. "Market test" successes
4. Poverty community successes

Comparison of these findings with those of other researchers were the tools used to present and evaluate the data findings, thereby showing a model which other communities may view clearly. They themselves can then decide what parts they might use, or what parts they might adapt or change, in order to suit their own needs.

### **Researcher's Entry into the Community**

Entry into this school community and access to documents, observations, and interviews with administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and students, were sought from the school Administrators, including the Principal, the Superintendent, the Curriculum Director, and the governing non-profit CEO.

However, this process was made easier because of past professional associations as the Ecology Center Coordinator and teacher for this school from Spring of 1995 to Spring of 1999. The fact that the researcher had participated in community action projects and in prayer groups with members of this community also facilitated smooth entry into the school. Previously built trust and affection relationships, helped to make entry easy and natural during the dissertation research and writing process. These relationships also facilitated relaxed yet extensive interviews. Current

volunteer work by the researcher with a fifth grade class in developing an ecology garden and demonstration area, as well as volunteer work as a Montessori Religious Education teacher also facilitated an open entry.

### **Researcher's Personal Background**

My family background is rural, and has always included direct experience with friends and associates similar to the community this school serves. All four of my grandparents and my parents were homesteading ranchers and farmers in central New Mexico. We lived near the community the school now serves when we moved from our homestead, settling in a small town outside of Phoenix. My parents finally moved to a small farm in southwest Phoenix, so that they could provide educational opportunities for their five children.

I grew up with great love, a strong family, and work ethic values. My closest friends were always my Grandmother, my Mom and Dad, my brothers and sisters, and now my husband and our two daughters. Profound love of nature and an innate form of mysticism always gave my life a sense purpose and a sense of the sacred. My whole life has given me a great compassion for the working poor, and those who are oppressed by the greater society. My skin color and family support allowed me to rise from

my working class roots through the ranks of education. However, temperament and social service jobs have always led me to remain in intimate contact with the disadvantaged.

I first met with the Ruiz family at a community action prayer group in their back yard on August 15, 1989. The Ruiz family reported that more than 30 teens and young adults had recently died from violence in their immediate neighborhood. They, along with others, felt a desperate need for change (Ruiz, E., 1998). Within several months, I agreed to try to find something constructive to do for despairing and at-risk teens of the neighborhood, as alternatives to drugs, crime, and gangs. I was asked to help because it was known that I had founded and now worked with a non-profit bereaved children's support group organization, and that I was pursuing a degree in Educational Counseling (see Appendix C for complete explanatory interview).

I began to try to develop, along with local scientists, engineers, and architects, an educational program of interlocking Sustainable Systems food production, water purification, energy production, and solar adobe building. I myself, took University of Arizona Master Gardener and Master Composter classes (Glenn, 1995), did a Biointensive gardening internship at "Common Ground Foundation" in Northern California (Jeavons, 1990), and



took a summer Biointensive workshop at Ohio University (Rioch, 1994). I learned how to construct solar cookers (Aiello, 1989-1999), as well as sustainable system fish and water-purification ponds (Fitzsimmonds, 1996). I got a professional greenhouse donated (McAlister, 1989-1999) which my husband constructed, and he himself began to develop a sustainable solar adobe construction business, with our consulting solar architect, which they called "Urban Homesteads" (Aiello, 1989-1999).

It was hoped that development of these life-style enhancing skills would build children's self-esteem, independence, ecological understanding, cooperation skills, and economic sense of responsibility. Developing these positive skills and qualities, it was projected, would give real hand-on solutions and hope for the future, to replace negative attitudes and behaviors of hopelessness, anger, and despair. A board of Directors for the development of a hands-on educational ecology skills program was begun, which included all of the above-cited professional consultants.

Over time, it was decided that a school program could best deliver these skills, so in December of 1991, another woman and myself determined to start a pre-school on the Ruiz family property. At that point, I had a serious car wreck, with coma, partial paralysis, speech and coordination problems, so my friend started a small school in March of 1992 on the

property herself. After a miraculous recovery process, I rejoined her the next September, and have worked in this community continuously since then. In the summer of 1992, we both began an AMI Masters program in Montessori Teacher Training, so that we could conduct a quality program. This one room school with only 10 children was the basis of the Charter school grant.

The school was named “Espersanza Montessori Academy”, which means “hope” in Spanish. Hope for the children of the future was the spirit in which all work was undertaken for this school and this community empowerment project. The name of the Charter school was later changed to “The NFL Youth Education Town Academy” only at the insistence of the NFL, when that organization donated one million dollars to the school. But in my heart, the school will always remain Esperanza, hope for the future, hope for the children, hope for the world.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **THE FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

This introduction is all based on information obtained from interviews with Estella Ruiz, Deputy Superintendent for the NFL/YET Academy.

The seeds of this project were planted on December 3, 1988. At that time, the youngest son of the Ruiz family, Reyes Jr., had been on drugs of various kinds for 16 years. He began his addiction process at the age of 12 as a student in a Catholic private school.

At the time, his mother, Estella, was an administrator for a bilingual program at a local public school district, and was finishing up a Masters of Education degree at Northern Arizona University, and his father worked with migrant farm workers for the Catholic Diocese of Phoenix. His older brothers were married and had families, one working in California, and his twin brothers Armando and Fernando working as a State Legislator in the House of Representatives, and as a Politician and Justice of the Peace candidate, respectively. His sister Becky was an administrator working with Head Start, and his youngest sister Rosie was working on a nursing degree. His sister-in-law Letecia was an Assistant Principal at a local high school,

and his other sister-in-law worked for the State of Arizona. Each of these professional skills were to prove invaluable as the school project unfolded.

Within this large and religious Hispanic family, the mother Estella was at her wit's end with fear and despair for her youngest son. She feared that she had permanently lost him to the street crime sub-culture in her poverty inner-city neighborhood. Many of his friends and associates were in jails or involved with theft or gangs, and some had even been shot or killed. He was a good young man, but drugs had control of his life. She turned to prayer and to God with the fervor of a wounded and suffering mother's heart.

After a profound spiritual experience, which is documented fully in a transcribed interview in Appendix C, she and many other parents and community members committed together prayerfully to work on solutions to this neighborhood's problems. Estella's spiritual experience ultimately led to the complete and instantaneous breaking of Reyes Jr.'s addiction, as well as to his loving marriage and complete rehabilitation, into a powerful and effective community worker.

With sincere devotion, this family and community committed to seek community-based action in a way which empowered families to join together as a greater family under God, for the good of each member, seeing

each as a sacred child of God worthy of dignity and respect. A powerful sense of mission developed and grew into an inner fire, a fire to help not only this immediate neighborhood, but others as well. This sense of mission grew into a desire to help others, by being a model for how they and their communities could join together to help both themselves and those in need. The flames of this inner fire even spread into a desire to warm and bring healing into the lives of those in need everywhere, anywhere in the world where there was human suffering. Amazingly, as of Spring 2000, the resultant community development organization has given spiritual leadership classes to thousands of individuals in Africa, Mexico, Europe, and Central and South America (Ruiz, A., 2000).

### **Community and Historic Process**

All information for this section of this document was obtained from interviews with former State Senator, Armando Ruiz, project C.E.O. and his father, Reyes Ruiz, Sr.

Gradually over the next several years, the Ruiz family began a non-profit Community Development Company for implementing a program of spiritual evangelization, education and community service, called “Espiritu Community Development Corporation”. This corporation and its board

applied for an Arizona State Charter school grant, which was granted to open its doors for students in the fall of 1995.

It was discovered that the most important factor for getting this community action project launched was building a consensus of support from the members of the neighborhood, whose lives it hoped to positively impact. This clearly elucidated statement of the mission was vital to help others decide if it could be taken on as their own. Thus the Ruiz families' back yard became the scene of many community meetings. Personal contacts were made in person, door to door, and over the telephone.

This process of gathering interested and committed individuals together was facilitated both by the families' long history of social action involvement, and by their long history of parish association with their local church, St. Catherine's Catholic Church. As news spread of Estella's spiritual experience, even the Bishop for the central Diocese of the State of Arizona convened a commission to investigate both the Ruiz Family and their newly formed rosary prayer group. No fault was sited, and no censure was imposed.

Gradually, a core of people were gathered who had a deep desire for social reform to address the educational, physical and spiritual challenges facing this poverty neighborhood. Issues of job training, basic education,

family support, positive identity and self esteem were seen as key to helping youth, families, and elders, alike.

Developing a mission statement that succinctly outlined their beliefs and goals was a process of refinement and team building. Political and educational administrative skills previously developed were used, but as the scope of goals expanded and more people joined the group, keeping a clear focus became an issue. Long-term strategic plans for self sufficiency took form as a concept for community development called “Project America”, including plans for a medical clinic, elder housing, schools, food and energy production, neighborhood beautification and affordable housing. But it was seen that both intellectual and spiritual growth must precede permanent economic growth, if a mentality of “welfare dependence” and defeatism were to be combated.

It soon became apparent that real community reform could be seen as the work of many years, and that a commitment of at least 10 years was necessary in order for Board members to lay a solid foundation. Nine members was determined to be the best number for decision-making. Tapping into one’s deepest spiritual roots was found to be the key to lasting commitment to work in the face of overwhelming problems. Then starting with education of the neighborhood’s young was determined to be the first

and foundational step. The final education mission statement that was developed is as follows. “Espiritu schools develop principle-based leaders from primarily low-income areas, who aspire to go to college. We develop the 4 parts of their being: spirit, intellect, leadership and body” (Ruiz, A., 2000).

Thus it became clear that the first step was to find money to fund an elementary and secondary school. This researcher and a friend had for the previous two years established a one-room preschool with 10 students using her Montessori classroom materials, essentially on a volunteer basis. As the State of Arizona began in 1994 to consider instituting Charter schools using public tax monies, then Senator Armando Ruiz was instrumental in getting supportive legislation passed through the House and Senate. His sister Becky, with a history of Head Start administration, was also instrumental, on a legislative level, in forming initial guidelines for a State Charter School Board, along with the Arizona State Board of Education, as the two agencies in Arizona capable of reviewing grant applications and funding schools.

Espiritu wrote a charter grant for Montessori-theory based k-12 school with and emphasis on hands-on education, including a Sustainable Systems Ecology Education component. The application was accepted by the Arizona State Charter Board in the spring of 1995, only the third school in



the State to be granted a Charter. The school was scheduled to open on Ruiz family property located on a lot behind their family homes, in time for the fall semester of the same year. This meant only five months' time was available to set up an entire school and its program, as well as to recruit and register an adequate number of students.

A major push was begun to assemble and construct classrooms, office space, sidewalks, landscaping, bathrooms, furniture, desks, books, paper, supplies, curriculum, policies, bus transportation, cafeteria, faculty, administrative and maintenance staff. Only \$20,000 in start-up funds were available, so a major campaign for donations of property and labor was begun.

Reyes Ruiz Sr. had been involved in construction most of his life, and his skills, tools and equipment was invaluable. He literally built himself or supervised mostly volunteer demolition of existing structures, construction and repair of donated or purchased portable class rooms. He also installed all water, heating, cooling, and electrical systems. He reported often working 16- hour days, weekends, and even all night long during this period, despite a long battle with cancer.

“I tried to talk my sons out of starting a school,” he reported. “But now I’m glad they did not listen to me. When I look around me now at what

we've done, it's beautiful, it's a miracle. I am Grandpa to all the kids here now. I pray to hear of some of our students becoming the leaders of a better world, even maybe becoming Congressmen or President of the United States. This is my dream for the future of this school."

### **Philosophical and Theoretical Process**

Information for this section has been taken from interviews with Estella Ruiz, Deputy Superintendent, and her daughter, Becky Ruiz, Curriculum Coordinator.

As previously stated, the roots for the Charter school grant application were from a one-room Montessori classroom and from a Sustainable Systems Ecology education program. Both educational programs were founded on hands-on student involvement, with choice, internal personal discipline, and the full-cycle of student responsibility for projects from inception, through implementation, clean-up, and evaluation.

