

A History of the Free School Movement

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Abstract

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the free school movement burst onto the American educational landscape. Free schools were small, innovative, anti-traditional private schools that based their teachings around notions of children's freedom, self-governance and social justice. From about 1969 to 1973, free school journals, networks and conferences blossomed from coast to coast, and the number of free schools increased exponentially. But beginning around 1974, the free school movement began to gradually decline. Many free schools closed, journals discontinued publication, and educational discourse shifted to new reforms. A small number of free schools still exist today, and some "free schoolers" continue to publish articles and maintain loose networks and coalitions, but the free school movement has almost entirely faded.

In this thesis, I will first define free schools and the free school movement. Then I will describe the previously undocumented history of the free school movement from 1971 to 1998. Next, I will explore the different fates and factors that "free schoolers" contended with as the broader social trends of the 1960s and early 1970s became less favorable towards alternative education. Finally, I will draw conclusions about the important lessons that educators today can learn from the free schools. My contention throughout is that the free school movement slightly but perceptibly nudged mainstream American education towards incorporating the philosophies of student freedom, self-governance and social justice.

Acknowledgments

Isaac Asimov, author of over 500 books and innumerable articles, once described writing as “a simple extension of coherent thought.” Before this thesis, I might have agreed with him. After, I could not disagree more. Writing these hundred pages has convinced me that extending coherent thought into worthwhile writing is far from simple. It takes buckets of sweat and tears, flashes of semi-divine inspiration (largely induced by sleep deprivation), and the support, discipline, and dedication of a number of priceless individuals.

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Ron Miller, founder of the *Holistic Education Review*, deserves special mention as both a collaborator and an inspiration. Mr. Miller has also been researching the history of the free school movement, and eventually plans to write a book on the subject. We made contact in late September and immediately began a fruitful and reciprocal sharing of resources, insights and raw data. Mr. Miller's perspective on free schools profoundly informed my own, and his encouragement and appreciation for my work greatly inspired me. I truly hope that my research will prove as useful to his book as his findings have been to this thesis.

Tom Hyry of the Yale University Archives earned my deep gratitude by making dusty old boxes of free school materials available to me at very short notice. Surprisingly knowledgeable about his charges, Mr. Hyry's efforts made my research at Yale smooth and productive.

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Preface

For as long as there have been public schools in America, there have been critics to complain about them. When Horace Mann said, "One former is worth a thousand reformers," he was not speaking in the abstract. As the forming father of our public school system, Mann must have foreseen the myriad reformers who followed him, criticizing, adjusting and rebelling against the system he created. From Mann's day on, public education has suffered attacks from all sides. School reform has become a sort of national pastime. The history of American public schools is really a history of American school reform.

Some public school critics have opted for internal reform, for changing schools within the system. These public school reformers have usually fine tuned or slightly adjusted certain areas of school curriculum, structure, governance or funding. These reformers have rarely created radical changes, because public schools usually have so much institutional inertia that attempts at significant overhauls fail. So, many frustrated reformers have taken their ideas outside the system, establishing independent schools that circumvent the inertia of the public system.

The free school movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s was one such independent reform effort. Responding to a host of complaints about the public school system and the particular zeitgeist of the late 60s, the free schools attempted to create radically alternative learning environments, environments in which children were free to

pursue their own interests at their own paces. In doing so, they dramatically challenged conventional modes of schooling. Free schools emerged slowly in the early 1960s and eventually coalesced into a nationwide (but still grassroots) movement. Towards the end of the 1960s both the number of free schools and their support systems (free school journals, networks and conferences) grew exponentially until the free school movement peaked in intensity around 1971. Some observers hailed free schools as an inspirational new form of schooling that could become the wave of the educational future. However, the movement began to falter in the mid-seventies, and then steadily declined throughout the eighties and nineties until it has become virtually nonexistent in 1998. Today about 35 free schools still survive, but they no longer form a movement like they did in the late sixties and early seventies. As the twentieth century draws to a close, free schools are no longer a significant force in the American educational landscape.

What happened, both to individual free schools and to the movement as a whole? Why? Where did the intense energy of the early free school movement go? What broader cultural and educational factors influenced the history of the free schools? And what legacy have the free schools left behind? How, if at all, has the free school movement affected larger educational trends? These are the central questions that have motivated this study.

To answer these questions, the paper is divided into five sections. Chapter I explains what free schools were – their central philosophies, typical curricula and essential characteristics – and details the methodology of the study. Chapter II explores the roots of the early free school movement, and charts its development until the movement's peak in 1971. Chapter III then describes the decline of the movement, from 1971 to 1996, using both statistics and case studies of individual schools. Chapter IV analyzes the reasons for that decline, both in terms of the movement as a whole and in terms of individual free schools. Finally, Chapter V presents the legacy of the free school

movement – how it has affected American education – and the important lessons that school reformers of today can learn from the free schools.

Together, these five chapters span the entire history of the free school movement. Yet this study is not meant to be a survey of the free school movement. I do not claim to have gained a comprehensive analysis of all free schools ever in existence. I had neither the resources nor the appropriate methodology for such a survey. Instead, I intend this thesis to be an informed, insightful gloss. Since no one has attempted any sort of analysis of the free school movement since 1972, such a gloss should be helpful. Hopefully, it will inspire other scholars to pursue deeper study of the free school movement.

I also admit that this study is largely dependent on my personal reactions, interpretations, and choice of material. I can only present material that I have found, read, or heard, and that excludes scores of school visits, reams of reading, and an infinity of interviews. To underscore this personal interpretation, I will continue to use the first person throughout the paper. This should remind the reader that I have written a personal gloss rather than a final Truth about the history of the free school movement.

That said, I do believe that I have stumbled upon some truths, uncovered genuine hard data, conducted provocative interviews, and researched some representative case studies. Regardless of the personal slant I give the material, I have tried to avoid being a free school advocate. Conversely, I have tried to avoid being a free school opponent. After all my research, I have come to believe that free school philosophy sounds good in theory, but does not necessarily work. That is, a few very good free school worked, but many were mediocre, if not downright bad, institutions. American public schools could certainly learn some important lessons from the free school movement, but so could free schools have learned lessons from traditional education. So my agenda is not advocacy of the free school movement.

Rather, I have sought a historically accurate picture of the free school movement. There are a number of reasons to pursue such a picture. For one, there is history for

history's sake; that is, satisfaction of curiosity, seeking knowledge of a formerly uncharted educational movement just to know what happened. Second, from this knowledge school reformers of today can extrapolate important insights useful to their current endeavors. They can learn from examining the crucial factors that caused free schools either to fail or survive. Finally, studying free schools may tell us about the effects that radical education of the sixties and seventies has had on American education writ large. Admittedly, we can only speculate about these effects; because they were philosophical abstractions rather than concrete programs, we cannot say with certainty that current trends in American education come directly and exclusively from free schools. But we can arrive at conclusions about what important philosophies of the free school movement *should* be incorporated into today's public schools, if they have not been already.

For all these reasons, the free school movement is worth studying. It is also a fascinating story, replete with enigmatic characters, plot twists, universal themes, a dramatic climax and an ambiguous resolution. It is a story that drew me in, pulled me along, and at times overwhelmed me in its complexity. I hope that, if I have presented the story of the free schools effectively, my readers will find this history as compelling as I have.

I. *Parameters and Methods of the Study*

Before delving into the complex history of the free school movement, we must agree on the parameters of this study. This chapter defines both “free school” and “free school movement” and describes the types of schools that I have examined. Then it details the methodology I used to examine these schools. This preliminary information should let the reader know what I have studied and how I went about studying it.

Definitions

There is no simple way to define the term “free school.” We can make a list of criteria describing most free schools, but it will never be exhaustive. We can describe a typical free school, but many free schools did not fit that mold. Free schools were held together by no centralized ideology. They had no founding figure, no Maria Montessori or Rudolph Steiner. No official free school organization determined the legitimacy, the philosophy, or the curricula of free schools. Because they were often founded in reaction to monolithic school systems, free schools often prized their uniqueness above all else, and intentionally defied classification. And because so many other alternative educational models emerged concurrent with the free schools (e.g. open schools, alternative public schools, and schools without walls, to name a few), the lines between free schools and other types of education reform were very blurry. The following definition, therefore, has this disclaimer—that all free schools met most of these criteria, but that some defied one or

even two of them. In other words, this definition is designed to give the reader an idea of what this study is studying, rather than to create rigid boundaries that rule in and out which schools were considered free schools and which were not.

The most fundamental principle of any free school was, naturally, children's freedom. First and foremost, free schools were non-coercive institutions. In other words, they did not force children to learn if they were not ready to learn. Instead, free schools let children pursue their own interests at their own pace. The free school teacher provided materials, introduced new concepts and offered guidance, but did not force children to engage in any given activity. In the most radical free schools, class attendance was completely voluntary; school time could be spent in the classroom, in the playground, in the woods, or in the shop. Many free schools did expect children to attend class, although when pushed, they rarely enforced attendance rules (at George Dennison's First Street School, like many free schools, "we abolished the category of truant"¹). Furthermore, all learning that occurred inside that classroom came from the voluntary interests of the students. This student freedom, above all other factors, defined free schools.

Democratic self-governance was the second defining feature of most free schools. Rather than taking orders from higher authorities like school boards, superintendents or principals, free schools were controlled by teachers, parents, community members and students. Decisions were often made in "town meeting" style gatherings, with anyone present allotted an equal voice. Many free schools operated on a consensus model, or variations thereof. Jerry Mintz described the decision making process at the Shaker Mountain School in Burlington, Vermont:

We ran it as a democracy. Harvey Scribner (Vermont's Commissioner of Education) had suggested that I put students on the board, so five of the ten board members in the school were always students, so they had the swing votes. So whenever any important issue came up, it always went back to the all-school meeting, because the kids said, "Why did this go to the board?" The

¹Dennison, George, *The Lives of Children* (New York: Random House, 1969) p. 98.

school developed a decision making process that is the best school democracy I've ever seen anywhere, and I've visited hundreds of schools now.

With as much power as any adult, free school students often voted on school budgets, school policies, and even staff hiring. Jim Turner, who started teaching at the Alternate Learning Project (ALP)² in 1971, told this humorous story about his job application process:

Turner: I went down for this interview, down to this bowling alley that the kids had built the walls in.... I went in and I met a large group of people. I mean, the kids were sitting way up high on bookcases and everything, and parents were in the meeting, and the director was there, and some teachers. And I went in, and the interview process basically was that they fired questions at me. Kids would ask me questions they were concerned with, which had nothing to do with biology, but had more to do with my personal habits.

Hausman: Like what? Do you remember?

Turner: Like, "Um, would you smoke dope with kids?" (laughs) That was my favorite question. I looked at the kids who asked me and I said, "I don't smoke marijuana, so I wouldn't smoke it with you." And the kids who asked me, they thought that was the greatest thing, you know, because they couldn't imagine anyone in their twenties that wasn't doing that stuff.... So the director told me, after he called me up and hired me, that he had wanted some other lady, but the kids wanted me.

In other words, the students of ALP had as much control of the hiring process, if not more, than the director. Because free schools were often formed in rebellion against top-down control, they insisted on democratic self-governance.

The third fundamental free school principle was social justice. Free schoolers – that is, people who created and taught at free schools, not free school students – objected to the many inequalities that plagued America in the 1960s. So they actively strove to bring about social justice. Free schoolers were often involved with the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement, or the war on poverty, and they used their free schools to impart these values on the younger generation. They mixed children of different classes and races together to promote harmony and understanding. They took field trips to anti-war marches and rallies. By abolishing the power dynamics of

²ALP, in Providence, Rhode Island, was a rare example of a school that, had it not been under the control of the Providence city school board, would have been a free school.

authoritarian teachers and submissive students, they provided an ideal of social justice, where all members of a community have equal power. This principle of social justice was certainly the most amorphous free school tenet, but at the same time, it was probably the most powerful. As we will see in Chapter II, this concern with social justice connected the free schools closely to the broader counter-culture of the 1960s.

How did these philosophies of non-coercion, self-governance and social justice play out in a free school's pedagogy and curriculum? What did a free school's daily routine look like? Again, the variations on a "typical" free school day were endless; I can only give a general idea, not a specific definition, of free school pedagogy. Walking into a free school, an observer might have been struck by the apparent lack of order. Free school classrooms were almost inevitably messy, packed with materials, books, toys and practically anything else that children could get their hands on. And since free schools were almost never housed in actual school buildings, they lacked the hallways, the lockers, and the rows of desk that give schools that ordered, institutional feel. During my first visit to a free school, I wrote this in my notebook: "Cluttered, dirty, messy, there's kid stuff everywhere! Hamsters, blocks, electronics, books. How do they find anything in this mess? The kids obviously run this world, not the adults."

Free school teachers never stood at the front of the room, especially in the lower grades. Instead, they moved around the room (or rooms) helping individuals or small groups of students with some activity. In one corner, a teacher might have helped a five-year old sound out the letters in a Dr. Seuss book. At the central table, another teacher would have been making play-dough with a dozen seven-to-ten-year olds. Outside, the science teacher roamed around the woods with her class, identifying different species of trees and flowers. Many students, however, were completely unsupervised; they would be, to use a favorite free school phrase, "doing their own thing." Some read quietly to themselves, engrossed in their books. Others played imagination games for hours, creating elaborate fantasy worlds which they would go on to write about in their stories.

In the upper grades, where structure and schedules were more prevalent, most students either attended or floated in and out of classes. Classes were small, and the great majority involved informal discussions or experiments around tables or rugs, without individual desks. Students and adults together developed the school's curriculum. School One, in Providence Rhode Island, used a fairly typical process of curriculum development. At the first all-school meeting of each semester, a huge piece of paper was stretched across a wall. Children and adults wrote down all their ideas for classes in what became a sprawling, jumbled brainstorm. Later, a smaller group of adults and students looked over the paper, found themes and repeated suggestions, and formulated a loose curriculum for the year. Typical classes included Hispanic History, Animal Biology, Pottery Studio, Improvisational Dance, The Novels of Hermann Hesse, Yoga and Bread-baking. Sometimes the classes were taught by faculty members, sometimes by older students, sometimes by community members, and sometimes by no one at all. They usually had a regular meeting time, but they might have convened spontaneously when all the members of the class happened to be in the same place at the same time.

