

Wilder Penfield School

This study differs from others in this issue in that it involves three endeavours and is complex, demonstrating that educational reform often follows mixed patterns of development and not a linear uni-dimensional model. The common link between the three activities is the manner in which the school has responded to the expressed needs and interests of the community. This response exhibits considerable leadership commitment, and care amongst those involved.

Wilder Penfield School is one of nine elementary schools serving approximately 3,368 English students in the Baldwin-Cartier system, a school commission which serves both French and English Catholics. Located in the then fast-growing community of Dollard des Ormeaux, it was built over a decade ago to accommodate approximately 600 English elementary children. The school's name reveals its aspirations, "to inspire all students to strive for the excellence and greatness which the name suggests". While the school is organized along traditional lines, innovation is stressed. Although many changes, both internal and external, have occurred since the school opened, its reputation and involvement with the community remain at a high level.

As of September 1980 this school had incorporated the children from the neighbouring St. Luke's School into the various programs at all grade levels, K-6. A declining student population and the 1976 introduction of Bill 101 have been the major external changes with which Wilder Penfield has had to contend. Now, following the merger of the two schools, the student population approximates once again a total of 600 children. It is expected that this number will remain stable within the foreseeable future.

The staff includes Mr. E. Samoluk, Principal, Mr. G. Neville, Vice-Principal, and a teaching staff of thirty, many of

whom are specialists in different areas. Non-teaching personnel include a full-time bilingual secretary, and the school nurse who visits for one and a half days each week. A most efficient, friendly and capable group of parent volunteers operates the school library.

The three different programs are the French program and its various options, extra-curricular activities, and a parent-training program.

The French program

Given that this is a board-wide program it may not be correct to define it as an Educational Project. The M.E.Q. has defined such an endeavour "a school which is involved and moving towards establishing its own distinctive ethos."

Since one of the most important objectives of this particular Second Language Program is a greater degree of curriculum uniformity, it is difficult to see prospects for diversification. However, individuality and teacher input are maintained in terms of their choice of classroom strategies and use of materials. Teachers involved in this program state a definite preference for this flexibility and make use of their choices when they are developing instructional strategies.

In May 1977 a preliminary report on Second Language instruction was issued by the French Program Committee of the Board, after a year's work. As many groups as possible were consulted during the next two months. Parent Committees, Teacher Associations, the Association of Administrators, teachers, parents, and the Quebec Personal Guidance Association were all contacted and asked to participate at public meetings, where not only the rationale for change but recommendations would be presented and then debated. In addition, a special brochure was sent to the parents of 8,774 students. This pamphlet outlined the committee's recommendations and also included a survey form and questionnaire which parents were requested to complete and return to the committee. Replies were received from 2,791 parents, a 31.4% return rate.

Finally, in February, 1978, the Committee presented the double objectives of providing quality education in English and providing the opportunity for graduates to be competent in French. Many divergent views were then explored through debate and discussion; the entire issue became as emotional as it was pedagogical. Final recommendations emerged, having been subjected to intense scrutiny. Granting all parents freedom of choice, the following programs were presented for their children:

- Early Partial French Immersion
- Extended Regular French Program
- Late Total French Immersion Program (Grade 6)

Teachers were encouraged to make use of French informally. Some extra-curricular activities should be offered in French to facilitate informal contact with the French-speaking community.

Since September 1978 Wilder Penfield has been very much involved with all three French Immersion Programs. Primary Teachers have had a great deal to say in terms of the proposed original curriculum and changes they felt to be necessary and crucial. They have made and selected materials they consider to be more appropriate than those originally available. There are now some excellent materials designed by them and the French Language Consultants are available for any interested teacher. Teachers remain free to select their own instructional strategies, and some report their preference for the use of learning stations while others prefer a more structured approach.

Classroom teachers meet twice a year with colleagues who share similar teaching situations. These meetings provide an opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of programs at particular grade levels. These sessions also allow teachers to share materials and discuss effective teaching strategies.

At Wilder Penfield, certain aspects of the initial curriculum and certain curriculum materials were found to be inappropriate. Discussions and lobbying led to a six-month release for one teacher to plan and design more appropriate curriculum and materials. It is the program's flexibility and the ease with which it appears to accommodate the views of all involved, whether teacher, parent, child, administrator, or consultant, that constitute to some measure the success and positive feeling that this particular program promulgates.

Extra-curricular activities

As many children are bussed to school, these sessions usually take place during the lunch hour. Clubs meet for an hour once or twice a week. Most of the clubs are for Grades 3-6 students.