The Montessori method's emphasis on development of the child's inner spiritual resources, his social conscience, his sensitivity to nature, his aesthetic refinement, and his enjoyment of beauty, also affected the Administration's philosophical choice. Estella Ruiz stated:

The school really started because of that, when I saw how the Montessori method really approached the way we should see children.

And in this day and age we need to change the way we see children. Often we see them as inferior, but Maria Montessori said that we need to see them as God's sacredness. And so all the things in my life began to make sense, and that's the reason that we decided to open up the Charter school. Because I saw a great need for not just those 10 children, but for all the children, especially in this community that is plagued with gangs and violence and drugs, and with kids who no longer care about who they are or what they do. And then they go out there with guns and hurt each other, and hurt their families, and often end up in jail, or dead, or so many terrible things.

So definitely, this is a community that needs to have something happen, and it seems that God is always watching and saying "How can I help?" And so He came to touch my heart and the hearts of my family and those around us. So from there, from those great needs, this project was born (Ruiz, E., 1998).

In fall of 1995, when the Charter grant monies began to be dispersed, a tuition-supported Montessori preschool was started on an adjoining property. It had three classrooms of approximately 25 students each, and was called Esperanza Montessori Academy. Trained AMI and AMS Montessori teachers were hired, and plans were laid for an in-house Montessori teacher-training program for faculty and community members.

After much consideration, the decision was made to extend the educational program all the way up to a high school program. This was seen as risky, since advice was that previously Montessori trained students would be needed to continue the caliber of student performance and high academic standards on into a high school program. It was thought that the program could grow organically, adding higher grades as the students progressed

from year to year. However, immediate need over-rode caution.

Maria Montessori had only outlined a secondary program, called “Erd Kinder” or “Earth Children”. She died before developing an example of this secondary teaching program, but she envisioned a low-stress, sustainable farming environment, where students developed their own businesses, and where social, ethical, and moral issues were explored, as well as the practice of music and of the Arts (Standing, 1984). A reading and discussion curriculum that included the Britannica Great Books, as well as discussion groups of Jacob Brownowski’s great ideas and major issues in human history, was proposed to be added to round out this college preparatory secondary program.

Problems with implementing this innovative college preparatory curriculum occurred both with the student body and with the faculty. Teacher in-service workshops in integrative curriculum were held to try to ease teachers into these concepts, and to develop resources and shared lesson plans. These problems will be discussed in the analysis and conclusions sections of this document

As the school progressed over its current 5 years of operation, more traditional classroom strategies were reverted to, as only a Bachelor’s Degree was required by the State, and many teachers were novice teachers,

or were not State certified. At least 2 teachers had Doctorate degrees, one Veterinary Degree, and many had Masters Degrees, but as with many other Charter schools, high teacher turn-over was a serious problem. Accordingly, it has been seen as essential that teaching faculty buy into the school's mission and philosophy, in order to stay at the school and work with its challenges. Thus a currently-stated philosophy in the Student and Parent Handbook for 1999 says the following:

Since Students learn by example, Espiritu's faculty and staff endeavor to be examples of love and service. We strive to leave lasting impressions of the values of honesty, service, and integrity with our students. Because each student must be able to make informed decisions to live according to high moral principles, we encourage self-discipline, self-respect, respect for others, and growth in learning so the student will be able to deal with everyday issues in the world (p. 1).

### **Implementation and Operational Process.**

Information and data for this section have come from several sources. Interviews with Administrators and the project C.E.O. were used, as were observations and extensive document review. Policies and Procedures Manual and the Student Parent Handbook were also used.

### Overview

The school described in this document has a student population, as of

January 2000, of 650 children, and a waiting list of approximately 100 children. Many large families have several children of all ages who attend this school, and many have cousins or other relatives in attendance. One hundred and fifty children aged 2 to 5 attend Esperanza Montessori Academy, a non-profit tuition supported preschool. Four hundred children grades K-8 attend NFL/YET Elementary Academy. One hundred and fifty students grades 9-12 attend NFL/YET College Preparatory Academy.

A faculty of 23 teachers, 8 Administrators, and 20 support staff make up the personnel pool. The student body is approximately 85% Hispanic American, 10% Anglo American, and 5% African American. Staff ratios are similar, with teaching faculty 60% Hispanic American, 30% Anglo American and 10% African American.

The basic subject matter taught is mandated by the Arizona State Board of Education, with guidelines provided in the areas of reading, writing, math, Social Studies, and Science. Standardized tests drive a traditional curriculum in higher grades (those with no Montessori teachers) to master required skills. Special Education and extensive student counseling services are offered on a consultant contract basis in conjunction with the State Board of Education. A competitive Physical Education sports program is offered students, with teams for football soccer, and basketball.

## Budget

Financial support for this school comes mainly from taxpayers public educational funds in the form of “average daily attendance” on a per student basis. The initial Charter grant was for five years, with renewal contingent on successful review and oversight from the State board. The yearly total per high school student allowable is \$4,800 and the total per elementary student is \$4,000. Higher amounts for older students are allowed to cover additional costs of science laboratory programs, career and counseling programs, physical education and additional subject matter staffing.

Additional funds have been solicited from State and Federal grants, private donations, and community and school fundraisers. Initial start-up costs were augmented by the \$20,000 Charter grant. A \$1,000,000 grant from the Super Bowl profits, plus matching City of Phoenix funds in 1995, was used exclusively to build and equip a computer lab, radio station, and television studio. Additional classroom space, offices, bathrooms, a sports field, and a multi-purpose assembly room have been adapted to house the self-contained high school.

Family ownership of the land on which the school is located, 4848 South 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Phoenix, necessitated and allowed for private personal loans for sidewalk and slab construction costs, landscaping, drinking

fountain installation, bathroom construction, cafeteria plumbing and equipment installation. Ownership of these facilities is thereby retained by the Ruiz family, even in the event of the failure of the school and the revocation of the State Charter grant.

From a total yearly budget of approximately \$2,000,000, approximately 55% goes to salaries for faculty, administration, clerical, maintenance and support staff, including consultants, Special Education, ESL, Physical Education, Music, and specialty staff. Approximately 20% goes for fixed overhead costs, such as utilities, water, insurance, computers, copying, furniture, and maintenance repairs. The final 25% goes for school supplies, such as books, paper products, teacher training, and curriculum development materials.

### Administration

Administrative positions are held by the CEO/Servant Leader, the Deputy Superintendent/Lead Facilitator, PreK-3 Principal/Curriculum Facilitator, PreK-3 Program Assistant, 4-12 Principal/Facilitator, 4-12 Parent/Student Advocate, Health Coordinator, and Administrative Clerk.

The school is a division of a non-profit Community Development Corporation, and has a 501(c) 3 tax exempt status. The Corporation oversees



four departments in the following four areas: Intellectual, Spiritual, Leadership, and Social Action.

- 1) Education, with the NFL/YET Academy of 650 K-12 students, Los Milagros Academy of 125 K-10 students in Safford, Arizona,
- 2) Spiritual Leadership Development courses, in personal responsibility, conflict resolution, negotiation skills, partnership building, and public speaking, and spiritual value formation,
- 3) Technology and Communications programs operating from their computer, radio and television station to develop skills and values,
- 4) Community Development adult education classes, affordable housing, community college Advanced Placement high school credits, and future community development programs.

A Board of Directors, composed of 9 community members, functions as the ultimate decision-makers on policy issues which are then carried out by the school administration. They are called “Elders” and are chosen and respected for their wisdom and loving hearts, above any professional competencies. Within the organization, the administrators are referred to as “servant leaders” in honor of the concept that they are to keep their values of service, rather than personal power or private agendas.

Board members are responsible for decisions making, strategic planning, program financing, and organizational evaluation. Administrators are responsible for short term planning, program facilitation, teacher retention, supervision and in-service training, student discipline, and day to day operations of the school.

Hiring and firing of faculty members, retention of maintenance and repair staffing, cafeteria programming, bussing and school event transportation, insurance, taxes, meeting payroll, State and City licensing, student recruitment, public and community relations, Health Department and Special Education programming, utility and equipment maintenance, Board of Education compliance and reporting, and over-all budgeting, are all included in administrative day-to-day operational duties.

### Orientation, School Calendar, and Placement Testing

The student's first contact with the school is meant to be warm and welcoming. Parents and children both attend an introductory interview and a family tour. They submit previous report cards, transcripts, test scores, birth certificates, immunization records, and writing samples and portfolios of previous work, if available. Mandatory student insurance is required, at the price of \$7.50 per year, which covers students during school hours,

sports, and field trips. A licensed R.N. provides prescribed medication dispensation and informal health care education and counseling, as well as health care, vision and hearing screening.

Academic assessments are administered (see Assessment section). After assignment to a teacher, a welcoming letter is sent home welcoming each student into the Espiritu family. A continuing student is assigned to each new student to mentor and “buddy” for one month.

School hours are from 8:00am to 3:00pm. The school has office hours from 7:00 am to 5:30, however, in order to accommodate their majority of dual full-time working parents and single parent families. An after school program of sports, arts, and study hall is offered until 6:00 p.m.

The school year begins the second week in August with a Parent Orientation, offered at 6:00pm each evening for returning pre K-5 students, 6-12 students, and new students in both age groups. This is called “Spirit Week” and focuses on introductory activities to build a sense of community, with early dismissal all week.

The school year extends from the second week in August until the first week in June. The year is divided into 4 quarters, and older students change required classes, and make differing choices on electives at the beginning of each quarter.

Teacher in-service training meetings occur during the week-long break between quarters. Parent-teacher conferences occur after the first and third quarters, and can be scheduled at any other time when requested or deemed necessary by teachers. Second and fourth quarter report cards are mailed home. Kindergarten graduation, 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation and high school graduation occur on three successive nights.

### Grading, Discipline and Behavioral Standards

Parents and students are given a handbook of school policies, and are required to go over requirements verbally during the initial interview. They are both required to sign a form stating that they have received a copy of the handbook, understand all parts of it, and agree to be governed by the policies and standards contained therein. This is then considered a legal and binding document which protects both the school and the student's family.

K-5 students are educated in self-contained classrooms with a home-room teacher. Grades 6-8 students also have a home-room teacher but change classes for math, science, humanities, and social science. ESL classroom pullouts do not begin until October. Graduation requirements from the secondary school requires 22 credits, with one half credit earned each time a student completes a class with a passing grade.

Safety is a vital issue in this high crime area, and thus the campus is closed, with no students allowed to leave during school hours of operation. Serious disciplinary action, including expulsion, may follow infractions of this rule.

Grading policies of “A” to “F” are used, with 4 points given an “A”, and GPA and class rank are computed accordingly. Academic deficiencies require correction through additional summer school or approved correspondence course work. Academic probation is assessed on students who have failed two or more failing grades in a grading quarter, and failure to improve performance may result in suspension or expulsion.

Homework policies of 30 minutes per day for grades K-3 are required, and 60 minutes per day for grades 4-12 are required. Fifteen minutes of daily reading for grades K-8 is required, and 30 minutes of daily reading is required for grades 9-12, in addition to homework requirements. Missed homework assignments results in the requirement of a 45-minute detention period after school hours to complete work. The disciplinary consequences of more serious infractions, such as cheating, forgeries, tardiness, and absences may include parental notification and possible suspension.

Regular and prompt attendance is required. Average daily attendance is used to calculate the school’s budget, so even greater attention is paid to

regular attendance. Absences of 5 days or more in a quarter may result in loss of credit for that class. Tardiness interferes with the student's education, and penalizes other students by delays. Excessive tardiness can be cause for suspension or expulsion.

Expulsion or suspension are immediate for tobacco, alcohol or drug use, as well as potential for fighting, spreading rumors, defacing or damaging property, stealing, foul language, sexual contact, or verbal abuse of other students. Use or threat of use of weapons of any type merits police contact and immediate dismissal.