Alongside the more formal classes, many diverse activities were always happening. Field trips were a popular activity, with destinations varying from legal offices to libraries to the local garage. Sports and outdoor games were common, as at the Community School in Santa Barbara, California:

Sports activities go on all day long. There is almost always someone playing soccer, kickball, snake in the grass, Frisbee, whatever. Usually, however, at about 11:00 there is a "big game" involving children of all ages and several of the teachers or parents who are there. Sports have been very important in creating a happy, friendly and cooperative atmosphere in the school.³

When children were not playing, guest speakers, parents and other community members often stopped in to give lectures, show movies, answer questions or teach a class. Plays and talent shows, almost always student initiated, were produced on an irregular basis. The list could go on and on; this description only begins to catalogue the hundreds of possible free

³Graubard, Allen, *Free the Children* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972) p. 87.

school activities. It should give the sense of a child-centered, unstructured, sometimes overwhelmingly chaotic environment. Free schools prided themselves on such environments; after all, the operative word in free school was "free." If the student chose to play soccer all day, or build model rockets, or finish a novel, he was free to do so.

However, the word "free" did not extend to financial matters. Although they charged less than other private schools, free schools usually depended on student tuition. Exact financial statistics about free schools are hard to muster; Allen Graubard and the New Schools Directory Project made the only attempt in 1971. Their figures, condensed into Table One, had this qualification:

The data on school finances needs especially careful interpretation since free schools do not, in general, keep very accurate, detailed, or complete financial records. Since resources come from very diverse sources - tuition, contributions, bake sales, donated equipment, and even, in the case of one school, panhandling - accurate accounting is not often available.... Eighty-one percent of the schools charge tuition, with almost all of them stating that they give scholarships. But since the great majority of these schools use a sliding scale for tuition, the concept of "scholarship" is quite hazy.⁴

	Public Schools	All Private Schools	Free Schools
Normal Tuition	NA	\$1,500 - \$4,000	\$0 - \$800
Average Cost/Pupil	\$1,250	\$1,000	\$600
Average Teacher Salary	\$9,000 - \$15,000	\$6,000 - \$8,000	\$0 - \$2000

Table One:
Statistics from Allen Graubard's "The Free School Movement," 1971

As the figures in Table One indicate, free schools were almost always underfunded institutions. The phrases "shoe-string budget" and "hand-to-mouth" came up frequently in discussions of free school finances. Because of their social justice ideals, free schools tried to include students from all economic backgrounds. Thus they almost always

⁴Graubard, Allen, "The Free School Movement," in Fantini, Mario, editor. *Alternative Education* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976) p. 73.

operated on sliding scale tuition: "Usually people pay what they can afford," wrote Graubard in 1971, "and the hope is that there will be enough high tuition payers to balance the people who can pay little or nothing."⁵ Sometimes free schools had rich benefactors (often one of the founding parents or the director) who supported the school with independent wealth. Occasionally, free schools garnered income by selling crops or produce, or by manufacturing goods such as baskets and cloth. Many free schools depended on the largess of community organizations and churches. A few free schools actually received funding from the government, either through school boards, federal education grants, or social service/welfare agencies. Most free schools combined one or more of these sources of income to stay afloat.

The following paragraph, describing the Thoreau School in Wallkill, New York, was a typical example of a free school's income:

Unfunded by any governmental agencies or charities, the school is supported by tuitions that are as low as \$1 per day for some, to higher fees. Some children do not pay at all. One set of parents were providing the main funding, but have since moved out of the area—hence the current financial squeeze. Rodman (the school's founder/director) said that parents are now holding Tupperware parties and other fund drives to see the school through until June. Rodman believes that the financial problem could be settled, without adverse effect on the Wallkill taxpayers, if the school were accepted into the local school district.⁶

So while free schools had minimal operation costs and charges, and tried to include students of all classes, the "free" in free school rarely meant "tuition-free."

This already messy definition is further complicated by the fact that there were two interwoven strains of free schools: the "community" free schools, and the "Summerhillian" free schools. This is not to say that there were two incompatibly different types of free schools, but that free schools fell at different places along a spectrum that ranged from community schools on the one side to Summerhillian schools

⁵Graubard, *Free The Children*, p.42.

⁶Rodman, Karl, "Thoreau Wants to Join Wallkill Central," in Fantini, *Alternative Education*, p.101.

on the other. Most free schools, as we shall see, combined both strains. Lawrence Cremin explains this fusion of the two strains concisely in his article, *The Free School Movement—*

A Perspective:

The new free school movement began slowly, gathered momentum in the middle 1960s, and manifested itself in the appearance of scores of new child-centered (Summerhillian) schools. Simultaneously, growing out of the civil rights movement, there arose the political programs of black and ethnic self-determination and the so-called community free schools associated with them. During the last five or six years, we have seen a fascinating interweaving of the child-centered and political-reform themes in the new schools.⁷

The differences between community free schools and Summerhillian free schools were differences of emphasis, more than anything else. The community free schools emphasized social justice and self-governance more than non-coercive learning. These schools were started in urban communities in response to social and political problems of the inner cities. They concentrated on giving poor and minority students an escape from the public schools that either alienated or repressed them. Many students in community free schools had dropped out of public schools, not because they failed their classes, but in rebellion against the racism and arbitrary control exerted by teachers and administrators. Community free schools responded with Afrocentric (or, in rare cases, Latinocentric) curricula, student and parent control of the school, and increased student freedom. For the most part, community schools granted students considerably more control over their own learning. However, in the most extreme cases where the teachers cared much more about political liberation than non-coercive learning, community free schools' pedagogy remained fairly traditional, aiming to impart the basic skills needed to succeed in (or overthrow) society. Community free schools emphasized the social justice and political freedom of the free school movement.

Summerhillian free schools derived their name from the Summerhill school in Suffolk, England, which served as their inspiration and ideal.⁸ They emphasized non-

⁷Cremin, Lawrence, "The Free School Movement—A Perspective," in Fantini, *Alternative Education*, p. 61.

⁸Summerhill's profound influence on the free school movement will be explored in Chapter II.

coercive learning far more than self-governance or social justice. Close interpersonal relationships, personal liberty, creativity and internal motivation took precedence over academic skills. Summerhillian free schools tended to serve the children of the white upper and middle class, often in rural or suburban locations. Their curricula focused entirely on students' interests, rather than on the adults' political or social agenda. These schools were smaller, served younger children, and usually cost more than community free schools. One description of an extremely Summerhillian school belies its total commitment to a non-coercive learning environment:

"What do the kids do all day?" I've been asked that a lot, and I've never known how to answer. "They do what they like." "They play all day." "I don't know."

They've dumped flour all over each other, left money around the house, said "fuck you" to a man who stopped them from rolling in peat moss, they've pissed on their toys and on each other, stolen from stores, tied each other up, had food fights, screamed, yelled, cried, watched TV, watched a cat have kittens, they've dressed up in yards of material, made tape recordings, taken pictures, listened to records, glued things, masturbated and fucked each other, climbed trees, looked at comics, made presents, sent letters, gone for hikes, picked flowers, taken baths together, and looked blankly at grownups who asked them what they do all day.⁹

The Summerhillian schools, at their purest, often neglected issues of social justice, paid great attention to self-governance, and made non-coercion their central tenet.

Tension occasionally marked the relationship between these two strains of free schools. Community free schoolers accused the Summerhillian schools of elitism, and of avoiding real problems by running away to the hills of Vermont and California. Jonathan Kozol voiced this critique in his book, *Free Schools*: "An isolated upper-class rural free school for the children of the white and rich within a land like the United States is a great deal too much like a sandbox for the children of the SS Guards at Auschwitz." On the other hand, Summerhillian free schoolers protested the imposition of political propaganda onto their children. They claimed that children should be allowed to grow in sheltered

⁹This excerpt comes from issue #12 of the "Summerhill Bulletin," put out by the Summerhill Collective, a splinter group of the original Summerhill Society. The passage, written by Bill Pigman, is immediately preceded by a picture of five young children, all naked, jumping into a mudhole.

environments, free of social strife. But those critiques applied only to the most extreme schools. In practice, most free schools fused together these two strains and fell somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. In Mario Fantini's words:

The free school movement includes two wings. The free schools embracing a Summerhillian philosophy that "freedom works" are primarily white middle class. The other wing of the movement emphasizes the school as a political environment... Both wings come together in most free schools, although the tension between them provides a constant source of serious discussion.¹⁰

Now that we have defined the parameters of the term "free school," we must define the phrase, "free school movement." In fact, the definition of "free school movement" is even more important than the definition of "free school," since this paper focuses on the movement as a whole, rather than on individual schools. To define the free school movement, we must first agree on the meaning of the term "movement." In his study of the progressive education movement, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, Herbert Kliebard spends over four pages examining the way any movement might reasonably be defined. He starts with this definition from historian Peter Filene:

It is obvious, [Filene] observes, that a movement as a form of mass behavior may be diffuse in certain respects, but a movement is certainly more sustained than a fad, more encompassing than a panic or riot, and broader than a cult. A movement is also to some degree self-conscious rather than a category of persons who simply share one or more common characteristics. "The members of a social movement," Filene argues, "combine and act together in a deliberate, self-conscious way, as contrasted to a noncollective or 'aggregative' group (such as blondes or lower-income families) which has a common identity in the minds of social scientists or other observers rather than in the minds of members themselves."¹¹

Filene argues that without the self-consciousness, a group should be called "shifting coalitions around different issues" rather than a social movement. Kliebard takes this distinction and arrives at this definition of a social movement: "*A broad category of persons who share certain fundamental beliefs and who, over a sustained period of time, self-consciously act to gain public acceptance for those beliefs.*" The women's suffrage movement, the

¹⁰Fantini, *Alternative Education*, p. 7.

¹¹Kliebard, Herbert, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* (New York: Routledge, 1995) p. 240.

temperance movement, and the civil rights movement of the 1960s would be prime examples.”¹² According to this definition, were the free schools a true social movement, or were they simply a series of shifting coalitions around different issues? To which of these four criteria – shared beliefs, sustained action, self-consciousness, and gaining public acceptance – did the free school movement adhere?

Free schoolers undoubtedly shared the central beliefs of non-coercive learning, self-governance and social justice. Although free schoolers never developed a formal doctrine that united the movement, the closest articulation of a free school credo¹³ encompasses all three of the central tenets:

We are a coalition of schools, groups and individuals committed to creating an egalitarian society by actively working against racism, sexism, ageism and all forms of social, political and economic oppression. The means by which we accomplish these goals are through participant control, whereby students, parents, and staff are empowered to create and implement their own learning.

Of course, some free schoolers took issue with one or two of these shared beliefs. For example, the Sudbury Valley school refused to agree to this credo because of its emphasis on “egalitarian society” over “participant control.” Such dissent seems normal in a grassroots movement, and does not undermine the unity of the free school movement. Although different free schoolers may have interpreted these tenets differently, they shared the central concepts of non-coercive learning, self-governance and social justice.

Proving that the free school movement constituted “sustained action” depends on the definition of “sustained.” Does sustained mean more than a year? More than two years? More than ten years? Free schools first appeared in America in about 1963, and though the movement has significantly changed since then, free schools still survive today. According to these liberal dates, the free school movement could be considered 35 years old. The most conservative estimates would place the start of the movement at 1965 and

¹²Kliebard, *Struggle*, p. 244 (original italics).

¹³This “credo” is the National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools (NCACS) Mission Statement of 1974. This statement was drawn up and agreed upon by free schoolers who wished to finally establish a nationally visible coalition. The role of the NCACS will be discussed further in chapters III and V.

its finish at 1973. Still, this would mean the movement lasted for eight years. Even eight years, I believe, constitutes something, in Filene's words, "more sustained than a fad, more encompassing than a riot or panic, and broader than a cult."¹⁴ So if "sustained action" means eight years or less, which I think it must, the free schools must be considered a genuine social movement.

Proof of the self-consciousness of the free school movement comes directly from the mouths of free schoolers themselves. When I specifically asked free schoolers, "Did you feel like you and your school belonged to a 'free school movement,'" I elicited responses like this one from Allen Graubard: "Oh, yes. We were all talking to each other, sharing ideas, all meeting each other at the same conferences." Another free schooler, Lucia Vorys, said, "Sure there was a movement. We'd all read those same books, you know, and so we were all moving in the same direction." Out of the 14 interviews I conducted with people who had actually worked in free schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s, only one told me that the free schools did not comprise a movement, but that they were just part of a larger educational revolution. Furthermore, Allen Graubard, whose *Free the Children* was the only comprehensive analysis of free schools by a free schooler, subtitled his book "Radical Reform and the Free School Movement." Obviously, the free school movement was a self-conscious movement, rather than, in Filene's words again, "a term that could be applied to a category of persons who simply shared one or more common characteristics."¹⁵

The last criteria, working to gain public acceptance, is not so cut and dried. Most free schoolers would have liked public schools to become more like free schools. But free schools were largely separatist institutions, rebellions against the public system. For some free schools, especially some of the more extreme Summerhillian schools, the ultimate goal was to transcend society, not to gain its acceptance. Passages like the one from the

¹⁴Kliebard, *Struggle*, p. 240.

¹⁵Kliebard, *Struggle*, p. 240.

Summerhill Bulletin above prove that some free schools even flaunted their rejection of public acceptance. On the other hand, as we shall see in Chapter V, some free school philosophies made their way into mainstream education. In fact, some of the free schoolers I interviewed claimed that this public acceptance, even if it was very subtle, was the greatest legacy of the free school movement. So while free schools do not neatly fit this last criteria, given their separatist nature and their fundamental beliefs, they still must be considered a genuine movement.