Every year new clubs are formed and others disbanded. Towards the end of each academic year, current student interests are explored and discussed with the teachers and the administration. A potential list of clubs for the following year emerges. The clubs are intended to satisfy curiosity, develop interest and intellect, and provide enjoyment for the student. A variety of activities, lectures, and presentations by outside experts form the core program of a club.

In 1981 the Math Club, then in its second year of operation, met during lunchtime twice a week. A student may participate at one of three different levels. For example, Tuesday was the weekly remediation session, and three teachers helped out with this group. The regular and above-average students met on Thursdays to improve and expand their skills

and play Math games. On Friday afternoon, after school, an accelerated group of gifted children participated in Math skill acquisition in order to compete in the Quebec Math competition. In 1980, this group won the top prize in the province, and the Quebec Math Teachers' Award was proudly displayed in the school library. Students and teachers alike enjoyed the many varied opportunities for development that this particular club offers. Total enrolment for all sessions was approximately 125 students.

"The Mad Scientists", a group of twenty-five grade 5 students, met once a week over lunch to discuss their interests in science. This club was created that year by the Vice-Principal. Quite a large number of students showed up. A list of potential areas to be explored was discussed. The following topics had been on the agenda: orienteering, forensic science, working with carnivorous plants, and electronics. Projects on volcanoes and acid rain were designed and developed, and were displayed at the Parents' Open House.

There was also a Running Club directed by the Physical Education teacher. Club members met twice a week to jog. Students involved in this did so for enjoyment, though some might have been doing initial training for fun-run marathons outside the school. There were also two sports clubs that year. One was the grade 6 Basketball Club which met once a week at lunch-time to play and practice in order to compete with other schools. This team was going to a Mt. Bruno School in June to compete against a similar team in a South Shore community.

The Journal Club involved Grade 4 children in journal writing. These children were exchanging journals on a regular basis with another Grade 4 class at Valois Park School, serving the Lakeshore School Board. In June 1981 both groups actually met one another for the first time after having corresponded for the past academic year.

The evaluation of such clubs was not formal, whereas the French Programs had to be looked at with greater seriousness for obvious reason. Yet plans were being made for the future - in terms of which clubs to maintain, which to terminate, and which to begin.

For the next year, the Principal had agreed to organize a chess club for Grades 3-6. The group would meet once a week to play chess and learn new strategies. Some members would work diligently so that they might compete in intramural or perhaps even provincial tournaments. As there is also a high interest in drama and acting in this school, a Drama and Creative Writing Club was planned. This group would, for its annual project, write, act and produce "Alice in Wonderland" for the Wilder Penfield School Community. A Netball Club would also be started.

The commitment and financial support of the School Committee would make possible the purchase of any necessary uniforms and equipment for these clubs. The parents obviously felt very much a part of the school - they appreciated the time

and interest that this dynamic staff and administration donated to these lunch-time clubs. The children involved learn much and enjoy their club experiences.

The S.T.E.P. program (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting)

S.T.E.P. is a program that evolved because of growing parent concern about their children. Many parents had expressed concerns about their families and looked to the school for answers. In 1981, the principal and vice-principal decided in collaboration with the School Committee to organize and implement a program. A nominal fee was charged to parents; the remainder of the expenses were carried by the School Parents' Committee. The school decided the program would be more effective if an outside professional ran it. The School Parents' Committee agreed.

The leader's role is not to answer questions as such. This program involves reading, discussion, and exercises reflecting typical concerns, as well as encouragement of and by the participants. Parents then attempt to put these newly-learned principles and techniques into practice in their own families. The leader facilitates discussion of the materials, keeps the group on task, leads the exercises, and makes assignments drawn from the S.T.E.P. Parents' Handbook.

Once again Wilder Penfield School had shown, through its concern, commitment, and initiative, that it is responding to community needs. This particular time it was the parents who received the extra attention.

Although, as originally stated, there is no official Educational Project in action, there are many things that occur in this school that further the developmental bond between school and community, notwithstanding that this school has stood for and maintained its excellence for fifteen years.

The school has reacted to specific community concerns and interests through its S.T.E.P. program and extra-curricular clubs. While the traditional mode of teaching prevails, commitment, care, and initiative on the part of the Wilder Penfield staff all contribute to the community perception that this is a warm, inviting, and invigorating environment in which their children may participate.

If this school were in business, it would be a successful company.