Appropriate and respectful behavior is expected on school buses, which run to and from school within a 5-mile radius. Courteous behavior is required in the school cafeteria, where the price of lunch is \$2.00, with free or reduced prices available. Behavior at school dances is expected to be reasonable, respectful, and modest, as it is on field trips. General obedience and respectful, courteous behavior is expected at all times, and students are asked to be aware that their good behavior is a reflection on their belonging to a school that values and cherishes each person.

### Evaluation and Assessment

Teacher lesson plans are submitted to the Curriculum Coordinator for

each quarter, and feed back and support for teaching techniques and every day classroom activities are given during faculty team meetings for K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 level groupings. Multiple intelligences and higher order critical thinking skills are accessed and developed at all times during the learning, application and evaluation stages.

Authentic assessment that uses modalities other than testing is sought. Portfolios of student writing, journals, poetry, artwork, models, diagrams and graphs are maintained and shared during parent conferences. Student programs, speeches, dramas, and performances are fostered, as well as computer designs and programs. Group work and team projects are encouraged. Students are encouraged to critique themselves and others, as part of developing and using higher order thinking skills of evaluation, analysis and synthesis.

Field trips, such as to the Science Center, Art Museum, Earth Day, Botanical Gardens or Planetarium, are used as tools to summarize theme units or as final integrative projects. Student reports, evaluations, synthesizing projects are then used in assessment portfolios.

Placement testing and Criterion-referenced pre-testing take place during the second week of school, after a period of personal adjustment and comfort. Criterion-referenced teacher-administered Brigance scores are

used for K-2, and STAR scores are used for 2-12 grades. These instruments are developed to be culturally and language sensitive, and are approved for placement assessment by the Arizona State Board of Education. Improvement of one to two grade levels is sought for students below, at or above grade levels. Post-tests to determine advancement are administered during the last month of school, and Stanford 9 Norm-referenced tests are administered in April during the week before Spring Vacation.

State standards and requirements for each grade level in skill acquisition of reading, writing, science, social studies and math skills are built into the Montessori curriculum, integrated curriculum, and ESL programs. Passage of the State-mandated “AIMS”, or Arizona Instrument for Minimum Standards test, is a graduation requirement.

### **Special Programs**

NFL/YET has developed eight programs that are fairly unique for its student body. It can be seen by the nature of these programs that the NFL/YET Academy strives to provide students and their families with not only academic support, but with emotional, physical and spiritual support as well. Hands-on activities which allow student initiative, leadership development, critical problem solving, and solution participation are



emphasized. Safety for each student within a loving family environment, are the hallmark values of each program.

1) Service to family, community, and society is a key value that students are expected to develop at NFL/YET Academy. Therefore students in the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades are required to perform 30 hours of community service per year in order to graduate. These hours can be done as part of special projects for the whole class, or may be done individually with hospitals, churches, or charity organizations. Exposure to this service will build compassion, character, and leadership in community organizations.

2) Peer tutoring is designed to give special attention to students in special areas of academic difficulty, while fostering mentoring abilities in more advanced students. This program takes place within grade level, but higher grade-level students also are used to help lower grade level students with study skills and academic content, with emphasis on reading and math. Reinforcement of student's own skills is thereby accomplished, and service hours may be earned by high school students. Volunteer tutors from the community may also be used to help students with special needs, or to augment ESL student's experiences. Parents and elderly volunteers are

especially sought for these tutorial jobs.

3) Adopt an Area program encourages students and homeroom teachers to be responsible for the cleanliness and beautification of the school campus. Recycling of cans and papers is part of the program, and recycled lunch scraps have been given to school animals in the Ecology Center. Planting grass trees, flowers, butterfly gardens, shoveling ornamental gravel and rocks outside classroom space has been done, as well as general cleaning, litter removal, sweeping and watering. Pride and a sense of ownership result.

4) Student Court is a program to refer school discipline infractions to student peers. An understanding of the need for laws, personal responsibility and social order is an intended outcome. Two students from each grade, starting at the fifth, comprise the court, which meets each week to develop policy and adjudicate infractions. A student court retreat is used at the beginning of the year to help students understand the issues and responsibilities of justice and building appropriate internal self-discipline.

5) Television and Radio Broadcasting Technologies is an emerging

program. The NFL built the school a state of the art commuter center which is used by students, their families and community members to learn computer technology and programming. Classes to learn and improve English skills in adult learners are also offered in the evening. The NFL also built and equipped a Television and a Radio station to be used by students to learn video and film-making academic and job skills. This program is also connected with “Spirit University” adult education classes that teach English, computers, and job application skills. Junior college credit for community college classes is sought from the local South Mountain Community College system.

6) Shabulia Rallies are held on Friday afternoons to encourage self-esteem, positive self-image, and school spirit. Topics covered may range from anti-gang programs, anti-drug and alcohol programs, to Native American story tellers, Aztec dancers and musicians, school elections and sports team support. Humor and fun are emphasized, but messages of respect and person accountability are always included in the gatherings. They are grouped for primary, elementary, and high school themes.

7) The Sustainable Systems Ecology program is a hands-on building

program which teaches students how, on a household scale, to construct, maintain and use these seven interlocking Sustainable Systems; Solar Adobe home construction, Bio-intensive Gardening, Organic Composting, Fish Farming, Natural Water Purification, Small Animal Husbandry, and Energy production. Nutrition, food preparation, and preservation are also taught. This program has three main goals, each of which gives students hope for the future. It teaches vital lifestyle-empowering job skills which could allow individuals to take care of all of the basic human need for affordable housing, food production, water purification, and energy production. It teaches science skills to provide immediate local and moral solutions for the global environmental and ecological crises, as well. But it also teaches, through skill acquisition and communal work, the vital values of self-esteem, personal responsibility, cooperation, community building, and love and respect for Nature or God (see Appendix B for curriculum).

8) Parent and Student Advocacy helps students and their families with addressing problems unique to them, such as emotional, financial or social services needs. The program also takes students on trips to job sites, Junior Colleges, medical, legal or technical training centers, etc, to expand student's horizons. This service offers group classes encouraging health

care, grooming, and manners, as well as personal organizational skills and academic goal-setting.

In summary, it can be seen that NFL/YET Academy seeks to provide a nurturing yet rigorous academic environment. It seeks to provide culturally appropriate and sensitive programming, which includes ESL classes, history, culture, music and dance experiences, especially for students with Hispanic as well as other ethnic backgrounds.

It seeks to provide a safe environment where family values and a sense of community responsibility are stressed. It seeks to build student character through the independent exercise of hand-on projects that students themselves plan, implement, and evaluate. It seeks to build job-related skills and entrepreneurial opportunities. It seeks to provide integrative curriculum exercises that link all course work into interrelated systems, providing a comprehensive, global view of life.

Lastly, NFL/YET Academy seeks to build critical problem solving skills for students, as well as higher order thinking skills, within the framework of successful and satisfying projects. It truly seeks to give students an education that can be used to nurture them into becoming strong, independent, and yet responsible, loving members of a global human family.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS**

#### **Criteria for Analysis**

As outlined in the methodology, sound criteria for interpretation and analysis of these findings must be based on three areas of information drawn from the review of the literature. These three areas of educational information are as follows:

- 1) Educational theories of Paulo Freire
- 2) Educational theories of Maria Montessori
- 3) Charter school literature

Charter school literature review revealed four themes over the chronological span of time covering their existence in American Education since 1992. These will be compared to the school's development:

- a. "Market based" reforms
- b. Problems encountered
- c. "Market test" successes
- d. Poverty community successes

## **Analysis Based on Paulo Freire's Educational Theory**

Paulo Freire postulated that social reform that improves the lives of oppressed peoples must be based on education which raises the political consciousness of these peoples, so that 1) they have the tools to critically understand the structure of power. Then, 2) they must be able to use that power to improve their own lives and the lives of their children into the future. The values that this education must be based on are 3) hope for the future, and 4) ultimately on love, so that empowerment does not degenerate into oppressed people just changing places, so that they in turn, now become oppressors themselves.

The history of this project was presented in such detail to demonstrate that the impetus for change came from within the community itself. Then committed and competent people arose to try to bring about positive change and improvement in the lives of themselves, their families, and the neighborhood at large.

However, change and growth in critical consciousness occurred over time, as demonstrated by the following interview. This analysis was given at the close of the fifth year of operation, by Armando Ruiz, project C.E.O. and former State Senator.

We saw that education for the children was vital in order to change the roots of poverty here, but we also saw that raising the intellectual

development of adults was necessary too, for them to change their own dependency or “welfare mentality”

We increasingly saw the need to find ways to develop wealth right here, with affordable housing, for example, which allows the profit margin from the sale of locally built homes to remain here, and not be siphoned off by outside developers. This calls for programs of entrepreneurship education for adults, as well as English literacy and technology (Ruiz, A., 2000).

Changes in consciousness may have occurred in other areas, also.

Faculty turnover was a serious problem, especially during the first two years of operation, and especially in the upper grades. Strong, creative teachers were stressed by lack of resources and lack of experience with the population of students. Changes in administrative policies over the initial school year, placed additional stress on less adaptable teachers. Some teachers felt that they were not consulted before changes were instituted, and dissatisfaction occurred. Pressures from parental demands also caused stress. One former teacher reported:

I came out of a sense of mission to help individual students. But over time, I spent so much time, money, and devotion in class that I felt drained. Administrative changes affecting the teachers and students were made with no input from the teachers who were in the classroom day after day.

However, the next school year a consultant was hired to improve faculty and Administration communications and relationships. Efforts were



reported to implement clearer and more responsive conflict resolution. The fact that this project was conceived and carried out in prayer, ultimately provided a cure for seeing any one group's needs as more important than those of others. The sense that God is the Father of all, not just one group or the other, finally provided correction for exclusion of anyone. The personal realization of past mistakes over time, followed by sincere efforts to correct them, modeled the tolerance and forgiveness contained in a prayerful approach toward life which is espoused by the school's Administration.

“Grandpa Ruiz” added some common sense wisdom to this situation, according to his family.

If you don't want anyone to criticize you, just sit on your hands at home and do nothing. But if you go out and try to do anything important in the world, you can expect criticism from everyone. So try to do what you know you should, and don't worry about what people say about you (Ruiz, E., 1998).

In spite of failures and struggles for survival, these conflicts can even be seen as proof that NFL/YET Academy does strive to incorporate the development of a critical consciousness for understanding the sources of both power and failure in society. Student Court is an example of such a program.

The individual student's own ability to use higher order thinking skills to critically analyze, evaluate and formulate ideas as a source of personal

and collective power to effect change, is woven throughout the whole school curriculum. Integrated curriculum and authentic assessment techniques emphasize these critical thinking skills.

Collective action used toward responsible ends is an integrative theme that runs throughout pre to high school programs. Adopt an Area, Montessori Peace curriculum, and Ecology programs are all such examples.

All of the school's programs are under-girded with the values of hope for the future, and are based on love for self, others, nature and society. Peer tutoring, parent-student advocacy, and "Shebulia" rallies foster these values.

Thus Freire's theories of education seem to be upheld by both some of the positive and by some of the negative experiences of NFL/YET during its initial stages of development. Oppression of this group by the dominant society may have resulted in temporary similar oppression of school employees while administrative systems were developing. Self-correction may indicate growth in understanding the abuses of personal and financial power.

However, it is of importance to note that Freire's central theme, that education should be seen as having deep relevance to the student's family, community and political life, is embodied by the very inception and implementation of this school. The communal social action of this

oppressed minority community to improve itself by mobilizing people and resources, using local political agencies, speaks of a significant gradual upgrade in political consciousness.