So, according to both Kliebard's and Filene's definitions, free schools did make up a true social movement. They shared a set of fundamental beliefs that impelled them to self-conscious, sustained action. Admittedly, there was tension within the movement, especially between the Summerhillian strain and the community school strain. Nevertheless, the free schools must be considered a true social movement—more sustained than a fad, more encompassing than a panic or riot, and broader than a cult.

Methods

Now that I have outlined the parameters of *what* my study focuses on, *how* did I go about researching this movement? Uncovering the history of the free school movement has been a complex process of discovery. It has been a matter of following subtle leads, picking up on hints and innuendoes, delving into dusty boxes of old journals, and asking the right questions of the right people. I have felt much more like an investigative journalist than an academic researcher, trying to piece together a story from diverse sources and perspectives.

I went about collecting information in three different ways: readings, interviews and statistical analyses. I started with a literature review, but quickly found that very little has been written about the free school movement. The literature pertaining to free schools, and to radical education of the late sixties, falls into four categories. First, there were the radical, groundbreaking works of the early sixties that inspired many free schools. These

included (but were not limited to) John Holt's *How Children Fail*, *The Underachieving School*, and *How Children Learn*, Jonathan Kozol's *Death at an Early Age*, Herb Kohl's *36 Children*, and, perhaps most importantly, A. S. Neill's *Summerhill*. Some of these books described the terrible injustices of public school classrooms; they elicited a sense of rage at traditional education. Others told uplifting tales of children learning outside of the mainstream system, or articulate radical philosophies of education. What they shared in common was their inspirational effect on the free school movement. Allen Graubard wrote, "One often finds in talking to free school people about how they got started that they say things like, 'We read John Holt and then called a meeting,' or 'A friend gave me copies of *Summerhill*, Herb Kohl's book, and Joseph Featherstone's articles, and then I talked to some other parents....'"¹⁶ These books gave me an idea of the educational *zeitgeist* of the mid-sixties. They helped me to understand why free schoolers adopted certain educational models and philosophies.

Second, there were numerous academic essays and collections pertaining to the open school movement. Because the open school movement was more mainstream, was often allied with university or government money, and existed within the established public or traditional private school system, it was much easier to document. Numerous educators and academics, some with significant resources, had large stakes in promoting the open school movement. Consequently, they published articles and books lauding the open classroom, codifying its methodology, solidifying its definitions, and attempting to make it even more mainstream than it already was. Examples are Roland Barth's *Open Education and the American School*, Virgil Howes's *Informal Teaching in the Open Classroom*, David Nyberg's *The Philosophy of Open Education*, Vito Perrone's *Open Education; Promises and Problems*, Charles Silberman's *The Open Classroom Reader*, and Bernard Spodek's *Studies in Open Education*. These are only a few of the most prominent collections and essays of the time; hundreds of open classroom articles flooded

¹⁶Graubard, *Free the Children*, p.9.

mainstream journals in the early seventies. If a researcher was studying alternative education in the sixties and seventies based entirely on the academic literature published, he or she would might easily surmise that open classrooms were the only educational reform of the time. So reading these open classroom books helped me contextualize and compare the free school movement to the more mainstream reform efforts of the sixties and seventies.

Third, a few of the more dedicated free school people wrote individual histories of free schools. Some were written as postmortem accounts of failed schools, like Steve Bhaerman and Joel Denker's *No Particular Place to Go*. These books detailed attempts to create or sustain free schools, and grappled with questions about why they failed. Other individual histories, like Dan Greenberg's *The Sudbury Valley Experience* or Chris Mercogliano's *Doing it our Way*, told the stories of free schools that continued to grow and that survive until today. These books often celebrated the successes of the schools, while admitting the difficulties they had to overcome throughout the years. Still other individual histories are collections of essays and articles that chronicle different issues throughout a free school's history, like Len Solo's *Alternative, Innovative and Traditional Education*. What unites all these books is their personal, individual focus. While they often deal with broader philosophical issues, these accounts primarily provide individual perspectives on the free school movement. I looked at them in the same way I looked at personal interviews; as individual tiles in the historical mosaic of the free school movement.

Fourth, there were a very few books and articles that directly attempted to answer broad questions about free schools or radical, alternative education. Allen Graubard's *Free the Children*, which came out in 1972, was the first and only attempt to chronicle the whole free school movement. Since then, articles like Joe Nathan's "A History of Public Alternatives" and Ron Miller's "A Brief History of Alternative Education" have added interesting perspectives to the history of the free school movement. But none of these authors has published a comprehensive, historical analysis of free schools since Graubard's

book came out in 1972. Still, this fourth group of literature has been quite useful to this study, especially in providing direction and definitions early in my research.

In addition to my literature review, I have compiled statistics about free schools from 1965 to the present: the absolute numbers of free schools over time, the numbers of free schools that started each year, and a representative study of Chicago-area free schools over time. These statistics come from a variety of sources. Data from the years 1965 to 1971 comes from Graubard's statistics in "Free the Children," which he compiled while working at the New Schools Exchange, a national clearinghouse for free schoolers. For the period between 1972 and 1978 I relied directly on the New Schools Exchange Directories that I dug up in the Yale University Archives. These Directories, which came out yearly, listed alternative schools all over the country. Not all of the schools in the Directories were free schools, but the Directories gave enough information about each school to decide whether it was a free school or not. My most recent statistics came from Jerry Mintz's *Almanac of Educational Choices*, published in 1996. Mintz attempted to list all non-mainstream educational options, including Montessori schools, Waldorf schools, homeschooling cooperatives, and alternative public schools. So, like with the New School Exchange Directory, I had to comb through each of the 6,000 entries to determine which schools fit my definition. Luckily, most entries in the *Almanac* included a brief description of the school, its date of inception, and a person to contact. With that information I was able to determine, with a large degree of certainty, which schools fit my definition. I will explain this process further in Chapter III, when I present the statistics.

Statistics, however, reveal very little without corresponding interpretation. My most valuable information came from neither the statistics nor the literature, but from personal accounts of the free school movement. These personal accounts came in the form of intensive, structured interviews, which lasted from half an hour to two hours. The interviews were centered around two central questions: "How were you involved with free schools in the late sixties?" and "What happened to the free school movement from the

early seventies until now?" From the first interview in October to the last interview in February, I used the same general interview protocol (appendix A). However, with each successive interview, I found myself straying farther and farther from the strict protocol, asking more follow-up questions, taking the interview deeper. Therefore, the later interviews were my most valuable source of information, and my conclusions about the history of the free school movement are drawn largely from them.

I selected the interview subjects in a number of ways. The first step in the process, when I was just getting my feet wet in the world of free schools, was to send out a barrage of letters to free school people. My first list of contacts came from Kozol's two editions of *Alternative Schools*,¹⁷ which were designed to help people create free schools. I also sent out a mass email to the Brown University Department of Education, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Of the 22 letters I sent out, 5 were returned to sender, 7 elicited no response, 5 elicited useless or off-subject responses, and 5 turned into fruitful interviews. One of the letters found its way to Jerry Mintz, who told me via email that I should attend a National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools (NCACS) conference. After attending the gathering at Goddard College (which has been a haven for alternative education since the sixties) I found myself immersed in a relatively small, interconnected world of free school people. It seemed like everyone in the free school community knew everyone else, and intimately. Ed Nagel, the current National Office Manager of the NCACS, confirmed the intimacy of the free school community: "We're like a family, all these people who have been doing this for twenty-five, thirty years. Going to an [NCACS] conference is like going to a big reunion. Everybody knows everybody." I quickly became familiar with most of the names and schools that were important to the movement, and found myself within one or two degrees of separation from many of the influential free schoolers. From there it was only a

¹⁷ Kozol put out the first edition of "Free Schools" in 1972. A second edition came out in 1982 under the title, "Alternative Schools." For my initial mailing list I referred to both editions, since the list of Contacts, Leads and Addresses had changed over the ten years.

matter of networking and dropping names, until I had a fairly complete list of interview candidates.

Free school people are, for the most part, wonderfully accessible, open, and willing to talk about their experiences. They enthusiastically encouraged me to pursue my research, and offered many names and phone numbers for me to contact. So my relatively small list of addresses from the back of Kozol's book snowballed into a sprawling list of over one hundred possible interviewees. Needless to say, my primary task was to predict which interviews would be most valuable. To do this, I used three criteria. First I tried to interview people who had first hand experience with the movement since the 1960s or 70s. The only exception was Denice Jenkins, the current principal of School One, who nonetheless gave me a wonderful firsthand perspective of how School One had changed since its inception in 1971. Second, I chose interviews that would provide me with a broad perspective. Some of my subjects had failed miserably at starting free schools. Others still ran successful free schools, or had jumped from school to school since the late sixties. Some had observed the process from the outside, and had broad, thoughtful perspectives. Other provided detailed, personal accounts of their involvement in free schools. Third, I selected some interviewees based on accessibility. Though I had phone interviews with people in California, Colorado, Virginia, Pennsylvania and even New Mexico, many of my interviews were conducted in Providence, Boston or New York. Money was as much a limiting factor as geography; without a major research grant, I could only spend so much time on the phone, at conferences, or traveling to interviews. Put together, the three factors of personal experience, diversity and accessibility dictated my interview choices.

To summarize my methodology, this study is less than a comprehensive survey but more than a local investigation. To capture a sense of the whole movement, I have sought diverse and widespread information, from all over the United States. But to dig deeper into historical causes, I have relied on highly personal perspectives. Maybe I have attempted to get a handle on something too big. Maybe I have spent too much time

digging for depth, and not enough time surveying the entire landscape. Ideally, I have struck a fruitful balance. At best, my methods have given me some historically accurate and impartial insights. At worst, they have given me an opinionated perspective (albeit thoroughly informed) on the history of the free school movement. Either way, I assume full responsibility for the methods, the data, and the conclusions they have generated.

II. *Roots of the Movement*

It is tempting to trace the roots of the free school movement back to progressive education of the early twentieth century, especially as it was articulated by John Dewey. In terms of both philosophy and pedagogy, progressive and free schools share many basic tenets: respecting the interests of the learner, teacher as guide, school as community, and avoidance of formal subject matter, to name a few. Lawrence Cremin certainly made a connection between the two movements in his brief article, "The Free School Movement—A Perspective."¹ The article's first paragraph established this clear link between free schools and progressive education:

About a decade ago, I published a study of the progressive education movement of John Dewey's time [*The Transformation of the School*]. I am often asked, Is there any relation between that movement and the free school movement today? Is there anything to be learned from a comparison? And if so, what? My answer is that we can learn a great deal.

Cremin then compared the histories of the two movements, framing the free schools as a recurrence of the progressive movement. He called progressive education the "first movement," and free schools "the present-day movement," asserting that the two are inseparable. His concluding paragraph even claimed that the "authentic aspirations of both movements [were] articulated by Dewey," as if Dewey were the central philosopher of both progressive and free schools.

¹Cremin, "The Free School Movement—A Perspective," in Fantini, *Alternative Education*, p. 59.

This connection is understandably easy for a historian to make. As Cremin pointed out, the free schoolers shared many ideologies and methods with the earlier progressives. But according to free schoolers themselves, free school philosophies did not draw on Dewey or any other progressives. When each of my seventeen interview subjects was asked, "What ideas, thinkers, books, schools or programs informed your thinking about education," not one of them referred to Dewey, or William Heard Kilpatrick, or Helen Parkhurst, or George Counts, or any other progressive educator. Cremin actually admits this in "The Free School Movement:"

What is most striking, perhaps, in any comparison of the two movements is the notoriously atheoretical, ahistorical character of the free school movement in our time. It has been far less willing to look to history for ideas. Those who have founded free schools have not read their Francis W. Parker or their Caroline Pratt or their Helen Parkhurst, with the result that boundless energy has been spent in countless classrooms reinventing the pedagogical wheel.

Though he did not mention Dewey by name, Cremin certainly was saying that the free schoolers never looked to Dewey for inspiration. Though he illustrated the connection between their general ideologies, Cremin failed to show how free schools rose like the "phoenix in the ashes"² of progressive education.

Rather than stretching back to the 1910s and 20s, the free school movement was firmly embedded in the 1960s. In many ways, the 1960s were just as politically conservative as the 1940s or 50s; after all, the country elected Richard Nixon president and a majority of Americans supported the Vietnam War. Culturally, however, the 1960s were a fairly radical time. The civil rights movement challenged racial inequality in the North and South. Disaffected middle class youth, especially college students and young intellectuals, rebelled against the conventions of their parent's generation. Environmentalists and consumers banded together to form communes and food co-ops. According to Peter Clecak, author of *America's Quest for the Ideal Self*, all these cultural and political radicals of the 1960s – and the list extends far beyond the few examples I just

²Cremin, in Fantini, *Alternative Education*, p. 60.

listed – “became collectively known as the ‘Movement,’ an umbrella term covering a range of countercultural attitudes and activities.”³ Clecak went on to describe the Movement (capital M):

Just what *was* this elusive Movement? No single definition fits the entire Movement.... Political activists and social dropouts of all sorts identified themselves in varying degrees with the Movement. The targets of dissent were seemingly endless: nuclear weapons testing; the denial of civil rights to blacks; capital punishment; official harassment of dissenters, nonconformists and marginals; *in loco parentis* on campuses; poverty and inequitable distributions of power and wealth; the consumer culture; the war in Vietnam; liberalism; capitalism and imperialism; discrimination against nonwhite minorities, women, children and gays.... The Movement, then, eludes precise definition.⁴

For many who lived through it, the Movement became a kind of cliché, a buzzword with multiple meanings for multiple people. But which central ideologies united all definitions of the Movement? What were its essential facets? Like the early definition of “free school,” the following is not a final, formal definition of the Movement. Rather, it intends to clarify this important term – the Movement – so that we can understand how free schools were embedded in the larger cultural trends of the 1960s.

The first central tenet of the Movement was resistance to authority. Though the Movement may have been more visible than the mainstream culture (Jonathan Kozol wrote about the “media-promoted counter-culture”⁵), America remained fairly conservative. Traditional modes of cultural and political authority continued to dominate American culture. The Movement, Clecak argued, was a direct reaction to those modes of authority:

In the 1960s, authority went on the defensive in nearly every region of American civilization: it was regularly questioned, doubted, tested, and in some instance altogether rejected. In large numbers, gay men and lesbians rejected the authority of straight culture. Women denied the authority of men. Children abandoned parental authority. Blacks and other minorities rejected the authority of whites.... Radicals spurned the authority of bourgeois ideas and institutions.⁶

³Clecak, Peter, *America's Quest for the Ideal Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 19.

⁴Clecak, *America's Quest*, p. 118.

⁵Kozol, *Free Schools*, p. 7.

⁶Clecak, *America's Quest*, p. 279-280.

While the predominant tone of the 1940s and 1950s promoted conformity to authority, radicals in the Movement gradually but dramatically turned to rejecting authority. Ironically, Clecak argued, the counterculture of dissent actually became a mainstream movement: resistance to authority spread within many mainstream groups, such as working and middle class taxpayers, European ethnic groups, Catholics, evangelical Protestants, and neoconservative and New Right intellectuals.⁷ This dissent, both political and cultural, was at the heart of the Movement.

In resisting the social norms of the older generation, youth and Leftist intellectuals pursued the second facet of the Movement—personal liberation. Rebelling against the homogenizing effects of the 1950s, youth of the 1960s sought to regain their individual identities, to regain personal power in an increasingly impersonal world. Hippies and radicals gravitated towards alternate, personally liberating lifestyles. Communes and cooperative farms, especially on the West coast, resisted material culture and sought personal liberation through simpler, environmentally-conscious lifestyles. Recreational drugs, especially marijuana and hallucinogens such as mescaline and LSD, were used to “free the mind,” or to “experience alternate realities.” Many people looked towards meditation and eastern religion for spiritual liberation. These were all ways to gain individual freedom and identity in what was seen as a repressive, homogenizing culture. Clecak summarized this search for liberation as, “a quest for personal fulfillment, a pursuit of a free, gratified, unalienated self.”⁸

The third important facet of the Movement was the push for social justice. Blacks and whites worked together in the movement for civil rights, staging marches, rallies and sit-ins against institutional racism. Urban activists attacked poverty in the inner cities, setting up homeless shelters, community gardens and soup kitchens. The feminist movement challenged traditional limits on women’s roles, asserting that women could participate equally in societal power structures. College students all across America

⁷Clecak, *America’s Quest*, p. 20.

⁸Clecak, *America’s Quest*, p. 6.

stormed administration buildings, demanding greater access and control for minorities and the poor. Powerful hymns of social justice, such as “We Shall Overcome,” captured the optimistic vision of a free and equitable society.

These central tenets of the Movement – resistance to authority, personal liberation, and the push for social equality – profoundly affected the free school movement. Free schoolers themselves were aware of this connection. In most of the interviews I conducted, free schoolers at least mentioned, if they did not elaborate on, the relationship between free schools and the Movement. But again, the Movement was more an abstraction to most of my interview subjects than a defined series of attitudes or events. Several of them spoke of the “Revolution,” or would explain a certain phenomenon or event by saying, “Well, it was the sixties,” as if those terms had common meaning to everyone. So breaking the Movement into these three facets is a somewhat artificial division. It is useful only insofar as it will help us to see how the free schools fit into the larger countercultural trends of the 1960s.

According to the subjects I interviewed, the free school movement was inextricably tied to the Movement. My sixth interview question asked, “Do you believe you were part of a ‘movement’ of any sort?” I intended this question to elicit responses specifically about the free school movement, but most of my subjects talked about the larger Movement instead. I had this conversation with Eileen Landay, who started a free school in 1969:

Hausman: Did you feel like you were part of a movement?

Landay: Oh yeah. Absolutely.

Hausman: Describe that. What did that mean to you?

Landay: Well, it had various aspects to it. That is, some of it was educational, some of it was political, some of it was economic. And there were these communes, a series of famous communes that grew up all over the country, and we (The Learning Tree) were involved with them.... We believed in collectivism, anti-materialism, and what my mother used to call “living off the ground,” you know, back to the earth and those kinds of things.... We really were, in some ways, resisting the values of the last generation.... And the anti-war movement, that was part of the same thing, and the drug culture, I suppose, and the sexual revolution that was beginning to happen. So it was all part of a movement, and yeah, we were part of it. We were certainly part of it.

Landay's reaction to this question was so typical, in fact, that if I wanted my subjects to talk about the free school movement specifically, I almost always had to ask follow up questions, such as, "Did the free school movement fit into that larger movement? How?" Otherwise, I would be treated to reminiscent tales of the good-old, energetic, freewheeling sixties.

Within the larger context of the Movement, the free school movement actually developed from two different roots. These two roots became the two strains of the free school movement, the Summerhillian strain and the community school strain. In their early histories, these two strains were united only by their common connection to the larger Movement. Around 1968, however, they fused together into one movement, as Cremin and Fantini remarked. Also around 1968, the open classroom movement found its way into the complicated blend of free school roots. Open classrooms were not nearly as influential as the other two roots (they were more a half-root than a full root), but they did significantly affect free schools. Detailing these two-and-a-half roots, especially within the context of the broader counterculture, will help explain many of the later (post-1971) trends of the free school movement.

As the Movement set a tone of countercultural dissent in the early 1960s, a book from England burst onto the American educational scene. Without the growing radicalism of the Movement, the book might have gone entirely unnoticed. As it was, the publication of A. S. Neill's *Summerhill* in 1960 received tremendous attention, and started the wheels of the free school movement turning.⁹ Neill's book told the story of the Summerhill School in Suffolk, England, which he had been operating since 1921. Summerhill aimed to cultivate happiness in children, on the theory that happy children would grow to be functional, well-adjusted adults. According to Neill, children were happiest when adults did not interfere with their natural growth, did not force them to

⁹Though Cremin drew an exaggerated connection between progressive and free schools, he does agree that Neill, more than any progressive author, informed the free school movement. Thus, he wrote, "I would date [the beginning of the free school movement] from the publication of A. S. Neill's *Summerhill* in 1960." (in Fantini, *Alternative Education*, p. 61)

learn, and did not impose rules from above. Summerhill's curriculum was totally non-compulsory: children could go through their entire school career without ever stepping into a classroom. Neill concluded that if children were given such broad freedom, they naturally matured and learned happily.

Summerhill quickly became an influential, widely read book in America. Allen Graubard claimed in 1971 that "millions of people" had read Neill's work.¹⁰ Psychologists, philosophers, educators and cultural critics helped to bring Neill into the spotlight by using *Summerhill* in college courses. The book proved especially popular at small, radical colleges such as Antioch, Earlham and Goddard.¹¹ Neill's philosophy greatly appealed to this small but growing generation of educational radicals, and as that radicalism became more mainstream, so did his popularity and visibility. His insistence on children's rights and his deliberate dismantling of school hierarchy rang true with those who sought to resist authority. Those seeking personal liberation gravitated toward Neill's vision of children's freedom, where no teacher or principal or school board could oppress their students. Neill's belief in the natural goodness of children, and his fondness for the wilderness as an educational tool appealed to the "back to the land" movement. Also, his libertarian attitude towards sexuality appealed to advocates of personal liberation and "free love." A number of radicals adopted *Summerhill* as a kind of bible and formed Summerhill societies. Although these societies did not start free schools until later in the 1960s, they spread Neill's philosophy through reading groups, lectures and newsletters.

The first American free school was probably the Lewis-Wadham School, started in 1963 by Herb and Anne Snitzer. The Snitzers were heavily influenced by *Summerhill*; in fact, they often consulted with A. S. Neill's daughter, Zoë Redhead Neill, who ran Summerhill with her father. Nestled between the two rural villages of Lewis and Wadham, New York, the Snitzer's school essentially transplanted Neill's model to American soil.

¹⁰Graubard, *Free the Children*, p.11.

¹¹My father, an Antioch student from 1960 to 1965, remembers reading *Summerhill* times and having extensive discussions, both in and outside the classroom, about Neill's philosophy.

Lewis-Wadham attracted some attention from the popular press, and became a cause célèbre for radical educators from colleges such as Antioch and Goddard. Through an informal internship program, the school spread its Summerhillian ideas to many future free schoolers. Influenced by these ideas, Dan and Hanna Greenberg created the Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, Massachusetts, in 1965. Sudbury Valley fared even better than Lewis-Wadham. Its philosophy and pedagogy attracted many devotees, some of whom sought to replicate the school's success with their own free schools.¹²

Like Summerhill, Lewis-Wadham and Sudbury Valley catered to privileged children of the liberal, educated, upper-middle class. Though not unsympathetic to the Movement's push for social equality, these schools believed that their primary focus must be on learning, not politics. In fact, Sudbury Valley and its associate schools withdrew themselves from the NCACS over this school-as-political-arena controversy. Sudbury Valley had been one of the original NCACS members. When a clause about the political nature and implications of schooling was added to the NCACS bylaws, the Greenbergs and their associates strongly objected. This apolitical vision of schooling is nicely summarized by Neill in the Question and Answer section in the back of his book:

Are the children at Summerhill interested in politics?

No. That may be because they are middle class children who have never had the experience of poverty. I make it a rule to keep the teaching staff from trying to influence the children politically. Politics, like religion, is a matter for personal choice to be made later in life as the child grows up.¹³

¹²In fact, Sudbury Valley later condensed its philosophy into a package called, "The New School Starter Kit." The Greenbergs have successfully sold this package, at \$300 a kit, to scores of prospective educators. Thirteen Sudbury Valley clones have appeared since the mid-1980s.

¹³Neill, p. 354. Despite this fairly blunt quote, the apolitical view of Neill's work has been disputed. In his article, "A History of Public Alternatives," (in the NSE Newsletter, issue #132, 1976) Joe Nathan makes this interesting but unsubstantiated claim:

What was left out of Summerhill was as important as what it contained. According to Herb Kohl, Neill was a Socialist and insisted in virtually everything he wrote which was published in Great Britain that the ideas found in Summerhill wouldn't work on a broad scale unless the larger society was socialist. These conclusions were edited out of the U.S. version.

Nathan cites a personal conversation with Kohl as the source of his information. While I have no conclusive proof contradicting this information, given the overall tone of *Summerhill* and *Neill, Neill*,

This extreme view articulated by Neill came under attack from many educators, even those in schools that fell more on the Summerhillian side of the free school spectrum than the community school side.

While the founding of Lewis-Wadham, Sudbury Valley and a few other early schools marked the infancy of the Summerhillian free schools, the community school movement was establishing roots in politically disempowered urban areas. The birth of the community free school movement, around 1965, closely resembled the birth of its Summerhillian cousin. As with the Progressive schools, a historian may be tempted to draw ideological connections between the community free schools and earlier philosophies of education, such as the Modern school movement of the 1920s. But community free schoolers themselves rarely looked to the distant past for inspiration. Jonathan Kozol concisely captured this ahistorical outlook of the early movement when he described the birth of the New School for Children in 1966:

In making the decision [to start a free school] we were very much aware of doing something different and, as we believed, unprecedented in this city and this nation. There were, to our knowledge, no other "Free Schools" of that nature in existence. There was no movement. We had no literature to turn to. We were obliged to turn only to our own feelings and to our own insights for all comfort, all direction and all guidance.¹⁴

The truth, Kozol later found out, was that, "Some of these schools, of course, had started up as early as we, and one or two (as we now learned) had started up before us."¹⁵ At the inception of the first community free schools, the sense of a free school movement did not exist, and free schoolers infrequently looked to history for inspiration.

The community schools were inspired, however, by a contemporary movement: the "freedom schools" of the American South. During the early and mid 1960s, the civil-rights Council of Federated Organizations (including SNCC, SCLC and CORE) helped develop a network of small, radical schools in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and nearby

Orange Peel, a collection of Neill's letters, as well as two disparaging remarks about Communism in *Summerhill*, I remain skeptical of the claim that Neill was an avid socialist.

¹⁴Kozol, *Free Schools*, p. 1.

¹⁵Kozol, *Free Schools*, p. 5.

states. Their main agenda was to take black children out of the racist public schools, give them a sense of racial pride and power, and teach the basic skills necessary to pass voting literacy tests.¹⁶ This excerpt, from a memorandum to Mississippi freedom school teachers participating in a summer convention, captures the political agenda of the freedom schools:

The purpose of the freedom school is to provide an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternative and, ultimately, new directions for action.

The freedom schools' curriculum focused on the immediate political life of the community. In their concern with social justice and their militant insistence on self-governance, these schools resembled the community free schools. However, their basic methods remained traditional and authoritarian. Teachers drilled students in the three R's, in Afro-centric history and in militant dogma. Because of their strict discipline, the freedom schools cannot be considered free schools. However, they did inspire the community free schools with their insistence on political liberation and resistance to the authority of an oppressive, racist culture.

Like their freedom school cousins, community free schools reacted to very immediate conditions in very local circumstances. Groups of parents, teachers and community leaders found one another through local, grassroots networking. Many of them were close friends, or parents of similar age children. Some taught at the same public schools before starting their own free schools. Others found one another through ads in local papers or bulletins. Once they had banded together, these early community free schoolers acted with a flush of excitement to set up their schools. Again, Kozol's experience with the New School for Children typified the infancy of the movement:

The first few months were a period of unforgettable energy and locomotion. Sometimes it seemed we gave up eating and sleeping during those amazing days of April, May and June.... It was all incredible to us anyway.... It was a

¹⁶Nathan, *Brief History*, p. 10.

time when many of us felt confident about ourselves and we were not scared to stick our necks out and to take some chances.¹⁷

This sentiment of “energy and locomotion” was common to both strains of the early movement, and chances are that many free schoolers actually did give up eating and sleeping during the inception of their schools.