### **Analysis based on Montessori's Educational Theory**

Montessori theory of education states that the period of the “absorbent mind” from 3 to 7 years of age is the period of the greatest intellectual growth in human beings. Children must be given real activities with real consequences. She also stated that use of hand-eye coordination and large-muscle movement were vital for optimal human development. She stated that the “child is father to the man” and that the “child holds the key to world peace”.

NFL/YET Academy sponsors a 150 student Montessori preschool on the same campus as the elementary and secondary schools. Previously trained Montessori students then move into the grade school, both with their group identity retained, and with their Montessori training continued as they progress. Esperanza Montessori Academy is financed by parental tuition, which is a burden to many in this poverty community. Yet the realization that early childhood experiences are vitally foundational for intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual growth underlies the commitment to the

preschool's survival. Esperanza is seen as feeding well-trained, happy, and emotionally balanced students into a continually improving educational program for the upper grades.

A volunteer-staffed Montessori religious education program, called The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, is offered as an option to parents who desire it for their 3 to 6 aged children. This option further stresses the understanding of Montessori's emphasis on the role of early education in values formation. The Catechesis is reported to be a beautiful and invaluable program in character development by many parents.

All aspects of the curriculum at NFL/YET Academy strives to provide many hands-on learning experiences, with many examples of compliance with a belief that real learning can be shown by acting out real changes in behavior. For example, the values of team-playing and community-building are supported by inter-mural sports. Students are also hired to perform clerical jobs on campus and working internships are sought, such as a two-year internship placement for Ecology students with an Arizona State University Bio-intensive gardening project.

Montessori's theory that adolescents should develop business ventures is supported by future plans for student development of community video, television and radio station enterprises. Montessori's belief that world peace

must begin with the child is supported by a “Peace Curriculum”, which includes many creative exercises in multicultural social studies, history and geography. Also, units are done on techniques of conflict resolution, verbalization of feelings and active listening. Attention is paid to manners, social graces, and respect for elders.

On a more personal level, this emphasis on peace was perhaps borne out by observation of student’s relationships with each other on the campus. It seemed to this researcher that students who had 5 years of Montessori instruction were more coordinated and directed in their actions than many of their student peers. A peaceful, cheerful, secure, mannerly, helpful and genuinely friendly atmosphere could be observed over time in the classroom, cafeteria, and playground. Of course many other variables could explain these differences, such as organization, classroom materials, teacher personality, student temperament or family characteristics. But this difference was observed consistently with 60 students over a period of months. At least it may be postulated that the development of a Montessori program within this poverty community bears close observation over time. However, only with careful professional observation over time can it be seen if any significant differences in academic achievement, self-esteem and social responsibility can be documented.

## **Analysis Based on Charter School Literature**

The development of this school can be seen as following the same chronological changes that were documented for the Charter school movement in the United States. Initial high hopes for quick and effective reform were replaced by a growing awareness of the enormity of problems connected with constructing, planning, implementing, maintaining and evaluating an innovative and effective Charter school. These problems were societal and personal as well as administrative and financial, and it seemed that perhaps the whole movement was doomed to failure.

Finally, however, after a few difficult years, successes and positive change could be seen, especially in communities with special needs not being met by the greater educational system. Those programs gifted with committed and inspiring leadership in poverty communities especially seemed to show promise. The following analysis endeavors to show how NFL/YET Academy followed this seemingly national pattern of initial hopes, subsequent problems, to eventual tentative successes. Thus, program development seemed to follow the pattern outlined in the review of the Charter school literature.

“Market based” reforms were hoped to develop from the Arizona State Charter school legislation. Arizona, like other States, hoped to gain

positive school reform from competition. The goal was to use community resources to develop innovative programs, improve fiscal efficiency, improve student performance, improve student discipline, and to improve teaching strategies. Charter grants were seen as a way to stimulate change for the better, as a way to balance “monopolistic” practices that were seen as perhaps stifling and hampering many public schools.

However, rather than hoped-for positive changes, early and serious problems were encountered. Chaos and inefficiency may have been the initial result. Reports mounted, detailing lack of consistent State oversight, lack of administrative expertise, lack of funding for buildings, lack of libraries, laboratories, music programs, sports facilities, cafeterias, and even lack of books, paper and pencils. Public school teachers and administrators felt threatened or even attacked financially as well as programmatically. It seemed as if the promise of improvements from innovation to be stimulated by Charter schools, was instead degenerating into the dismantling and waste of very good existing programs.

Eventually, after several years, however, some “market test” successes were finally being reported. Some Charter schools were apparently fulfilling a societal need, and finally were running more smoothly than at first. Some cooperation, in the place of fear and resentment, was

taking place with local public schools. Charter schools were seen as offering expanded programs for certain special needs students, instead of being hostile competitors. Innovation and improvement in the delivery of instruction, could be seen in some instances, especially in the areas of the Arts, business and technologies.

Poverty school successes, especially within previously under-served populations, began to be reported. These schools in particular were seen to fulfill a need in minority communities, which were otherwise being under-served and overlooked. Committed and charismatic leaders arose who were willing and able to rally support and resources around their causes. Self-esteem, cultural identity and mother tongues were preserved, especially in Hispanic American communities, who felt their children were unsafe and that their family values were being undermined by the dominant society.

This very same pattern could be observed in the NFL/YET Academy. Initial glowing expectations of instant success and community support were instead followed by allegations of inefficiency. The school was accused of not being able to carry out initial promises of educational programs. Budgeting of scant resources was a problem, and some programs had to be cut back, such as library, music, fine arts, and field trips. Funding to finish the last stages of a yearlong student Ecology sustainable/affordable home-



building demonstration project had to be cut. Community infighting and teacher dissatisfaction resulted.

Nepotism in NFL/YET Academy's administrative, faculty, and staff hiring policies were even charged by a national news publication. This practice could never be tolerated in a public school, and yet public funds were being used to hire staff in this school. However, Charter schools could have free choice in programming and hiring, as long as State guidelines for material to be covered were complied with, and as long as students scored well on standardized tests. Family businesses were the norm in this community, so it was logical that this could be a family run school, so long as community members still chose to send their children to the school.

Finally, during the third and fourth years of operation, it seemed that many staffing and administrative difficulties were being worked out, and policies were in place which would assure smoother operations. A sense of student body belonging and internal self-discipline was developing among returning students. Two high school students who have attended the school since its first year reported the following:

We love the Administration and we know they are trying to help us. But sometimes it is so disorganized. We have had really great teachers, but some kids are here for a free ride, so they think its smart not to listen or to give teachers crap. We've had good teachers, and some of them have been really good role models, and we know they have tried to help us. We'll go here next year, because we believe things will improve.

Hiring and staffing issues were streamlined, and teacher profiles and training issues clarified. Funding had stabilized, as initial capital outlay for buildings and landscaping had already been made. Now the infrastructure of refining curriculum and beginning new curriculum programs could begin. More students are graduating from the high school, growing from one the first year to a whole class of 25 the fourth year.

Also, it is reported by Administration that relationships with local public schools are improving. “Uniforms are even being instituted there as a student discipline measure.” At NFL/YET, there is even a current waiting list of over 100 for prospective students (Ruiz, A. 2000).

Happily, one parent reported that she believed:

Our six children were safe and cared for, and they were getting a real education, especially my younger son, who has in the in the Montessori program for five years. He is so gentle and sweet.

Another parent and community member reported the following:

It is so great to drive by the school, right here where we have lived for years, and to see the changes. A beautiful school, trees, a field, grass, kids laughing and playing. I remember when this was just a junkyard. It makes me feel so proud to know that we were part of this, and that it was done right here with friends and neighbors. And to see it all happen was wonderful.

A veteran public school teacher who have been at been teaching at NFL/YET Academy four years reported that:

The mission to provide a special place for students is what keeps me here. It is a hard community to work in, and we need resources, but I have seen many talented teachers drawn here because of the mission. I have been in public education for 25 years, and I was quite excited to be able to get Montessori training here at the school when I was hired. It has not happened yet, but I keep believing it will finally come about. We just have to all keep working for the kids.

Another third year teacher reported :

I just signed my contract for next year. I hoped to get a bigger raise, but my son is happy with his Montessori teachers, so that makes up a lot. It also makes a lot of difference to me that we have so much support from our parents here.

The project C.E.O. stated that changes for the better coincided with an internal change of policy:

We stopped trying to be all things to all people. We *are* a Hispanic family in a poverty community. We understand the issues involved with surviving in this environment because we've done it. ESL and other language and culture retention issues are our own issues. As far as the Nepotism charge, Hispanic families do stick together and this provides strength and stability in hard circumstances. Our parents at the school know this and respect it, because it is how they have survived, too. The sense of roots is very important for children growing up, and we believe we provide a model for families who can stand together to fight poverty, prejudice and injustice. We learn to love other people and God from families. Families are sacred. Our school is a Family (Ruiz, A., 2000)

The recurrent themes of hope for the future and the love shared with all, as exhibited among students, teachers and families, are apparently the great strengths for this school. Belief in these values gives it a growing future. It is worthy of note that by May 2000, a Priest from Africa, a music

director from Chili, and four vibrant Carmelite nuns from Mexico have all come to live, for varying periods of time, on Espiritu Community Development property adjoining the school property. They have all come to both learn and to serve this community, and they have all committed to strive to help bring long-term service plans into fruition.

Administration, Board, and faculty strategic planning includes an extensive written evaluation and assessment of past failures and strengths. This document was conceived in an effort to assure that future policies and procedures stay on target with the original mission, yet expand rationally to meet future goals of improvement and empowerment.

In summary, it appears that NFL/YET Academy's educational experiences could be said to be supportive of both the educational theories of Paulo Frerie and those of Maria Montessori. Education here seems to have provided the tools for growing social and political consciousness, which resulted in positive empowerment for positive social change. It also could be said that NFL/YET Academy's experiences seem to follow a national chronological pattern gleaned from the available literature on Charter school reform. Hoped-for reforms stimulated by use of public monies for free market educational competition, seem to have borne some viable and potentially lasting fruit at this school.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Summary**

NFL/YET Academy is a real life example of the power of the human spirit to rise to great and overwhelming challenges. In the face of poverty, gangs, crime, prejudice, death, and despair, a community school has arisen across the street from crack houses, on a lot that formerly was covered with rusting car bodies and mountains of old tires. In the place of those symbols of lost dreams, the glowing faces of children now smile at the future.

This transformation of decay and garbage into life and growth has been no less that miraculous. But it has been a miracle performed by human thought, human sweat, human tears and human perseverance.

This project began 12 years ago out of great pain and need in an inner-city neighborhood hovering on the brink of moral destruction. Families huddled together in prayer, searching for solutions, and out of their communal ideals and hopes for their children, the energy to rise, to plan, to finance and to build this school was gleaned.

Then, when problems and criticisms again threatened to crush the fledgling school, this same group of individuals rose in exhaustion, again to

draw strength from prayer and from each other. Again, they persevered past this crisis to allow the school not only to survive, but at the current point in time, to instead truly thrive. This school is indeed a tribute to the individuals involved, but it also is a tribute to the power of love and of prayer.

This process has been outlined in chronological order, and the details of the resultant preschool through high school program have been presented. Both successes and failures have been noted. But to document the impact of this school experience on well over 1,000 children and their families is a task which can not realistically be undertaken.

Education is a seed that once sown, takes a lifetime for its silent roots under the earth to bear the tree, its branches, its foliage, and finally, to bear its fruit. And then, who knows where *that* fruit's own seeds may then ultimately be planted, only to grow, to multiply, and to nourish the whole earth?

To be an educator is truly to be involved in a blessed profession, but patience and selfless giving are the virtues called for in this profession. For the fruits of education belong not to the sower, but to the future. The real fruits belong not to the educator, but they belong only to the child himself, and to the adult he eventually becomes.