Many of the first urban free schools were called “street academies” or “storefront schools.” These early schools targeted “high risk” students in urban ghettos who either had dropped out or been in trouble with the law. Instead of subjecting these “problem kids” to more authority and tighter discipline, street academies let students develop their own curricula. Often these curricula involved community service, local apprenticeships, or projects that took place outside of traditional classrooms—hence the name, “street academy.” Not surprisingly, students responded well to the personalized, self-directed environments that differed so radically from the traditional, sprawling urban high schools. Schools such as the Parkway Project in Philadelphia and the Metro School in Columbus gained national attention for their success with these “high risk” youth.

The birth of the Penn Circle Community High School of Pittsburgh was typical of the early community schools. The following selections are taken from “I Will Mess Up On My Own: An Analysis of the First Six Months of Penn Community High School”¹⁸:

The East End Cooperative Ministry (EECM), a social alliance of 22 churches in the East End area of Pittsburgh, runs a free breakfast program every school morning for local high school students. The EECM staff found that each day forty to sixty of the three hundred students who came for breakfast never went across the street to school. The EECM staff wondered what could be done for these students....

They began to work closely with about fifteen of the truant students and tried to understand their problems. They found that these students felt they were not able to cope with the situation at the high school. They complained of the bigness of the school, the impersonal relationships with teachers and other students, the confinement brought by numerous rules and the structure which left them no independence....

¹⁷Kozol, *Free Schools*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁸cited in Fantini, *Alternative Education*, pp. 87-93.

The EECM staff were concerned about these truants, so they decided to start an alternative high school. With a \$7,000 grant from the EECM and five VISTA teachers, they opened the school with 40 students....

One of the primary goals of Penn CCHS is to turn students on to education. This is done by developing student interest, by giving students a lot of choice, and by letting them make their own decisions. The school also developed student involvement in learning by removing hassling rules. Students are allowed to smoke, eat, and drink soda whenever they wish. They can sit on a table, chair or floor. When they are not in class, they are allowed to play ping-pong, pool or records. Due to this freedom, more than one visitor to Penn CCHS has concluded that it was a play school. However, when treated like responsible people, students do not abuse their privileges; interest in ping-pong and pool has declined as the months progress.

Though Penn CCHS, like most early community schools, had no role models to look up to, they forged ahead with their experimental program and paved the way for later community schools.

Around 1967 or 1968, the groundbreaking, radical works of authors such as John Holt, Herb Kohl and Jonathan Kozol began to find their way into popular view. All of their first books – *How Children Fail*, *36 Children*, and *Death at an Early Age* – became bestsellers, and all three gained a degree of national fame. Like *Summerhill*, these books especially *How Children Fail*, extensively discussed children's freedom. They savagely indicted the backwards teaching methods and school structures that seemed to kill children's creativity, morality and curiosity. However, departing from *Summerhill*, they all fused pedagogical ideas with a sense of social justice, noting that numbing children's minds was just another way to keep disenfranchised populations from gaining social equality. None of the authors resolved the tensions between the Summerhillian schools and the community schools, but they illustrated how the two could easily complement each other, either in a unified movement, or in a unified school. Lucianne Vorys, who had apprenticed at a child-centric progressive school before becoming a free schooler, remembered how Holt's and George Dennison's books changed her perspective about education and social change:

Shady Hill (the progressive school) was, you know, a wonderful school, but it didn't include anyone but white kids. And I didn't want to have another

Shady Hill.... After I read Holt and Dennison, I saw that I could do both, I could have a no pressure, child-centered school and I didn't have to just include white kids. Because, you know, [Holt and Dennison] had done both. It worked for them. That was profoundly moving for me.

Even though it took them a few years, these radical books had a profound effect on drawing the two strains of the movement together.

Where they had once felt isolated and alone, potential free schoolers now had role models and literature to look to for inspiration and support. The books gave them courage to start their own free schools, either Summerhillian or community, but usually a combination of both. Schools such as the New Community School opened, a white middle-class school that incorporated a strong Black Studies program for its large minority of poor, black students. By 1968 these schools began to find one another and create local networks. Chicago area free schools coalesced into the Alternative Schools Network in 1968. A group of San Franciscan free schoolers who called themselves BARTOC (Bay Area Radical Teachers Organizing Committee) began publishing a newsletter, "No More Teachers Dirty Looks," in March of 1968. A Boston network called the Radical Teachers Support Group also began publishing a newsletter in 1968, called "The Red Pencil." Regional conferences organized by these and numerous other local networks drew increasingly large crowds. These local networks, journals and conferences connected free schoolers to one another, allowing them to share ideas and resources, and to inspire others to start their own schools.

At the same time, the Movement was gathering momentum in many different arenas. Radical reform of all sorts had spread into many corners of the inner-city. The Black Power movement was reaching a feverish pitch in many northern cities, and the fight for desegregation in the South had been raging for over a decade. Government grants flooded into social services as President Johnson tried to build his Great Society. Resistance to the Vietnam war increased. More and more young men and women "dropped out" of society and "turned on" to the counterculture. As Eileen Landay said,

"The other radical institutions of the late 1960s reinforced our early ideals. We all belonged to food co-ops... and there were co-operative banks, and communes, and living collectives. It was all mutually reinforcing, and incredibly exciting." The free schools, whose identity depended so intimately on the Movement, drew strength from this counterculture explosion. In 1969, George Dennison wrote, "There are no signs that a movement exists, but there are many signs that one might."¹⁹ Dennison must have written this on the very eve of the free school movement's birth; within the year his prediction came true.

At the same time as the two strains of free schools coalesced into one movement, a second wave of influence came over from England. The British infant method, also called the integrated day or the Leicestershire method, was a new system of pedagogy that encouraged student self-direction and internal motivation. British infant schools had smaller, more intimate classrooms, used more play and hands-on activities than drills and formal lessons, and, as the name suggests, only dealt with young children. They gained popular acclaim in England after an extensive government study, Plowden Report of 1965, lauded them as more humane and more effective than traditional English grammar schools. Joseph Featherstone, an American scholar, imported the British infant school model to America in a series of widely-read articles. These articles called the method the "open classroom,"²⁰ a term that was reinforced by Charles Silberman's famous studies, *Crisis in the Classroom* and *The Open Classroom Reader*. Starting around 1968, free schoolers, especially those that benefited from professional teacher training, often read literature from the open classroom movement. Particularly influential was Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *Teacher*, a detailed and beautifully written account of her experiences in an open classroom. Featherstone's articles were condensed into a book, *Schools Where Children*

¹⁹Dennison, George, cited in Kozol, *Free Schools*, p. v.

²⁰The open classroom should not be confused with the "open school," an architectural innovation that took the walls out of elementary schools, hoping that this would promote open interaction and exploration. While open architecture and open pedagogy were usually meant to go together, often the result was a lot of shouting and noise, until frustrated teachers convinced their well-meaning principals to replace the walls.

Learn, and it also became influential in academic circles. Soon collections of open classroom essays and accounts of open classroom success flooded the academic literature. These works gave free schoolers some of the tools and pedagogical methods useful in non-coercive learning environments. In his introduction to *Alternative Education*, Mario Fantini listed the community schools, Summerhill, and open classroom as equally important influences to the free school movement. While Fantini is wrong to suggest that it was an equal influence, the open classroom movement was at least a “half” strain; it certainly gave free schools many methods and curricula that worked effectively in non-coercive environments.

With the convergence of these two-and-a-half strains, the free school movement blossomed into national prominence. One of the regional journals, the New Schools Exchange (NSE) Newsletter, which originally came out of Santa Barbara, California, started networking with schools outside of its immediate vicinity. Harvey Haber, the director of the NSE, connected with schools all over the West coast, in rural areas of Texas and the Southwest, and in the urban Northeast. Between the fall of 1968 and the spring of 1969, its subscription list grew from fewer than 200 to over 2,000. According to Allen Graubard, who worked under Haber, the sense of locomotion and growth was phenomenal. Haber, Graubard and the rest of the NSE staff decided the time was right to call for a national conference. In our interview, Graubard described the infamous “Zacca Lake” gathering of May, 1969:

We decided to have a big conference, a free school conference. So we announced it in the Newsletter, and we found this gorgeous location about 40 miles north of Santa Barbara, called Zacca Lake. It was far out in the country, really out in the woods. I remember how we had to go up there with kids and chop roads, practically, to get cars up there!

When people started coming, we couldn’t believe it, it just kept growing. Finally, there were over 1,500 people. We had to send some people down to another campsite because there just wasn’t any room. Most people brought tents, and teepees, and old vans, you name it. At the same time, we had invited all these, you know, “important” people. I remember I went to the airport to pick up John Holt, and I took him back to this ranch that a friend of mine owned. It was great—we had about twenty people sleeping on the floor

and then John Holt, you know (laughs), he'd come out in the morning with his little towel and his robe and his toothbrush....

George Dennison was there, and Michael Rossman, who wrote *Learning and Social Change*, and some other important people, so it became this giant event. People drove in their old school buses from their free schools all the way across the country (laughs), from Texas and Chicago and New York. Because this was really the first thing of its kind. It was really like the Woodstock of free schools.

Because of the Zacca Lake conference, the NSE gained even more renown, and became a central network for free schoolers nationwide.

At the same time, east coast free schoolers were organizing their own national networks. In 1969, while he was still a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts, Len Solo started the Teacher Dropout Center. The Center aimed to connect disillusioned public school teachers – teacher dropouts – with new free schools that desperately needed teachers. The Center also served as a clearinghouse for free school information, gatherings, newsletters, and conferences. Another East coast network was the Education Development Center in Boston. The EDC started in 1968 as a publishing house for alternative school curricula and materials. Though they served public alternative schools as well, the EDC became a central location that many free schoolers looked to for both materials and information.

Free school conferences began happening on the East coast as well. The earliest one I heard of was the Free Schools Conference at Ben-Salem College in New York City in 1969. Mary Leue described the conference when I interviewed her:

Almost all the early free school people were there, including a lot of the writers who had influenced us all to start schools. It was at an experimental college down at Fordham University, down in Manhattan, called Ben Salem College. This guy John Patineaud and his sister Marge persuaded them to put on a conference. People came from California, they came from all over. Jonathan Kozol was there, Michael Rossman was there, who wrote *The Wedding and the War*,²¹ Paul Goodman was still alive and he was there, John Holt was there. John Patineaud called it "KOA: Konference on Alternatives." And from that conference, they started a newsletter called "Kommunications on Alternatives."

²¹Rossman did write *The Wedding and the War*, as Leue said, but did not write *Learning and Social Change*, as Graubard asserted.

These early conferences and newsletters spread through free schools like wildfire. The free school movement grew until it had gained enough visibility to warrant a critical examination from the likes of Lawrence Cremin, the grandfather of educational history.

So by 1969 the formerly isolated free schools had coalesced into a self-conscious movement. Kozol wrote, "In a rush around the winter of 1969 and spring of 1970, [free schoolers] began to be aware of one another. We started to sense that we were not on our own, but that we were in fact part of a growing movement."²² By 1970, Graubard could rightfully declare that the free school movement was an astonishing, vibrant new phenomenon.

Because they were a grassroots movement, the free schools had very immediate and local roots. They were not inspired by the progressive schools, the Modern school movement, or any other historical precedents. Rather, the free schools were direct products of the zeitgeist of the 1960s. The Movement – a combination of resistance to authority, the search for personal liberation, and the push for social equality – laid the foundation for both the Summerhillian and community free schools. When these two strains, along with the half-influence of the open classrooms, fused together in the late 1960s, the free schools coalesced into a vital, energetic social movement.

²²Kozol, *Free Schools*, p. 6.

III. *Trends in the Movement, 1971–1998*

By 1971, the free school movement had reached a peak of intensity. The two strains of the movement – Summerhillian philosophy and civil rights/urban minority activism – along with the peripheral influence of British open classrooms, had fused together into a bona fide educational reform movement. The community of free schoolers had a common base of literature, networks connecting individuals and schools together, a number of journals to spread and support their ideas, and conferences to celebrate and reinforce the movement. Free schoolers came from and fed off the counter-culture ideology of the sixties, and their schools fit nicely into existing patterns of social reform, rebellion and revolution. With the visibility and number of free schools rapidly expanding, free schoolers had every reason to believe that their schools were wave of the educational future.

However, within two or three year after this peak of intensity, the free school movement began to decline. No watershed moment or event marked the beginning of the decline. Even observers writing in 1971 and 1972, when the movement peaked, seemed unsure about the state of the free school movement. Most free school pamphlets and newsletters from that time exuded unbridled optimism about the future of American education, and a few of my interviewees remembered believing that free schools would be the next generally accepted educational innovation. But even pro-free school writers like Graubard, Cremin and Kozol, publishing in 1971 or 1972, hinted that the free school

revolution was not nearly as revolutionary as its more enthusiastic supporters asserted.

Graubard closed his book with this note of caution:

We won't win in the near future. Free schools will not sweep the country. Free school candidates will not sweep the school board elections. As part of the widespread attempt to improve the society and its spirit, free schools can make a contribution. But the work will be difficult and progress will seem very slow.... The idea of freeing all the children, even to the modest extent represented by the best of the free schools, is a good dream, but a dream nonetheless.¹

Cremin made a similar point in "The Free School Movement—A Perspective." While he lauded their efforts – "I find myself in much more sympathy with the movement... than I am opposed to it"² – he also faulted free schoolers for "asking the wrong questions," and portrayed the movement as too ahistorical, too shortsighted, and too "school-bound" to make a lasting difference in American education. With uncanny foresight, both Cremin and Graubard predicted the movement's slow, steady decline, even though they were writing at the height of its strength. This critical pessimism heralded the beginning of the decline of the free school movement.

In this chapter, I will present the post-1971 trends of the free school movement in a number of different ways. First, I will chart the movement with simple statistics that give a broad, general sense of the movement's decline. Then I will briefly describe the gradual disappearance of free school journals, regional networks and conferences. Finally, I will discuss the Four Fates of free schools: four case studies that typify what happened to the actual schools. Between these three sets of data, we should get a pretty solid understanding of *what* happened to the free school movement after 1971. I will wait until the next chapter to discuss *why* these trends happened as they did.

¹Graubard, *Free the Children*, pp. 205-206, 303.

²Cremin, in Fantini, *Alternative Education*, p. 65.

Illustrative Statistics

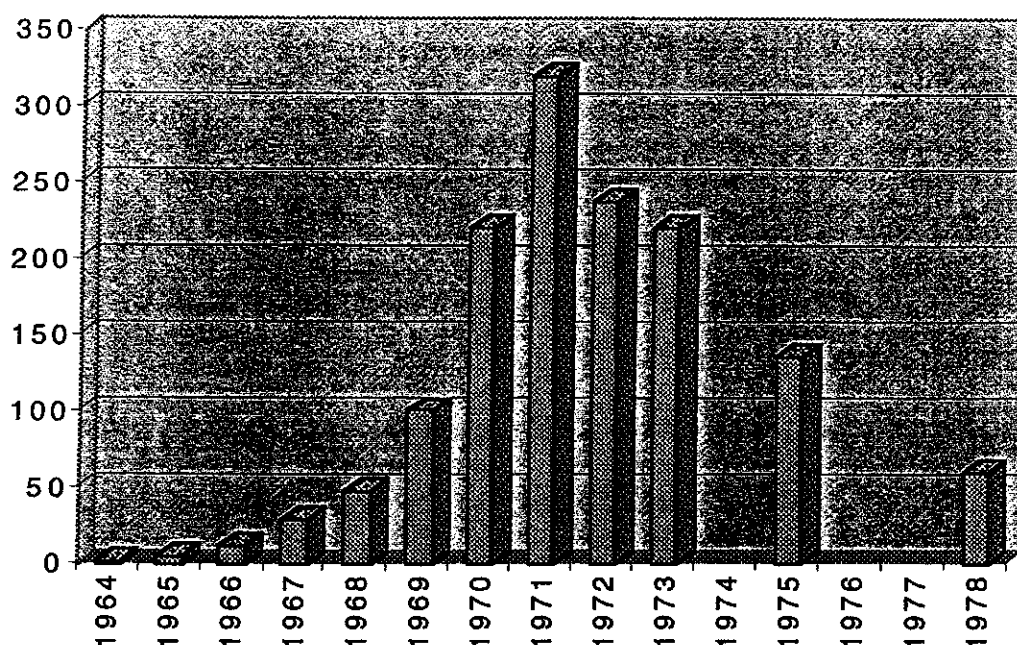
First, I must clarify that these statistics are intended to chart *change over time*, rather than absolute numbers. There is no conceivable way to accurately count the number of free schools at any given time, for a variety of reasons. Free schools came and went very quickly, flashed in the pan before they could be counted. Free schools were sometimes lonely institutions that intentionally isolated themselves; they did not want to be counted, they wanted to be counted out. Some free schoolers were busy operating their schools, and simply didn't have time to look outward and network. For these and other reasons, the New Schools Exchange Directory (and anyone else trying to count) inevitably missed some free schools. They knew this. Allen Graubard, reconsidering his own statistics, wrote, "The data, though it looks precise, being numbers and percentages, should be taken softly, and it is offered in this spirit."³ My statistics are offered in the same spirit.

Nevertheless, these statistics provide invaluable help in understanding the trends of the free school movement. They give us a concrete, visual illustration of the free school movement over time. Since they were collected by the same people with the same methods year after year,⁴ these statistics include (and exclude) the same schools year after year. So even if they do not reflect the absolute numbers, these statistics do accurately represent the strength of the movement.

³Graubard, in Fantini, *Alternative Education*, p. 69.

⁴All these statistics were compiled by counting free schools in the annual New Schools Exchange Directories, which dated from 1969 to 1978. Allen Graubard compiled the statistics until 1971, and I compiled the rest myself. Our methodologies were virtually identical, and our definition of "free school" was completely identical (because I took my definition from his book). So I would have excluded and included the same schools as Graubard, making these graphs valid representations of the movement's strength.

Figure 1
Number of free schools, 1964-1978



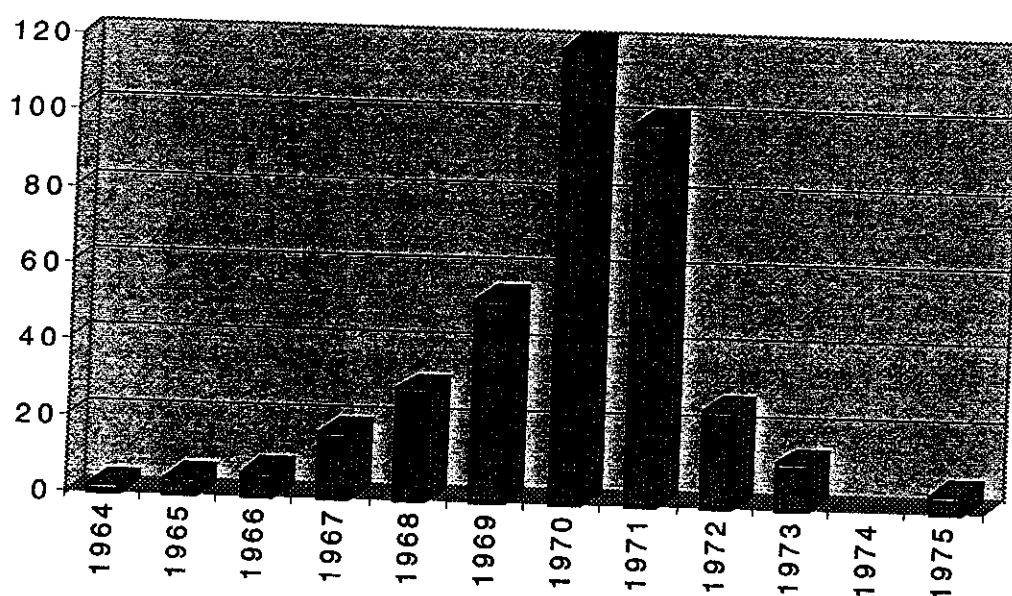
With that in mind, let us examine Figure 1. Figure 1 graphs the number of free schools in America – at least, those that had been found by the New Schools Exchange – from 1964 to 1978. It shows a small, but steadily growing number of schools from 1964 to 1967. Then, from 1968 to 1971, the number of schools almost exponentially increases. We can see why Graubard, Kozol, Cremin, Solo, and many other writers used adjectives such as “dramatic,” “unprecedented” and “exciting” to describe this growing movement. We can see why one unidentified cartoonist from the short-lived free school journal, “Alternatives for Education,” penciled these words in large, bubbly letters: “Look how far we’ve come... from just a couple of schools to THIS! WOW!”⁵ Yet, that cartoonists may have spoken too soon. In 1972, the number of free schools decreases, and continues to slide downhill until 1978. Unfortunately, figures are unavailable for all of the 1980s; after the New Schools Exchange Directory stopped publishing, no one bothered to count the

⁵Clark, Steve and Thea Clark, editors, “Alternatives for Education” (San Pedro, California: September/October, 1972) p.4.

free schools until 1996, when Jerry Mintz listed 35 in his *Almanac of Education Choices*. However, I believe that data from the 1980s would not alter the general flow of the graph. The number of free schools would still be seen in slow decline, as the original schools disappeared and fewer and fewer new schools were started.

Even more visually striking is Figure 2. Figure 2 graphs the number of free schools started each year from 1964 to 1975. Keeping in mind that for many free schoolers, as Len Solo observed, “actually starting a school was more than half the fun,” this statistic may be even more important than the overall number of schools. This figure certainly conveys the intensity of that 1970-71 peak of free school activity. After 1971, while many of the free schools continued to exist for different periods of time, very few free schools were being started. And, in fact, most of those were being started by people who had been in other free schools that just disbanded – a kind of free schooler recycling.

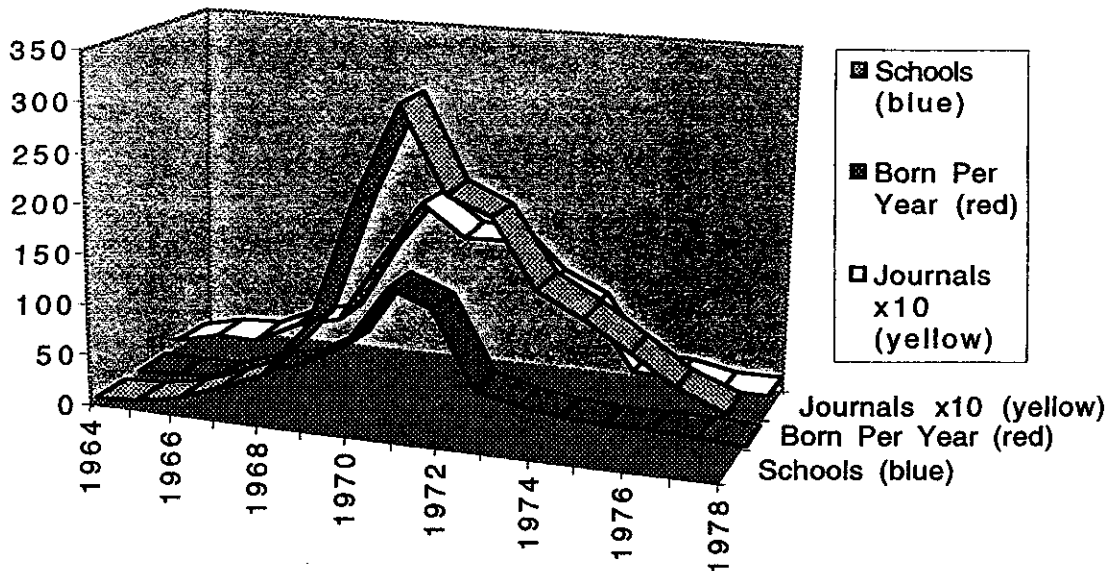
Figure 2
Number of Free Schools Born, 1964-1975



Putting the two graphs together and smoothing them gives an overall feeling of the

trends of the free school movement. Add to that the numbers of free school journals in publication from 1964 to 1978, and we get Figure 3: a striking visual model of the peak and gradual decline of the free school movement.

Figure 3
Free School Numbers, Birth Rates and Journals 1964 - 1978



Obviously, the movement has nowhere near the same visibility, power, numbers or intensity that it once had in the late sixties and early seventies. With so little change from late seventies, with so little movement, the free schools no longer seem to comprise a social movement at all.

The Four Fates

The statistics and graphs above give an impression of the movement's broad trends, but do not give us a picture of what actually happened to individual free schools. Of course, there are enough histories of individual free schools to fill thousands of pages, and I have not attempted to survey all the possible fates of free schools. However, almost every

free school's history closely resembles one of the "Four Fates" of free schools.

Undoubtedly, a few schools fell outside any of these fates, and some schools surely experienced a combination of fates, or a series of different fates in succession. However, the vast majority of schools I visited, read about or interviewed people from fell into one of these following four categories. 1) Schools that tried to succeed with their original, radical philosophies, and simply ended up closing their doors. Their lifespans lasted anywhere from six months to 20 years; on average, they probably lasted three years. 2) Schools that continue to operate today with the same philosophies and methods that they started with in the late sixties. These schools may have changed locations, or gone through periods of near failure, their leadership may have faltered or changed hands, or they may have even closed for a year or two, re-opening after some crisis or hardship had passed. Whatever struggles they endured, schools in this category succeeded in maintaining their original, radical philosophies — they are the rare "survivors" of the free school movement. 3) Schools that remained open but changed their programs significantly, usually moderating their radicalism and becoming more like traditional public or private schools. Purist free schoolers may consider these schools "co-opted" institutions; the member of the schools themselves usually believe that they have made necessary changes to accomodate changes society or students' needs. Either way, these metamorphosed schools can no longer be considered free schools by the definition I have established. 4) Schools that have become home-based learning centers, instead of maintaining their status as full time schools. Instead of bringing students together to a central school building, these learning centers provide materials, teachers, networks and sometimes even diplomas for homeschoolers.

To explore each one of these categories more specifically, I have chosen to trace the history of one school that represents each fate. As an example of a school that simply closed after a brief, intense burst of life, I have chosen The Learning Tree, which operated from 1969 to 1977. As an example of an unchanged, thoroughly radical school, I will look

at The Albany Free School, started in 1968 and still alive and well. As an example of a moderated, "co-opted" free school, I have chosen School One, founded in 1971, which continues to operate in Providence, Rhode Island. And as an example of a free school that has become a home-based learning center, I will examine the Clonlara School of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Like our original definition of "free school," these types are ideal, and are only helpful insofar as they explain the actual trends behind the free school statistics.

The Learning Tree

Of all the free school histories I encountered, the story of the Learning Tree, in Garden City, New York, was the most typical. All my information about the Learning Tree came from a long, rich interview with Eileen Landay, now a Professor of Education at Brown University. Her description of the Learning Tree's birth mirrors many free schoolers' stories:

In 1969, I had two young children, and one of them was in public school in Long Island. And I was quite unhappy with the state of education, and especially the education he was getting in his school. The original impulse came when I visited my son's school, and I saw the extreme impersonalization. I didn't like the way [children] were being treated, and I didn't feel like he was excited about learning. And it so happened that I needed a cause to build my life around, so I joined together with a group of parents, and together we created a school. It was called the Learning Tree, and it was a parent-run, co-operative, alternative school.

Although we didn't have any official titles, I became the co-director of the school. I both helped run it, so to speak, and taught in it, for six years, until 1975. I didn't have any teacher training at the time. I was a writer, and a parent, but I didn't have any training with education. I had a lot of theories about how teaching should work, and I tried them out, but I didn't have any training.

But a few people involved did have certification. There were really five core folks that ran the school, and of those five, two were certified to teach. But it didn't really matter, because state mandates were much less stringent then. In the beginning, we actually connected ourselves with the Ethical Humanist Society in Garden City, and for the first year we were housed there. They helped us get chartered as an independent school....