## **Conclusions**

This study was begun with the stated purpose of documenting the educational programs of the Esperanza Montessori Academy and the NFL/YEY Academy, in the hope they could be used as a model to be emulated by other disadvantaged communities. The questions to be answered were five:

1. Why did this community begin to develop a school?
2. Why did they choose a Montessori theory of education?
3. How did they implement and maintain a 650 student school?
4. How do they evaluate the impact of their school over time?
5. How useful is this school for a model for other communities?

First, a school was developed in an attempt to address very serious social problems within this poverty, minority, inner-city community. It was developed to offer hope for the future for its children, and to offer a real, concrete means of building a better future.

Second, a Montessori theory of education was embraced because it was believed that its high academic standards and its proven international track record for success, combined with its hands-on learning methods, would work best to provide sound education for success in this community.

Third, all the work and successes and failures, were outlined in detail to describe how the Administration developed, maintained and financed its

preschool through high school program. This was done with questions in mind which future Administrators might need answered in order to begin their own school.

Fourth, the impact on the local community and its students seems to be a valuable one that families desire. Long waiting lists of parents hoping to enroll their children in this alternative school instead of local public schools, even after five years of operation, speaks positively of the programs and values which this school offers to its students.

Fifth, many other individuals nationwide have visited this school, and it cannot be known exactly what impact their observations may have on other students over time. Parts of this program may be adapted to suit their needs, now or in the future. But the school's *existence* alone does offer hope, that it is indeed possible for people to help themselves and their children to improve their lives through education in the future.

The educators who have assembled here are indeed special people and their hard work and devotion has indeed been heroic. But in each community, great strength and resources are hidden. Similar church, civic, and service organizations are resources which can be tapped in most area for volunteers and support. Organizations like "Teach for America" and "Americor", have sent staff to the school, and their services are available for



staffing and consultation for other programs nationwide.

It is true, that having a former legislator on the Board did open up funding opportunities. But Universities and local governments everywhere have people and resources that can serve the same function.

What this community's experience has shown is that what *is* vitally needed to begin such a community empowerment school is people of good will who can:

- 1) Support a common mission statement
- 2) Commit to work long-term together
- 3) Submit their egos to the common good, and
- 4) Engage in open communication, conflict resolution and arbitration.

These people of good will are everywhere, in every community. Leadership that can galvanize them into action is also in every community. And finally, a motivating *mission*, that is clearly articulated and strictly adhered to, is also available to every community.

The willingness to work long and hard for the sake of their children's futures lies in the hearts of most parents and grandparents. The belief that they *can* be successful is what must be found. Perhaps the greatest gift of NFL/YET Academy is that it is living proof that success *is* possible.

## **Recommendations**

Of course, more studies need to be done with Charter schools of this kind, to examine what may succeed, and what needs to be eliminated. But from the experience of this school, it emerges that everyone involved can benefit from undertakings that proceed with genuine respect and love for students, parents, faculty, staff and administrators as a community.

Any future Administrator who would embark on beginning their own school must beware of three potential pitfalls, which seem to bedevil not only NFL/YET Academy, but other Charter schools as well. The first is financial. Those undertaking a school must be willing to assume personal debt to finance costs, as well as to assume legal corporate liability. Awareness of enormous start-up costs and operational costs calls for willingness to solicit donations and creative financing. Thus, formation of a tax-exempt 501(c) 3 non-profit Corporation for all school finances and grant applications would be recommended. This process can protect Administrators from financial disaster by allowing corporate legal liability and responsibility, rather than personal financial and legal liability.

The second recommendation involves faculty retention. Extreme care must be taken in initial hiring, first to match realistic expectations with the school population, and then to provide emotional support for faculty as they

encounter school-related challenges. Adequate in-service training must be provided, and faculty input must be genuinely sought and implemented when planning and carrying out curriculum design and classroom management. A school rises or falls on what happens in the classroom with each individual student moment by moment. Thus faculty must always be valued as the precious commodity which they are.

The last recommendation for future Administrators would be to deeply consider their mission. The mission statement must be clearly stated and must often be reviewed for integrity. What is espoused must be scrupulously carried out day by day on all levels of operation, and with all parents, students, faculty and support staff. In order for a school to offer the best program for students, all values must be lived constantly, without exception.

There are three other recommendations in which I heartily believe. I fully realize that they sound grandiose and impractical, but I believe in miracles, miracles which *can* occur over time and with great work. I therefore recommend more research and resources be devoted to:

- 1) Future programs which utilize the internationally proven Montessori education materials and methods to provide quality education for economically deprived populations world-wide.

2) Sustainable Systems education programs which teach families how to do their own affordable housing construction, water purification, food production, and energy production for economically deprived populations world-wide. (see Appendix B)

3) Culturally appropriate religious education programs which teach values to young children 3 to 6 years using Montessori principles for economically deprived populations world-wide.

### **Personal Reflections**

It has been a privilege to be a part of the development of this community and this school. I do believe that this example *can* be used by other schools, should they so choose. The following story proves to me that seeds from the NFL/YET Academy *can* be transplanted elsewhere.

A public school elementary principal from Bakersfield, California, Dr. Guadalupe Rivas, came to look at this school in the spring of 1999. She stayed with me for several days, as she contemplated if she and her family and colleagues had the strength and the resources to start a similar school. She hoped to help raise the educational standards and the conditions for children in her similarly depressed Hispanic community. She spoke at great length with Administrators here about funding and organizational details.

She toured the facilities, spoke with teachers and students, and observed the programming. She especially shared my delight in my Ecology garden.

In the evenings, we spoke excitedly about how she could apply for a California State Charter grant, and how she could acquire some currently wasted slum property. She outlined staffing, ESL language programming, and she planned a curriculum theory. In the days she was here, many tears were shed over how wonderful it would be to be able help the children and their families in her educational community to help themselves.

She crafted a mission statement, and named her concept “The Semia Verde School”, The Green Seed School, a place where seeds of love and hope could grow in the hearts and minds of her students.

It was a beautiful process to witness. She left with great affection and mutual respect between us, calling at intervals to report on the progress of her dream. The dream of love and education is now moving into reality. She is working hard to start her beautiful community school. The seed is planted and the roots go deep.

It has been said that the only true gifts we can give to our children are roots and wings. That is what education is at its best, both roots and wings. How blessed is the profession of teaching and how blessed it is to be a teacher! To witness children learn, and to see their spirits soar on wings of

love and hope for the future is truly a sacred privilege. To have been a part of this project from the very beginning, and to see *its* spirit soar on wings of love and hope, has indeed been one of the most sacred privileges of my life. Like Paulo Freire and Maria Montessori, I deeply believe that the future of our planet lies rooted in the education of our children. May both hope and love for our children be the wings we use to fly a steady course into that future.

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APPENDIX

A

## **Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects**

**Investigator:** Heather K. Devich

**Address:** P.O. Box 1114  
Tempe, AZ. 85280

**Home Phone:** (602) 685-0102

**Supervising Faculty:** Dr. Alma Flor Ada

**Project Title:** Education as a Tool for Social Change: Case study of an Arizona Inner-city Charter School

### **Study Aim, Background and Design:**

Classic Case Study using design and methods outlined in Case Study Research by Robert K. Yin, to examine how this pre-through 12 school functions in order to determine if it could be a model emulated by other disadvantaged minority communities. School opened in fall 1995 in poverty community in south Phoenix and educates 650 Hispanic, African and Anglo American students.

### **Subject Population, Inclusion\exclusion Criteria, special subject Groups, and Access Methods:**

- 1) Taped interviews with Principal, Vice Principal, Non-profit CEO, Curriculum Director, three teachers, three parents with their three students at the same time
- 2) Selection of teachers, students and parents done by above Administrators
- 3) Access gained by prior professional teaching associations and friendship with administrators

### **Procedures for Purpose of Study:**

- 1) Tape recorded interviews with above listed individuals
- 2) Direct observation of classrooms, cafeteria, playground, labs, physical plant, etc.
- 3) Supervised review of calendars, budgets, strategic plans, not to include any private student or family records, grades, or evaluations
- 4) photographs and video footage taken with written permission for reproduction in dissertation defense and publication
- 5) Analysis of above data for study conclusions

### **Risks: Potential risks, including potential loss of confidentiality, and discomfort to subjects. Methods of minimizing risks.**

- 1) No personally sensitive subject matter will be reviewed, only materials available to the public, as the purpose of study is to help outline how administrators would implement beginning a school in a similar community.
- 2) All taped interviews and resulting conclusions, including direct quotations, photos will be offered for listening, reading, and review by subjects, with their final editing of materials before submission of dissertation publication.

**Benefits: potential direct benefits to subjects and general benefits to science and/or society**

- 1) Administrators could use parts of study to serve as a "how-to" manual for emulating and fact-finding inquirers
- 2) Potential use of study in the field of education to offer one model of how a community mobilized to serve the educational needs of their disadvantaged minority population

**Consent process and documentation**

One copy of signed consent form given to subject and one retained for study records for the following:

- 1) One page project description with interview consent with editing rights
- 2) One page project description with consent to review documents
- 3) One page project description with consent to observe school and students
- 4) One page project description with consent to photograph and publish photo, if needed

Number of subjects to be enrolled per year: \_\_\_\_\_  
Total for the study: \_\_\_\_\_

Will this study be funded? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_ pending  
funding source: \_\_\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_\_\_ other

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature                      Supervising Faculty                      Date

**CASE STUDY OF NFLIYET ACADEMY & ESPERANZA MONTESSORI ACADEMY  
CONSENT FOR DATA COLLECTION**

**INTERVIEWS, OBSERVATIONS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND DOCUMENT REVIEW**

by

**HEATHER K. DEVICH, UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO  
EDUCATION DOCTORATE STUDENT**

I, (name) \_\_\_\_\_ (date) \_\_\_\_\_ Administrator  
at the above Charter school, hereby grant Mrs. Devich permission to conduct a tape recorded  
interview, (recored only to assure accuracy) with one of the following named individuals:

Principal \_\_\_\_\_

VicePrincipal \_\_\_\_\_

Curriculum Director \_\_\_\_\_

Financial Officer \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Staff Member \_\_\_\_\_

Other Administrator \_\_\_\_\_

Board Member \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby grant permission to observe the following activities, students, personnel or classrooms:  
(name) \_\_\_\_\_ (date) \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby grant permission to photographor video the following school property students, or  
personnel: (name) \_\_\_\_\_ (date) \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby grant permission to review or reproduce in the published dissertation the following  
documents: (name) \_\_\_\_\_ (date) \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that the purpose of this case study is in partial fulfillment of the University of San  
Francisco's Department of Education Dissertation requirements for the Ed. D. Degree. I Further  
understand that Mrs. Devich's personal purpose for this case study is to present a potentially  
emulatable model for other inner-city communities.

I understand that this a volunteer activity, and that there will be no monetary remuneration,  
either to Mrs.Devich or to interviewees.

I further understand that the interviewed individual and the School Administration retains the  
right to review, edit, change or delete any information used before publication in the Dissertation  
document. I understand that Mrs. Devich will destroy the tapes or photo negatives after said  
publication, they will be used for no other purposes, and will be held in confidentiality.

I further understand that as this dissertation project is sponsored by the University of San  
Francisco, a Jesuit Institution of higher education since 1855, and that if I have any further  
questions of concerns about this study, that I may call or write to:

**University of San Francisco  
2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, California, 94117  
Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects  
Phone number: (415) 422-6091**



**ESPIRITU**  
**Community Development Corporation**

*"Building community spirit by developing  
leadership in families."*

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects  
University of San Francisco  
2130 Fulton Street  
San Francisco, California, 94117

March 15, 2000

**BOARD MEMBERS:**

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Fernando Ruiz  
Luisa Villalba  
George Hernandez

**PROGRAMS:**

National Football League  
Youth Education Town  
Academy  
Cuperanza Montessori  
School  
San Milagros Academy  
Technology Center  
Leadership Training  
Center  
Community Development

Dear Sirs,

This letter is in regard to the Education Doctorate case study research project that is being conducted on our campus by Heather K. Devich. We have read the first three chapters of her proposal and find it quite acceptable.