This scenario of disillusioned parents bonding together to form a school was repeated hundreds of times across the United States. So, not surprisingly, the early days

of the Learning Tree resembled the early days of many free schools. By word of mouth and small informational meetings, the school recruited more and more students, peaking at a population of about 35. The children were young, all between the ages of six and twelve. Most of the teachers had children in the school: in fact, Landay first called the school a “parent-cooperative school,” rather than a free school (though, obviously, it was both). Most of the Learning Tree parents/teachers had read and been inspired by the typical free school literature, which Landay described as having a “profound impact” on their philosophy:

There was a whole series of books during that period that I know a lot of people will talk to you about. Perhaps pre-eminent was A. S. Neill’s book, *Summerhill*. Then there was Herb Kohl’s work, *36 Children*, and *Our Children Are Dying*, Nat Hentoff’s work, and *Death at an Early Age*, by what’s his name, Jonathan Kozol. Then John Holt’s works, I can’t remember the title of those now, but that was important to us. We read these books both before and during the time we started the school.... Those core readings were really important to us. But it wasn’t like we did a lot of on-going professional reading, like I do now. It was just that those books were incendiary, you know, they really sparked a passion in us.

Without any prior teaching experience, Landay and her colleagues formed many of their early beliefs about education from those “incendiary” books. This list of books reflects the influence of both the Summerhillian strain and the community school strain of the free school movement. Though it served a mostly white, middle class clientele, the Learning Tree was concerned with issues of social justice and civil rights.

The Learning Tree also resembled many other contemporary free schools in its curriculum, school environment and pedagogy. Here Landay describes the classrooms during the Learning Tree’s first few years:

They were kind of a mess, with a lot of stuff around—the more stuff, the better. Lots of things to build with, and paint, and dress up with. And a lot of books, and some tables and chairs. We tried really hard to look as uninstitutional as possible.

Then we were able to get, at the end of the first year, a big, old building. Once it had been a house, but I don’t remember what it was right before we rented it. It had three great big rooms, a kitchen, some workshop space in the basement, and a great big out of doors. So we had this great big open space,

and we filled it with plants, animals, books, stuff to play with, science stuff, just a lot of stuff. A lot of stuff....

We always tried to connect with real world stuff. Not in any very systematic way, but mostly in a very impulsive, untutored way. I know that if I could walk in there now, if I could go back in time, I know I'd be appalled (laughs). But we would take the kids to the beach, and collect sea-shells, and then do art with them, or read about them, or do little experiments.... We had one teacher who would do plays with kids. They'd write the play, and make the scenery, and write the songs, and play the music. And they were terrible plays (laughs) but it was great stuff, you know.

We gave the kids a lot of authority, so they could make all their own choices. My oldest son, Steven, got into magic, so he would spend his entire day practicing his magic tricks.... We encouraged the kids to follow their own interests. So a lot of it was just play, but then a lot of it was exploration—of stuff, and books, and words.

The description above vividly illustrates the first defining characteristic of a free school: students' freedom. The Learning Tree was equally committed to the second defining characteristic: self-governance. Since the school answered to no state authorities, it could govern itself completely independently. Within the school, the decision-making process was, in theory, as democratic as any free school could hope. Although the "five core folks" made most of the school's mundane decisions, important decisions were made by the entire community. Landay said that the Learning Tree "tried to be perfectly egalitarian, with no one wielding power over anyone else." However, she admitted, the Learning Tree never established a perfect democracy, and in retrospect, she considers that attempt "utopian and naive." When asked, "How did you make decisions in the school," Landay first let out a reminiscent laugh, and then told the following story:

I'm sorry for laughing, this is just one of those things. We got some money somehow – a couple hundred dollars, I forget how – and one of the other teachers, Bruce, he decided that it was absolutely crucial that the kids make the decision about how the money should be spent. These were kids from six to twelve. So he gathered them all in a school meeting, and said, "Okay, we have this money, and it's up to you how to spend it." It was an excruciatingly funny meeting, but awful, you know? These kids—well, they had no clue how to make a decision about how to spend two hundred dollars. They didn't even know what two hundred dollars was! It's terrible, but funny too, and so naïve.

Obviously, this story caricatures the worst effects of that “naïve commitment” to total democracy. But it shows how deeply the Learning Tree believed in community self-governance.

As with many free schoolers, Landay’s life came to revolve around her school community. The “five core folks” who created and sustained the school formed incredibly tight bonds, and have remained some of Landay’s best friends for thirty years. For those “five core folks,” and a few other teachers and parents, the school was much more of a spiritual calling than an institution of learning. In retrospect, Landay admits that, “A whole lot of, I think, the reason the adults formed those institutions (free schools) were for themselves, almost more than for the kids.”

It was a time of extreme counter-culture, extreme anti-authority, and it played out in everything we did: the kinds of clothes we wore, the kinds of positions that we took, the attitudes we had. Starting the Learning Tree was, in a way, our attempt to create a social world for all of us, even more for the adults than for the children. We loved the thought of forming this community of ideas, with like-minded people. Starting a school gave us a sense of connection in an impersonal, disconnected world....

In our case, I think we were quite irresponsible. We were seeking answers to our own questions, and we did it through the school and the kids. Sometimes I think we neglected the kids to fulfill our own needs.... There was an enormous immaturity connected to it.

This idea of adult self-indulgence is echoed by Len Solo, who started a free school in 1972, and later wrote a book called *Alternative, Innovative, and Traditional Schools*. In an unusually candid criticism from within the free school movement, Solo wrote:

I’ve talked with hundreds of free school teachers and parents, and almost all have been decent, sincere people, many of them deeply concerned about the damage public schools are doing to children.... Yet, most of these people have turned to establishing alternative schools in a more or less desperate attempt to solve their own problems and to do something meaningful with their lives.⁶

In case of the Learning Tree, this “desperate attempt to do something meaningful with their lives” was an attempt to be part of a tight community. The school served as much as a fulcrum for that adult social world as it served to educate children.

⁶Solo, *Alternative, Innovative and Traditional Education*, pp. 53-54.

According to Landay, the dynamics of this adult social world played a major role in the school's history. During the exciting, initial years of founding the school, the staff felt strongly bonded and committed to the school. Without that intense social connection, in fact, the school would never have been founded. But after about three years, those founders began to experience tension in the community. The social dynamics began to repel people. Divisive personality issues emerged. Normal struggles over curriculum, finances, and operation of the school began to pit the members of the staff against one another. Landay described this fragmenting of the once-tight community:

This sense of community—we wanted it so badly, but then there's a kind of imprisonment that develops. I think this is true with a lot of people who have tried communal life. They vacillate between wanting, enormously, close connections with other people, and a real sense of community, and so forth, and then wanting some flexibility, and wanting to be able to move out and not be so responsible for the community.

Teachers felt increasingly “locked to an institution, which was exactly,” Landay explained, “what we were trying to avoid.” After all, the Learning Tree was formed in reaction to institutionalism; the difficult social dynamics alerted the founders that their school was becoming part of the establishment.

Meanwhile, the children of those “five core folks” had grown up. As a “parent-cooperative school,” the Learning Tree had always centered around the children of the founders. When those children moved on to secondary school, their parents' interest in the Learning Tree naturally declined. So in the years 1975 and 1976, when those original children were graduating, the entire group of founding families decided to leave the Learning Tree. Because they weren't getting paid, and considering the complicated social dynamics, there was little incentive for the founders to stay. Landay broke her ties with the school in 1976, shortly after her youngest child had completed the school's highest grade. Another generation of leaders, whose children were still enrolled, took over from the founders. But none of the original “five core folks” maintained their connection to the school. The Learning Tree continued to operate for another three years. Its pedagogy,

curriculum and philosophy remained largely the same, although the second generation of leaders moved a little more towards mainstream educational models. After the school year of 1978-79, in Landay's words, "the school was done—it just closed its doors."

Although I am leaving the deeper analysis of why the Learning Tree failed to Chapter Four, I must emphasize here that the Learning Tree died peacefully. There was no bitter struggle between opposing forces, no tragic revocation of funds, no grizzly institutional death. In fact, according to Landay, there was nothing at all dramatic about the school's closing. This is just one more way that the Learning Tree exemplified the typical free school history. The vast majority of free schools in America failed, just like the Learning Tree ultimately failed. But rather than meeting some sort of untimely, tragic end, they simply faded away into the history of educational reform.

The Albany Free School

The early history of the Albany Free School sounds much like the early history of the Learning Tree. The notable difference, however, is that the Free School revolved around one dedicated parent, Mary Leue, instead of a group of parents. In 1969, Leue put her oldest child, Mark, back into the Albany public school system.⁷ Although he began the year in the public school, he pulled out after no more than a month:

We had just gotten back, and Mark had one of these mean teachers, you know, career teachers who had gotten all burnt out—mean, mean, mean! And he came home one day and said, "Mom, I can't stand it. I've had too much of this. Can't you teach me at home?" He knew I had a teaching degree. And I said, "Yeah, you're right. You shouldn't have to put up with this." So we started at home.

Leue only homeschooled Mark alone for about two weeks. In early October, Leue met another family whose three youngest children were equally miserable in the public system.

⁷The Leues had just returned from England, where Mary's husband spent a year-long sabbatical at Oxford. Although he enjoyed his time in the English schools, Mark had had "really dreadful experiences, starting in Kindergarten" in American schools. The contrast between the English and American schools must have been striking, especially to young Mark.

Their mother asked if her children could join Mark, and Leue enthusiastically assented. "Suddenly," Leue said, "we had a little school of four kids in my house."

For a full year the school operated without a name, a location (other than Leue's house), a budget, or any official recognition. Along with the normal reading, writing and arithmetic lessons, the children engaged in typical free school activities. They volunteered their time at a "guerrilla day care center" started by radical students at SUNY Albany. On Earth Day they collected 20 bags of trash from the side of the highway. Leue remembered the childrens' demand when June of that first "wonderful" year rolled around:

After the first year, the kids said, "We gotta go on with this. This is our school, and we've gotta go on with it and have a real school." So I said, "Well, what do you want to call it?" And they said, "The Free School, of course!" I said, "Oh yeah, right!" So that's how we got named.

Throughout the summer of 1970, Leue searched for a new school location. While many free schoolers were following the Summerhillian model of retreating to rural settings (what Leue called "becoming a bliss bunny"), The Free School was unwilling to run away from the realities of poor, urban neighborhoods. Instead, she found a typical free school building in the heart of downtown Albany: a recently vacated, funky, old church. The church's former congregation happily rented the dilapidated building to Leue for \$100 a month. It was a trifling sum, even in the late sixties, and it reflected the quality of the building. The students and teachers spent much of the 1970-71 school year fixing leaks in the roof, installing plumbing, adding insulation, and replacing rotten beams. Needless to say, the local building inspectors threatened to close the school on numerous occasions, but Leue always managed to convince them otherwise.⁸

Also in the summer of 1970, the members of the Free School decided to try to expand the school's enrollment. To attract new students, Leue put together a presentation

⁸Leue's stories of run-ins with all sorts of local officials – housing authorities, fire marshalls, truant officers and policemen – prove that free schoolers had to be a cunning, resourceful, political force to survive. Indeed, a few journals and authors I read insinuated that local officials constituted the most significant threat to their survival (though rarely, free schoolers claimed, did the authorities succeed).

of three movie clips which she showed around the Albany area. These three films together explained to interested parents the philosophies and pedagogies that Leue hoped to bring to life in Albany. Interestingly enough, her choice of which movies to show perfectly illustrates how the two-and-a-half roots of the free school movement came together in an individual school. First she would show clips from a documentary film about Summerhill, exemplifying, obviously, her Summerhillian inspiration. Then she would show a film about a Freedom School started in urban Virginia, exemplifying her commitment to civil rights and social equality. And finally, she would show scenes from the Parkway Project, an alternative school in Philadelphia that was arguably the most visible example of open classrooms in America.⁹ Armed with this collection of films and her ambitious dedication, Leue soon recruited four new students, bringing total enrollment up to eight.

Throughout the early seventies, the school continued to grow in size and popularity. Three or four new staff members had joined the school by 1973, and enrollment increased to about 30. However, revenue from tuition did not increase at the same rate as enrollment. Leue and her new co-workers remained fiercely dedicated to civil rights ideals, and so they tried to include as many minority students as possible. Middle class, white families who could afford full tuition found their children on a waiting list, while almost all the poor, minority children who applied were accepted into the school. Consequently, the income-per-student ratio decreased. From the beginning, Leue had largely supported the school with her own independent wealth. But as expenditures increased, Albany Free could no longer operate only on Leue's money. In 1973, the school found an innovative way of procuring income. In the following passage, Leue responded to my question, "How did Albany Free survive when so many other free schools closed?"

Jonathan Kozol, in his book *Free Schools*, otherwise known as *Alternative Schools*, recommends strongly that you start a business. He addresses seriously the issue of funding. And he had helped black parents in Roxbury to start a school, which I had visited, and they were doing well. I forget how they were

⁹Only after revisiting the data months after our interview did I realize how perfectly Leue chose her films. She is probably still unaware of her uncannily representative, bizarrely aesthetic choice.

making their money, but they were doing well.... So I started looking at how we could make some money to support ourselves.... I decided we needed to start a business, as Jonathan suggested, and the garage next door to the school came up for sale. So I bought it for \$10,000, and proposed that we start a textbook rental business. You know, there were a lot of universities and colleges in the area, and our job was to handle books four times a year, you know, twice a semester. The teachers hated it, because it was even more work, but it was a pretty good business.

The textbook rental business turned out to be very labor intensive. The overworked Free School teachers decided to discontinue the business after 1975. However, Leue replaced that loss of revenue with another business scheme in 1976. Using an inheritance from her mother, Leue bought a number of residential properties in Albany and its surrounding suburbs. In about a year, those properties began to generate money, and have continued to produce income ever since. These two businesses have offset the Free School's need for student tuition for more than twenty years.