We understand that this project has been approved by the University of San Francisco, that our participation is voluntary and that no monetary payments are due either Mrs. Devich or the NFL/YET Academy. Our Administration has granted Mrs. Devich written permission to record interviews and to quote various administrators, faculty, students, and teachers.

We have granted her written permission to review pertinent non-sensitive documents, to photograph students and activities, and to observe on campus.

We further understand that we have final editing rights on the finished document, that any data gathered will be used for no other use, and that raw data and notes will be destroyed after publication of Mrs. Devich's dissertation.

We reserve the right to use portions of the final research to share with potential administrators who come to visit and observe our school.

Thank you for your interest in our Charter school and its programs.

Sincerely,

Estella Ruiz  
Departmental Superintendent  
NFL/YET Academy

Phoenix  
4848 South Second Street  
Phoenix, Arizona 85040  
(602) 243-7788 • Fax: 243-7799

Safford  
2111 N. Calle Mesa Verde  
Safford, Arizona 85546  
(520) 348-8899 • Fax: 348-0188

January 30, 2000

Dear Case Study Participant,

This letter is to introduce myself as an Education Doctorate student at University of San Francisco. I am writing a Dissertation in the form of a Case Study concerning the programs at the NFL/ YET Academy and the Esperanza Montessori Academy. It is my hope that this document could be used to help other families and administrators develop a Charter school, if they desire to do so in their own communities. I hope we all can learn from the experiences of this community.

In order to adequately collect data needed for my Dissertation, I am interviewing three teachers, as well three parents and their three students. Your participation in these interviews will take place in the Administration Offices after school hours, when you come to pick up your student, or when you are finished with the day's work. The interviews will be at your convenience as far as date and time.

Your participation is voluntary, and will include no cost to you or will include no payment of money to you. You will be asked to reflect on and to share your experiences at this school, and I will tape record your answers. This is so that I may accurately use your statements in the evaluation section of my Dissertation. You may choose to remain anonymous, if you wish. I will have sole access to your statements, and will destroy the tapes when my study is completed and published. You will be able to edit or change your answers before publication of my Dissertation.

This case study project is sponsored by the University of San Francisco Education Department, in partial fulfillment of my requirements for an Ed.D. Degree. If you have any questions about this case study, please feel free to contact them at the following address or phone number:

University of San Francisco  
2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, California, 94117  
Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects  
Phone number: (415) 422-6091

Thank you so much for your participation in my Case Study. Thank you for the opportunity to learn from you and your child's experiences at this school.

Sincerely,

Heather K. Devich  
Education Doctoral Student  
University of San Francisco

APPENDIX.

B



**URBAN HOMESTEADS SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS EDUCATION  
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**

Presented by  
Heather K. Devich

(480) 827-7915  
(602) 685-0102

## Sustainable Systems Ecology Center Demonstrations:

1. Solar Adobe Construction:
  - a. Demonstration of various techniques such as hand production of adobe, straw, mud and water bricks, sun drying techniques, rammed earth and tire block construction, straw bale construction and etc.
  - b. Improved insulation through adobe facade over chicken wire construction, under-ground dug-out beamed construction.
  - c. Cooling tower construction, physical orientation to the sun, natural plant shading, edible landscaping, skylighting techniques, and double pane windows.
  - d. Adobe oven and kiln construction for cooking, and drying.
  
2. Bio-intensive gardening:
  - a. Nutritional childhood and adult needs, preventive health care issues, culturally appropriate food preparation, common medicinal herbs (teas, tinctures, poultices, packs) soap making.
  - b. Double digging and soil analysis, nitrogen fixation crops, amendments (fertilization) and bed preparation.
  - c. Seed selection, planting, soil spacing of plants, germination techniques and seedling transplanting, companion planting for natural pesticing, watering techniques, weeding and harvesting.
  - d. Seed selection for next years' crop, beekeeping for honey and pollinization, seed storage and rodent control, food and herb preservation (canning, drying and salting).
  
3. Composting:
  - a. Nitrogen/Carbon ratio for natural fertilization.
  - b. Compost pile building with natural garden clippings and animal waste.
  - c. Temperature and moisture control of compost pile.
  - d. Organic materials sifting to return the organic material back to soil.
  - e. Garden soil preparation with organic material from composting.
  
4. Water Purification Systems:
  - a. Control of amoeba, bacteria and parasites through solar radiation and condensation. Solar still construction and use.
  - b. Natural cleansing techniques: plant purifying, carbon and sand filtering and aeration by spraying water through the air. Latrine construction, grey water and sewage treatment and reuse.
  - c. Run-off and rain catchment systems. Cistern storage and guttering systems. Solar water pumping.

5. **Fish Farm:**

- a. Stocking species of fish, health and feeding, reproduction and growth.
- b. Algae and fungus control, waste water usage, plants to control water pH.
- c. Tank construction, underground circulation systems, and aeration system, waterfall, wind and solar pumping
- d. Harvesting, cleaning, preparation, drying and storage of fish protein products.

6. **Energy Production:**

- a. Cultural issues of deforestation, erosion, soil degradation, types of energy needs, i.e. cooking, heating, air conditioning, lighting, circulation, evaporative cooling tower construction.
- b. Recycling, reuse and garbage collection techniques. Use of biomass and sewage for methane gas production for cooking and heating, carbon monoxide control techniques.
- c. Windmills for water pumping and solar electric generation.
- d. Passive solar cooker, water heater, outdoor solar shower construction, maintenance and use.

7. **Small Animal Husbandry:**

- a. Chickens raising, feeding, maintaining health, nesting, reproduction, and egg storage. Chickens for food - killing, plucking and feather use.
- b. Goat feeding, maintaining health, reproduction, milking, making butter, cheese, yogurt, storage and use.
- c. Sheep feeding, maintaining health, reproduction, sheering, preparing wool, dying, carding, spinning and weaving skills.
- d. Use of animal waste products for composting, biomass energy production. Animal housing, cleaning and sanitation issues.

**EDUCATIONAL TOURS:** Contract for approximately 60 tours per school year, (workshops optional); to be conducted in the following manner:

1. Two tours per week conducted by Ecology Educator and Ed.D. candidate, Heather K. Devich, in Sustainable Systems Education
2. Students make cookie dough and put in solar cooker to bake while working hands-on at the site.
3. Students then participate in hands-on maintenance of systems, helping to plant, weed, water, amend soil, harvest, store, cook, gather seeds, make compost, care for and feed animals, gather eggs, milk goat, make cheese and yogurt, shear sheep, spin and weave wool, feed, harvest or cook fish, build worm farms, maintain solar water heater, distiller, cooling tower or any other necessary work to maintain Urban Homestead or outdoor systems.
4. Students assemble back in one group to eat cookies, discuss what they observed, learn how all systems work together, and receive printed handouts and diagrams on systems so they can build similar ones at school or at home with family, if desired.
5. Teachers provided with follow-up educational materials and project ideas.

**COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS:** Fee charged workshops to be conducted by Urban Homestead Collaborators, such as the Phipps Farms and Family, in the following areas:

1. Family budgeting for cost-effective nutritional meal planning.
2. Family cooking classes for home production of soy products such as milk, tofu, veggie burgers.
3. Home production of wheat-meat products, gluten development, seasoning, storage for chicken, beef, turkey, and pork substitutes, sausage, hot dogs, etc.
4. Inexpensive volume yearly storage for grains and legumes, such as wheat, rice, oats, barley, soy beans, pintos, lentils, etc.
5. Spicing techniques for tasty meal production, herb growing, drying, and powdering.
6. Simple and inexpensive preserving, salting, drying, freezing techniques.

**INNER CITY COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL OUTREACH:** Community Demonstration of affordable housing, food production, water purification, energy production, and neighborhood beautification:

1. "Espiritu Community Development Corporation" , a 501 ( c )3 non-profit Corporation, operates a 650 student preschool through high school at 4848 S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in the community of South Phoenix.
2. Existing Ecology Education Program can be used to implement a Sustainable Systems Demonstration Project to be built, maintained, and used by the school's student body in the same seven systems outlined above.
3. Community Outreach Education classes can be offered by Urban Homesteads teaching team and consultants, as well as by trained students and volunteers, to improve the family lifestyles and family property values.
4. Increased self-esteem, community cooperation, team building skills, and value formation in independence, critical thinking, problem solving, and personal responsibility can be fostered.
5. Community social problems of poverty, gangs, crime, and a sense of social oppression can thereby be combated with activities which build success in the place of hopelessness
6. Model for successful community mobilization in education and economic empowerment could be used to encourage similar disadvantaged communities.

**CONSULTING TEAM:** The consulting team will be available for advising and solving technical problems that develop during the project.

- 1.) Dan Aiello, Architect, Janus II Associates; consultant to the Arizona Solar Energy Council.
- 2.) Ed Glenn, Ph.D, Botanist, University of Arizona Environmental Research Laboratory.
- 3.) Kevin Fitzsimmons, Ph.D Marine Biologist, University of Arizona Environmental Research Laboratory.
- 4.) Gladys T. McGary, M.D. Director, Scottsdale Holistic Medical Group, G.T.M. Medical Foundation ASU East; and
- 5.) Roy E. McAlister, Energy Conversion Scientist and Engineer, American Hydrogen Association.

APPENDIX

C

**EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

**INITIAL INTERVIEW WITH STELLA RUIZ**

**INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION**

**UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO**

**FOR: DR. ALMA FLOR ADA**

**BY: HEATHER K. DEVICH**

**526-72-0318**



This interview is concerning the Charter school project with Espiritu Community Development Corporation. We will consider how the school developed from the beginning in spring of 1992 as Little Lamb Montessori with 10 students to where it is now, NFL/YET and Esperanza Montessori Academy with over 600 students, pre to high school. We will also look at the purpose of somehow offering this school to be a model, so that other disadvantaged or inner-city communities in the future could use our experiences in a way that would hopefully be helpful for other children.

So now I'm interviewing Estella Ruiz, a 62 year old Hispanic mother of seven children, grandmother of twenty-four, great grandmother of one. She holds a Masters of Education degree from Northern Arizona University, and is the director of the NFL\YET Academy and the Esperanza Montessori Pre-school in South Phoenix, Arizona. The school is located on her family property, and three of her sons and their families live there also. Many of her grandchildren attend the school.

H: Stella, you were a bilingual director of a language program in the Murphy School District for many years, is that correct?

S: Yes. For fifteen years.

H: Since we're looking at how the school developed, it seems to me to be important to talk about your motivation for undertaking such a difficult task.

S: Actually, we had no intentions of starting with this school. In fact, I had no intentions of ever returning to education. I retired in 1989 when I finished my contract year. I had thought at one time that I would get a Doctorate of Education degree, and maybe be an Administrator. But I never thought that I would go back to classroom education. What has happened, I believe, has been a project developed in the hands of God, directed by the Blessed Mother of God. So this has basically come about because of God's need to reach His children, so I take no credit for it whatsoever. I only do what develops and what is in front of me, not because I am so great, but only by the grace of God.

I have come to love God because of His love for me. And that message came to me from His great Mother. With that kind of information straight from the Mother of God, why would I possibly want to doubt His loving concern and care for all His children? So I have just put myself in Her hands and said, "Do what you will for the greater glory of Your Son." She has proceeded to do just that! So things open, the doors open all the time.

God speaks to us all, to my family, to myself in many different ways through many different people. And so I make no bones about it when I tell people that you, Heather, have been responsible a lot for the things that have been done here, you know, because God used your voice. And sometimes God uses the voice of people to tell us what He wants. You know very well that when you gave me this project that you had put together, I said, "Well who's going to do this?" And you had said "Well, you and your family." I said, "You're crazy!" And here we are years later, I think about nine years later, with this tremendous project that has grown out of - I could say out of

nowhere - but it really is not out of nowhere. It's out of God's needs for bringing back His children with His love.

So this is the way the school started, and also it started by a young woman who came down to see me, probably urged by you. (Speaking to Heather)

H: Yes, I had just met JoDene at a prayer group with Father Jack Spaulding. She knew that I had worked as a teacher both of ASU's pre-schools, so we were wanting to start a school together. We came down to see you with the professionals and Board Members from with my Environmental Education Foundation, but you weren't there, so we talked to Reyes (your husband), instead. And then, within a few days, I had a terrible car wreck, with a closed-head injury, coma, aphasia, and partial paralysis. Since I was incapacitated for about six months, she finally just came down to talk to you herself. She then started the school by herself for three months in the spring, and then I came down to help her in the fall.

S: Yes. So JoDene started with this little school, a one-room school with ten children using the Montessori method of educating children. At that point, I said "They can go ahead and take it. I really don't want any part in classroom education any more." But God has His own purposes, and what He wants to develop. So of course He brought me over just by visiting the children, because I could hear them laughing and singing on the other side of the wall from my yard.

H: Now, you have a granddaughter who was in that first program?

S: Actually Tepili was in there. Yeah! That's right! And then later the other granddaughter started, Natalia. Yes, that's right, Tepili did start there. She was three years old and she's nine now. I can't believe the years have gone by so fast!

But the school really started because of that, when I saw the how the Montessori Method really approached the way we should see children. And in this day and age we really need to change the way we see children. Often we see them as inferior, but Maria Montessori said we need to see them as God's sacredness. And so all those things in my life began to make sense, and that's the reason that we decided to open up the Charter school.

Because I saw a great need for not just those ten children, but for all the children, especially in this community, which is a community that is plagued with gangs and violence and drugs and kids who no longer care about who they are or what they do. And then they go out there with guns and hurt each other, and hurt their families, and often end up in jail, or dead, or so many terrible things. So definitely, this is a community that needs to have something happen, and it seems that God is always watching and saying, "How can I help?"

And so He came to touch my heart and the hearts of my family and those around us. So from there, from these great needs, this project was born.

H: Would you mind explaining in a nutshell, what you mean when you say, "God touched your heart"?

S: Of course. I was working in the public school system as an educator and director of the special language programs which included bilingual

education. I was on my merry way thinking that I was a grand person and that I was going to show the world a lot of things as a woman. There's nothing wrong with that, except that sometimes we forget that the woman is, of course, or needs to be, open to God. I had kind of separated God from social justice. I was very much involved with social justice, but I had put God aside.

So the change in me and my family came about through the prayers of my husband, Reyes, who is devoted totally to the great Mother of God. There is a phenomenon that's happening all over the world right now, which is the apparitions of Our Lady to many all over the world. And She came also to touch my life when She appeared to me one day. Not just all of a sudden, but there was a time of preparation in which God touched my heart. The Holy Spirit, I'm sure, touched my heart and began to melt that hard heart. Because I had a hard heart. I was all business and I had forgotten to be human, also. So through the great Spirit of God, He touched my life and began to melt my heart. And when I was ready, She appeared to ask me to help Her to do a great project that She had in mind.

H: When you say She appeared to you, I know people are going to want to know, what are you talking about? How did She appear to you and under what circumstances?

S: Well, the circumstances were that I had learned to pray the rosary. I was praying the rosary, going to daily mass, which I had never done before. The rosary I disliked, because of the redundancy and all those excuses that we give so we don't have to pray it. So anyway, I had them all. But the biggest problem of all was that Reyes and I had a family that was dysfunctional, and

even though we had taught them to love God all their lives, and to lead the life of the church, they had all grown up. They were men now. They were not living lives of righteous people. And I guess I was also on my own road of putting God to one side.

I had a family that is no different than anybody else in this world right now, as it is. I think that if people can see changes in a family that has forgotten to keep God in their lives, then there is hope for all families in the world. And so She came to a family who's husband was totally devoted to Her, who had been praying for us all his life. So when there was a need to come into the world and speak to the children of God, She, as always, comes to call us to God. So She came into my life, and it was after about a few months that everything went fast. In September of 1988, Reyes went to Medugorje, Yugoslavia, where Our Lady was reportedly appearing to six young people, and he had just come back.

H: Yes. I find it interesting that I was there with my family, that same week Reyes was there. I had been working on a book on Medugorje for six months with a priest from Georgetown University. We went with Father Spalding the first week, and Reyes was there the last week. I remember seeing people from his group, but I didn't know Reyes then.

S: Well, I didn't want to go. I was too busy in my business life, and so on and so forth. But when he came back, there was definitely a different way of looking for things for me. I began to open my heart.

I began to open my heart, listening to stories about Her, which I didn't use to like to hear. And through that short period of time, because it was only weeks, I began to change. And on December third of that year, 1988,

we were praying the rosary with one of our sons and his wife. They had been having problems of being married after seven or eight years, just kind of getting tired of each other, and yet they were uncomfortable with not having that unity that they had once had. So we were talking to them and of course, after we had finished talking, Reyes said, "Let's pray the rosary."  
(Background laughter from Heather)

That's his favorite thing. So we began to pray the rosary and during the time that we were praying the rosary, She appeared. I was the only one that could see Her and of course, needless to say, I was overwhelmed. I had been praying for my youngest son, giving him to the Blessed Mother, because I did not know what to do because I was afraid he was lost in the world of drugs. She appeared to me and I just crashed to my knees. She said, "Don't you know that I will take care of your children?" I was crying and calling out to Her and telling Her how beautiful She was, just overwhelmed by the whole thing. My family knew something was happening, but they just continued to pray the rosary.

It was ten years ago on this December third coming up, but yet I remember it almost if it were yesterday. That's something I'll never forget. It was one of the- (interrupting herself) It was *the* most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me. But with that, the next day came the realization that if She was doing this, that She must want something. And then I began to get very nervous because I wasn't quite sure that I wanted to do something for Her. I was very comfortable in my way of life. I was making good money. I had the things that I wanted to have, not that I needed (emphasizing). I wanted and liked grand things. So I was afraid that it was going to be taken away from me and I kind of became very nervous. But that was only about a day and a half. And then we went to talk to a priest

friend of ours, Father Jack Spalding, and I told him, “ I just have this feeling that She wants something from me and I’m not quite sure I can do it, whatever it is.” He said, “ You know you can always say no,” That’s what he told me - “because She’s not going to love you any less”. I said “But how could I say no to the most wonderful, the most beautiful Woman in the world? And he said, “Well, then you have answered your own question.” And I said, “Yes I have.”

So that day I committed myself to the work of God. And sure enough, on the next Tuesday, She asked me to be ones of Her messengers for the world. Reyes said I had to ask Her who She was and who sent Her, so I did. She said Our Father sent Her as the Immaculate Heart of Mary because of the great need in the Americas. I said “Do what You need to do and I will do whatever You ask me to do. Just put it in front of me. And if I know it is Yours, I’ll do it.” And from there things just began to move forward.

Reyes and I began to travel all over the world to speak about what was going on and what Our Blessed Mother was saying in her public messages for the world, and then from there came many other things. Then came a rosary prayer group two times a week, a Bible study group with our parish priest, the School of Evangelization, and then from there, the little school. Actually the little school came before the school of Evangelization. When JoDene opened that school. That came first. JoDene told me that she had received a message in her heart that said “Start with the children and everything else will fall into place.” And we did. She started with the children and everything else just began moving.

The Arizona State charter school system came about. Armando, my son who had been a State Senator before, was called in to do some



consulting with them. From the very beginning when they had first talked about it, he had been involved. So he went and was involved in helping them to pass the law. Then we decided to open this school. And at that time, we knew full well that God wanted to have a place that the young ones could come to where they could learn values and respect. Even though it's a public school and we can't talk about God, we can talk about God's values, and that we all need to have, respect, dignity, love for others. The social justice which I'm talking about which is so much a part of God. Sometimes we want to be the ones that carry the banner, and we don't think that it includes God. If you love God, you love your brothers and sisters, and you don't want anything wrong. And if there are horrible things happening to our children, then we can't sit back and watch it happen. We've got to get involved.

In one year, I remember we sat with a group of people, remember Heather? There had been thirty-six kids killed right here, across the street on Central, through all kinds of violence. We sat down with a group of concerned people, about how many? Twenty people were there.

H: Yes, I remember, at the YMCA.

S: Yes. We talked about what were some plans that we could do to help this community change. To help the community find self-respect and self-dignity. And so we made these great plans, in which I remember at the time I was going "Oh sure, yeah, yeah!

H: (laughing)

S: And so here it is years later all coming to fruition and I'm going, "Ok Lord, you're working with a knuckle head here!" (Laughter) And what has been happening has been bringing great blessings, not only upon the community, but also into my life. It really has been such a beautiful blessing to be involved in this great work. So I see the hand of God in everything that happens here. Great human beings working with us. People who, in their lives, put God first, and then the work of God comes right next to it. Those are the people working here. And it's a joyous thing.

Oh, yes, we have our ups and downs. Not everything goes right all the time, and that's because we're living in this imperfect world and we don't expect perfection, unless we're crazy. But it is awesome to see how God works. All the things that are going on in this beautiful place! All by the hand of God! Yes, using human beings because that's the way He works. But wonderful things are happening for our young people. I think through them, we can change this community. And yes, Heather, It can be replicated in other places, so that people will know that God exists and that He cares! And that He will never leave us alone. Ever! We can't always depend on human beings, but God we can always depend on. And that's what He's shown me. He'll be there always with His great love.

H: (Very moved) That's beautiful. (Pause) Stella, I know that it's going to be hard for anybody to believe that the Mother of Jesus appeared to you.

S: Yep!

H: And then that Her inspiration for Her children has been the whole motivation that's kept you going and your whole family working constantly

for ten years with very, very, demanding projects. Reyes Sr. also has cancer, doesn't he, but he works everyday like a 20 year-old, out on the tractor, pouring cement, laying bricks. It's amazing to see. But when She first appeared to you, you had told me that you were praying for your son, Ray, who had a serious long-term drug problem?

S: Oh, yeah. You know, this same community that has all these young people with drug addiction and violence, had my youngest son, too . My son was involved at the time the Blessed Mother began to appear. He was involved in the world of drug addiction and drugs. I never really heard the horrendous story until after he made the changes in his life, and he told us about it. And I couldn't believe that was my son. Yet the evil had gotten a hold of him. He was a drug addict and had been, he had told us, since he was twelve years old. It happened in Catholic School, because all my children went to Catholic schools, so you know we're not exempt, I guess, even if children do have Catholic organizations. The evil one is all over. But that's where he began. He was 27 years old in 1988, when Our Blessed Mother appeared, and he was still involved. But it took the Blessed Mother and -I should say- Our Lord, with the prompting of Our Lady, who, I'm sure now, is responsible for many wonderful things. It was probably about three weeks until Reyes completely changed. It was like Paul. It's like when Paul was hit by lightening, because it was from one day to the next. I mean he fell to his knees. The Blessed Mother asked him if he would help in the work that She was to do and he said "Only if She takes me the way that I am." And She said, "Let him know that this is the way I want him." And when I told him that, he fell to his knees and cried and cried and cried. That was the last day he ever used drugs, the last moment he ever used drugs.

And now he's a warrior for Our Blessed Mother for Our Lord. He's married to a good woman now, and he does a lot of the evangelization, and travels all over the world to do the work of God.

H: Stella, I don't know if I ever really made something clear to you. But, one night, I feel like She came to my heart with this educational plan for the children of this community. It was after the rosary prayer group in 1989, right before Thanksgiving, and I had been coming to the prayer group since the first public Message on August 15<sup>th</sup>. Ray came up to me and said, "There are so many kids coming here with drugs problems. What can we do? I know that you're working on an Educational Counseling degree, so do you have any ideas?"

So I went home that night, and it was just incredible! I was in a state of profound prayer, and the whole proposal just tumbled out. I then gave it to you to put on the alter for Our Lady the next day.

S: So that was it!

H: So it was all from Ray. I don't think I'd ever really told you.

S: No.

H: That night, I stayed up all night long and danced around with tremendous energy and joy, and wrote up this complex proposal for a Sustainable Model Education Community with schools, a health care center, a parenting education center, an old folk's residence, related arts and businesses, and food, water, transportation, energy and waste systems. It seemed that these

were all powerful inter-disciplinary, academic educational projects, and yet practical and interesting everyday skills, that kids themselves could help plan, build and maintain. In the process, they would learn to build up self-confidence and respect, learn the value and necessity of cooperation, and ultimately, learn a deep love of God's handiwork in Nature and a deep understanding of man's response to God through the order and culture of society. All of these positive, life-giving activities would then replace - and leave no time or desire for - the destructive negativity of despair, gangs, drugs, and violence. It all seemed to follow Christ's dictum that everything was contained in His three part Law, to love God, and our neighbors as ourselves. It all seemed to be the essence of Hope, the essence of Love made visible.

I finished at dawn, just as the sun was coming up. I said "Wow! This looks like good stuff! Let's give these kids the real tools to build a better world, together!" And it all fit so naturally within the Montessori hands-on Method and materials for education, and was exactly the type of activities she said adolescents must have to become balanced, productive adults.

S: Well, so you know God was already working with us all, at that point. He was using Reyes Jr., too, who knew very well what that crazy world of drugs was all about. I guess you know that there are sins in the world out there, blatant sins out there in the world of drugs. But also there are sins in the world of politics and the world of education and the world of- all over the world! I know. I was involved in the world of education and I saw and I see, what's going on. The lack of control in the educational system. The lack of direction and self-control of the students and the young people. The lack of great love with discipline in the families. Dysfunctional families all

over! Whether you're rich, poor, no matter what race or religion, these have no bearing on who it attacks. So you know, this is our world that we're living in. It is really bad and God needs us to work with Him now more than ever.

H: So you think it was specifically because of your prayer? "God help us with what's going on in this community!" Is this why Our Lady came to you and said, "If you're offering yourself. I'm going to take you up on it" in effect?

S: No, I think it was the other way around. I think God had a plan and knew how He was going to work and He needed somebody. So He sent, of course, His Mother, who He knew He could always trust tremendously, and said, "Get that knuckle head!"

S: and H: (loud laughter)

S: "Because I need her to do some work and I need her whole family. Go get her, win her heart and then they're going to do something for me."

H: Well, speaking of your whole family, you said that your son Armando was in the State Senate whenever She first appeared, and Reyes Sr. was working for the Diocese of Phoenix with migrant workers. Wasn't your family worried that everyone would think that you were fanatics, and you'd lose your jobs?

S: Oh, Armando himself says that he thought, "Oh my God! You know I'm not going to be able to win my next election!" And how mistaken we are

when we think that God has no part in our lives, when we're involved in all the politics and the things that we do in the world. Not only did he win the election, but also he had won it bigger than he had ever done before. And then he, himself willingly gave up politics to do the work of God.

H: And you also gave up your job?

S: Yes, I did. Our Blessed Mother did ask me to give up my job because She had a plan that was going to need my time. My whole time. I was fearful because we're in the habit of not trusting God. I was going "Oh my God. How are we going to live?" And She told me "You will always have the things you need. Not the things you want. But you won't want them anymore. But you'll have the things you need." I can tell you ten years later, we've never had to struggle. We have always had the things that we need. I don't want what I used to want anymore. I'm satisfied with our humble home where before I had wanted this beautiful home. And so I'm satisfied. I thank God every day that He included us in His plan because it's a beautiful wonderful plan. I'm honored to have been hit on the head by a 2x4 at the beginning! Really, by a wonderful woman, Our Blessed Mother, who was very gentle and beautiful.

But you know at first I was afraid that many would not believe. Then She said to me "Many will not believe. But my daughter, many more will believe." And that's exactly what has happened. She has touched thousand's and thousands and thousands of people by what's going on here. And there have been many beautiful conversions in our lives and in others. So I don't worry. I never have, thanks to the Lord. After she told me that, I put myself in the hands of God and my heart with the Blessed Mother, and

then I do what I have to do. And since that time I have never had to worry about whether people believe or don't believe. I don't think that it is a matter of believing whether She's appearing or not, but whether I'm changing my life to allow God in my life so that I may have a peaceful life, I may have a joyful life. So that I may have a life where I enjoy the things He's put in this world. That's what I care about. So I'm not so much interested in whether people believe whether Our Blessed Mother is appearing to me or not, but whether their hearts are open to change their lives. So that the violence and the pain can cease. And like Our Blessed Mother says, that we can live like the brothers and sisters in this world. That's the way we were meant to live. And so God calls us to do this, and that's what I want more than anything else. So I'm not too worried about whether people believe or not.

H: From the outside, it's been amazing to watch you open your whole life, listening to and counseling people, to see you giving everybody your telephone number, anybody coming from around the world. It seems to me like people have made tremendous demands on your time. Pilgrims coming to the prayer groups. Desperate people begging for your prayers. And then to begin the school of Evangelization, to begin this school which now has over six hundred kids. It's been amazing to watch your family work, seven days a week, and who knows how many hours a day! That's been a tremendous inspiration for me. For ten full years, to see all this conversion and hard work in your own family. Do you feel like the way people have responded to you has been different since the apparition?



S: I'm not quite sure what you mean by "responded." Have they been closed?

H: Have people treated you like, "Oh, there's that crazy lady who's had these apparitions!"

S: You know what? Never, ever have I heard anybody say that to me. Now do they say it somewhere else? Well, you know, if they do, God bless them. (Laughter) It doesn't even hurt me if they did say it. I would really be crazy if this peace that I have in my heart would not be so important to me, that I really am not so concerned about what people say. No, People can say whatever they want to. The peace that I have in my life now, money doesn't buy it. Only God can give it to you. And I am definitely not going to close my life to that peace, so it doesn't matter what people say. Our Blessed Mother says not to worry about what people say. She says, "You are called to love, not to anger, or to be upset about things in this imperfect world. You are called to love, because in the end, love will conquer all." And so when people seem to be angry with me I just give them a hug. You know, let them know "I love you". It doesn't matter if you're angry with me. "I love you". And that has won many hearts, so many hearts. It works. It works.

H: Beautiful. (pause) She's been appearing for ten years since December third of 1988. So as of December third of 1998, She is not going to be appearing anymore?

S: Well, She's not going to be giving any more public message like She has all these years. And She's not going to do the public apparitions where

people come. But She said She will continue to appear to me when necessary. So She's not abandoning me. She knows, I guess, that after ten years, if She left me, I would find it very, very hard. Not that I couldn't make it, if that's what I was asked to do. But that's not what She's asking me to do. She's asking, She's saying, that "The work I came to do with you has been accomplished in the public messages." And I believe that, after seeing the great things that are going on. Prayer groups and Bible study. The Evangelization course is all over the world now. The school is started, and other people from all over the county to see the school. Indeed, the job that She wanted to do, to call people back to God, has been accomplished. She doesn't need to speak anymore. I think She said the same thing so many times. "Come back to God. God loves you. Love him back. Respond to that love. Love your brothers and sisters. Help them out. Put God into your social justice and see how beautifully it works."

She's completed that part. And so now the work that is going to happen is going to be different. So the messages She will give will be private, for the work that is going on here. She won't appear as often as She has in the past. When She has to say something to me, She'll let me know. So, yes, I will continue to have that source of joy in my life. Otherwise I'd be home crying for God knows how long!

H: (laughing)

S: It's been kind of sad, I'll tell you, in the last month. She told me August, in the month of August, that it was going to happen. The first Saturday of August when She appeared, She said to prepare ourselves. And first I thought "Oh, my gosh, thank God! A lot of the work that we have been doing, we won't have to do any more". But then as I began to think, you

know, that there are so many people, so many thousands of people touched by the messages and the rosary prayer group. Not that God will not continue to touch people in one way or another, because He always does. But that particular way is over. So I will miss it. And even though, yes, it was demanding, now I'll miss that part of my life. And so far, that's kind of sad. But also, She said that great things were going to happen, that we were going to see them happen. "The great things that you will see, will continue to be hard for you to believe." So really, as a family, we will continue to be committed to God, and through the signature of our Blessed Mother, (like She said one day), we will continue to do the work that has to be done for the children of God. So we continue the work.

H: Well, it's really been wonderful talking with you, and I think this is a good basis for explaining your spiritual inspiration and motivations. So from now on, when I talk with you, I'll be talking pretty much about the school, because that's the project that I'll be working on.

S: Good. Oh, you wanted for me to say something about our Voice. You asked, and I said it hasn't changed. But maybe it has for the better, because we were always a family that was involved in issues, and we were very well known for our politics. Armando being in the Senate, I being very involved in the educational politics of the state, Fernando always being the one to work with politicians to make them successful.

H: Also, his wife was the assistant principal where I went to high school, and your oldest daughter was the director of a child care center and very involved with Head Start, right?

S: (nod) So we've always been involved in having a Voice in the community. I think the problem was that we had separated that Voice from God's Voice. We thought it was our Voice and so we made *ourselves* important. So what we have come to find out, is that really, God wants us to do social justice, to be involved in the world.

Some people are called not to be involved, like the Cloistered Nuns, those people that God calls to pray for those who are out there in the - what do you call it? - the battle fronts. So there's a purpose for each one of our lives, and our purpose recently, is to work in the community, and to bring back God to people's hearts, and then to help people find God in their lives and in themselves, and to find their dignity, and their hope. That's what we've been called to do as a family. So the Voice is the same, maybe a little bit better and greater, because we have learned that it is not us. It is God Who works through us. That's the difference.

H: That's very profound, Stella. Thank you so much.

















# THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

## Dissertation Abstract

### Education as a Tool for Social Change:

#### Case Study of an Arizona Inner City Charter School

It is a very difficult task to provide adequate education in the United States for children living in an inner-city environment, with problems of poverty, minority status, drugs, crime, gangs, suicide, despair, and many single-parent households. This is a Case Study of how one Arizona inner-city poverty community has risen to answer these educational demands for its children through a Montessori theory-based Charter Pre-12 school. The 650 student population served in this school is approximately 80% Hispanic American, 12% African American, and 8% Native, Asian and European American.

Data were gathered from extensive interviews, observations, and document analysis. They were analyzed and evaluated in three ways: first, according to a literature review of the educational theories of Maria Montessori, then according to those of Paulo Freire, and lastly, according to a review of Charter school books, articles, and government documents available up to January of 2000.

The results were an in-depth description of first, the history of this community's needs, its struggle to establish and fund the school, then the resulting educational program which it developed and implemented, and lastly, the community's positive evaluation of its efforts. The curriculum described had extensive use of ESL and

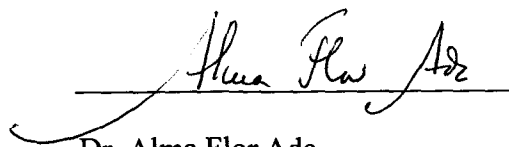
cultural appreciation programs, hands-on student initiated and student-implemented programs, integrated curriculum and critical thinking programs, job-skills related programs, self-esteem and character development programs, and Sustainable Systems Ecology Education demonstration programs. All these findings were presented in a manner which could be useful to other Administrators, who might desire to use this school's example to begin or to improve their own programs for a similarly disadvantaged inner-city population.

Conclusions were that after five years of operation, this community empowerment school has indeed found methods, curriculum and programs that have successfully helped to meet the emotional, cultural, moral, and educational needs of the children in this particular poverty community. Conclusions were also that this community's experiences are valuable and appropriate for examination by other prospective Charter school Administrators from similar communities.



Dr. Heather Koger Devich

Author



Dr. Alma Flor Ada

Chairperson, Dissertation Committee