With firm financial footing and steadily increasing enrollment, Albany Free began to branch out into the wider free school community. Leue and her colleagues soon encountered many of the Northeastern free schoolers through regional, and even national conferences. They read numerous free school journals, especially the New Schools Exchange Newsletter, and submitted their own articles for publication. Albany Free joined the fledgling NCACS in 1976, and became an influential part of that national community. Leue developed close, personal relationships with many visible free school writers and thinkers (Jonathan Kozol, John Holt, Herb Kohl, and George Dennison, to name a few), and with the directors of many individual schools. In 1985, noticing the dearth of information about free schools and alternative education, Leue started publishing "ΣKOLE: The Journal of Alternative Education." ΣKOLE printed anything written by and for the free school community: critical articles, book reviews, students' stories, profiles of individual schools. Despite weakening ties with the NCACS, due to personality conflicts, Leue and her Albany Free School became a major, lasting player in the free

school movement. As the 1970s rolled on and many free schools, like the Learning Tree, lost their initial momentum, the Albany Free remained healthy and vigorous.

In the late seventies and throughout the eighties, the Albany Free School confronted and overcame many difficulties. Chris Mercogliano, who has taught at Albany Free since 1973, talked about the declining enrollments in the early eighties:

Lack of kids hurt us, too. Some schools went down because of lack of enrollment during the eighties period. Because there was kind of a malaise that set in, everyone in education went to sleep, and the pendulum swung back to the right. We weren't really hit so hard because we could survive without the constant influx of tuition. But there were some hard times in the eighties. All of the original families had left (ie. their children had graduated) and with the whole Back to Basics movement, we had some trouble keeping enrollments up.

The trouble subsided in the early nineties, when even more children applied to the Free School than in the seventies. But other difficulties and glitches threatened the school. The original school building proved uncomfortable and unsanitary, and a new building had to be purchased. Then the lease on that building ran out, and the school had to move again, and once again after that. Teachers would unexpectedly drop out of school halfway through the year. Philosophical schisms deepened within the staff over issues of student freedom, curriculum, and assessment. But due to Leue's leadership, Albany Free managed to work through the tough issues that often drove schools (like the Learning Tree) into the ground. From both Mercogliano's informal descriptions and from my personal impressions of her, I can tell that Mary Leue has been a consistently strong, fair, energetic leader. She admitted that her "sheer willpower" had often pulled the school through a hard year.

Today the Albany Free School is alive and well, and as radical as ever. When I visited the school in the fall of 1997, I was immediately reminded of the descriptions of free schools in the literature of the sixties. The school is still chaotic, energetic, intimate and filthy. I witnessed children working and playing all over the building, almost entirely unsupervised, making music in the Big Room, reading in the loft, falling off the jungle

gym, and pouring glitter all over my head. Leue, now a white-haired grandmother of three, still edits and publishes Σ KOLE, and practically lives in her boxes of free school materials. The school remains as committed as ever to social justice, to non-coercive learning, and to self-governance. The Albany Free School provides a vibrant, living example of one of the few surviving free schools.

School One

Like the Albany Free School, School One in Providence, RI, has operated continuously since its inception in 1973. But unlike Albany Free, School One has significantly changed its philosophy, pedagogy, structure and character. Once a very radical institution, School One has transformed itself into a fairly mainstream private school. The current leaders of School One say that their school has effectively adapted to meet the needs of an ever-changing society. Harsher critics¹⁰ might claim that the school has been co-opted, that its original ideals have been diluted and weakened by traditional education. The reality of the situation was probably somewhere in between these two extreme interpretations. Regardless of any moral judgment, the facts remain the same: School One is no longer the free school it once was.

School One was founded in 1973 as an off-shoot from the Alternate Learning Project (ALP), a Providence public school that had opened its doors in 1971. ALP was the brainchild of Larry Perros, a radical veteran of the Providence public school system who had secured a block grant from the federal government to open an experimental urban school. Heavily influenced by writers like Kohl, Holt and Kozol, Perros created what would have been a free school, had it not been under the direct control of the Providence City School Board. Within two years, ALP had achieved high degree of fame and recognition. It was so successful, in fact, that numerous other school districts across the

¹⁰Examples of harsher critics might be Jerry Mintz of AERO or Mary Leue of the Albany Free School. While neither of them had ever heard of School One specifically, they both talked about "co-opted" free schools (with a degree of scorn, or at least disapproval).

country tried to clone ALP for their own cities. Naturally, ALP became a popular school within Rhode Island; parents scrambled to enroll their children in this exciting, innovative new school. However, because it was a public city school, only children from Providence could apply. According to Connie Pesch, a teacher at ALP, "The staff at ALP discovered that there were kids all over the state that really wanted to be in an alternate school setting." So in the spring of 1973, with input from parents living in Narragansett and North Kingston, "Larry [Perros], being the creative individual that he was, decided to set up a private school component that could draw kids from all over the state." School One opened its doors to the entire Rhode Island community in September.

For its first two years, School One shared virtually everything with ALP. They were housed in the same building, the "old bowling alley," described by Jim Turner, "that the kids had built the walls in." They shared classroom space, a joint curriculum, books, occasionally even teachers. They certainly shared a philosophy of education based on student freedom and self-governance. Both started out as very balanced mixtures of the Summerhillian and community free school movement. As the first two years passed, School One became slightly more Summerhillian than ALP. Its students had more freedom to create their own classes, to attend class when they wanted, and to make decisions about the governance of the school.¹¹ Though she has only been director of School One since 1991, Denise Jenkins heard stories of the early character of the school:

Jenkins: People used to think of School One as a hippy-dippy, freewheeling school. They thought that our kids did drugs all the time, and art, and didn't do any work. That wasn't totally true, but there were hints of truth in it. We were pretty unconventional, I guess.

Hausman: What was unconventional about it?

Jenkins: Well, for example, the way that we used to formulate the curriculum for the year. Kids and teachers would all get together on the first day of school and stretch out a huge piece of paper across a wall. They'd write down whatever classes they wanted to take, or teach, all over the paper, in crayons and markers and pens. And then a group of teachers and kids would look

¹¹ ALP, on the other hand, focused more on traditional content and graduation requirements than on student freedom. Partly this was because ALP belonged to the public system, and had to conform to public school standards. However, partly it was due to the higher proportion of working class and minority parents who were more interested in formal academics than the upper-middle class, white parents of School One.

over the paper and find themes and similar classes, and they'd write up a schedule. It was very unconventional.

Jenkins went on to describe the tremendous amount of freedom that students had in those early years. School One truly was a radical free school for its first few years of operation.

The symbiotic relationship between School One and ALP only lasted two years. School One's NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) Self-Study, published in 1993, explains the split between the schools in very diplomatic language: "In 1975 a decision by the Providence School Board to move ALP to new quarters severed the relationship between the two schools." Connie Pesch described the same split in more concrete terms:

For the first two years, [our relationship with School One] worked out extraordinarily well because we shared resources. We shared facilities, you know, transportation, everything. And nobody was cheating the system, nobody was skimming off the top. But once the city picked up the cost, they balked, because they feared that we were mixing private and public money. Someone higher up got freaked out and moved ALP out of the building. It was too bad, because Larry [Perros] had envisioned creating a School Two, School Three, School Four, et cetera, all over the country. But the school board killed that idea.

Once the Providence School Board separated them, the two institutions went their own ways, never to share resources or curricula again.

Control of School One was placed in the hands of Arthur Dion, who had taught art at both ALP and School One. Soon after the split from ALP, School One began to moderate its free school values. A formal, daily schedule was instituted, as opposed to the irregularly scheduled classes of the first two years. Class attendance became mandatory. The decision making process moved away from student-faculty consensus to control by a Board of Directors. In general, commitment to radical educational and social change lagged; Arthur Dion had none of Larry Perros's radical reform ideals. Two sentences from the NEASC Self-Study summarize the crux of these changes:

In the early years there was some friction between faculty who believed in complete academic freedom and those supported by Mr. Dion who also

wanted to stress academic standards. Mr. Dion's faction won the day and School One has continued to hold onto this view.

Throughout the late seventies, School One continued to moved towards a more traditional model. By the early eighties the school's population reached 100 students, a tremendous increase from the first 15 children in 1973. The school bought an impressive new building, a former parochial school, with its newly secured financial base garnered from increased tuition. The final transformation came in 1987, when School One joined the Coalition of Essential Schools. While it is committed to significantly changing schools, the Coalition is a relatively mainstream school reform organization. Certainly, it has a top down structure and very little committment to student freedom and self-governance. By 1993, the term "free school" did not appear anywhere in School One's literature, and probably had not for fifteen years.

Today, in 1998, School One has many alternative components that set it aside from more mainstream preparatory schools. Its curriculum still focuses largely upon art and community service instead of the traditional subjects of English, history, science and math. Classes are small and intimate; everyone knows everyone else, and all are on a first name basis. The administration tries to keep tuition as low as possible to include a diverse student population, and many of the students are on financial aid.¹² But School One has lost its radical, innovative bent. It is very much an institution, complete with many formal structures, top-down boards and committees, rich alumni, grades, rules and regulations. It has become a stable, almost complacent institution — exactly the kind that the free school movement was rebelling against in the late 1960s.

Denise Jenkins is well aware of the school's moderation over time. Though she obviously takes pride in School One (and rightly so, I believe), Jenkins seemed at times to be justifying the changes from 1973 to now. "We had to change as society changed," said Jenkins. "We didn't have the power or the money to do whatever we wanted." As a

¹²In fact, one third of the revenue from tuition goes directly towards financial aid.

counterexample, Jenkins brought up Sudbury Valley, the classical Summerhillian example: "Sudbury Valley didn't have to respond to societal changes because they didn't need the money. But when our resources got low, we had to change. We had to appeal to more people." Consequently, Jenkins claimed, School One survived as an institution where many other free schools failed.

Pinewood/Clonlara West

Like School One, the Pinewood school in Pine, Colorado, has changed a lot since its inception. But instead of getting more mainstream, Pinewood has moved farther and farther away from traditional American education. Over its 17-year history, Pinewood has gone from a radical, rural free school to a homeschooling cooperative. It is now affiliated with one of the largest homeschooling networks in the country, the Clonlara School of Ann Arbor, Michigan. In fact, in 1996 Pinewood officially changed its name to "Clonlara West." Pinewood's shift from free schooling to homeschooling is representative of a significant portion of free schools.

Pinewood's history is largely the story of Olivia Loria, the school's first and only director. Loria first got involved with radical education at the University of Michigan, where she earned a teaching degree in 1969. While at Michigan, Loria was exposed to the writings of Holt, Kozol and especially Neill. After a repressive parochial school career, she welcomed the philosophies of children's freedom and self-determination. "Reading all that stuff was wonderful," Loria said. "It awakened in me the thought that this is the way we ought to do education." Yet when Loria started teaching in a public school, she was sorely disappointed. She began to look for alternative schools to teach in, and found the Detroit Children's School, an urban free school in the heart of the Detroit ghetto.

Without any financial stability,¹³ the Children's School soon closed, leaving Loria jobless.

¹³Like many urban free schools, the Detroit Children's School existed solely on community contributions and the good will of teachers. Community support was strong in the beginning, but as the Detroit economy became weaker and weaker, contributions dried up. Therefore, the school only survived from September, 1969 to March, 1970. During that time, Loria was paid a total of \$100, all of which she spent

After travelling for a while, Loria moved back to Ann Arbor and took a job at the Clonlara School under the leadership of Patricia Montgomery.¹⁴ Clonlara was still a very classical, Summerhillian free school, but was starting to diversify into the homeschooling world. Loria learned a great deal about both free schools and homeschooling from Montgomery.

In 1976, Loria moved to Colorado, and after taking some time off to have her first child, she returned to teaching in the public school system. Although she was teaching in what was nominally an alternative school – the “Evergreen Open School” – she once again became frustrated with the public system. By the time her own child was slated to enter school, Loria had become disillusioned with even the most alternative of the public schools:

When [my daughter] turned five, I looked around at the schools, and I didn't want to send her to any of them. I didn't want her to lose her love of learning, to lose her creativity, to be in a place where she was going to follow oppressive rules all day. Because that's what would have happened if I'd put her in a public school. I said to myself, “I can't do this to her. I have to start my own school.”

Knowing that she couldn't do it alone, Loria put an advertisement in a local paper. A number of parents from the area contacted her, and soon a meeting was scheduled. The meeting was charged with enthusiasm, and Loria decided that the time was now or never. In September, 1981, with ten years of teaching experience and a lifetime of dedication, Loria opened her own free school.

The Pinewood school began with five children and Loria as the only teacher. Although it opened nearly a decade after the movement's peak, Pinewood closely resembled the free schools of the late sixties. Loria ran the school out of her house on a budget that barely covered her expenses, and certainly never turned a profit. The children ranged in age from four to 14, all learning together in ungraded settings. Their

to take her class ice-skating.

¹⁴Loria had actually known Montgomery before working at Clonlara. In fact, Montgomery taught art at the Catholic school that Loria hated so much. “Pat always rescued me,” Loria said. “My sixth grade teacher would throw me out of class, and in Catholic schools you can't wander the hallways, so Pat would let me come next door and do art with her.” Their bond, both as student and mentor, and now as collaborating professionals, has remained strong for over thirty years.

curriculum was to explore their environment in whatever way they felt motivated: lots of hiking, cooking, building, reading and playing. By the end of the 1981-82 school year, Pinewood had gathered seven more students, bringing the total enrollment up to twelve. "We had a wonderful time those first few years," Loria remembered. "The children learned so much just from living together." On the spectrum that ran from Summerhill to urban community schools, Pinewood was pretty far to the Summerhillian side.

As the eighties proceeded, parents stopped wanting to send their children to Pinewood full time.¹⁵ Loria started to make special arrangements for many children. For example, a family might pay half tuition to send their child to Pinewood three days per week. On the other two days, the children would usually homeschool. Loria began preparing homeschooling materials for such students. Eventually, more and more families dropped out of the school itself, but continued to look to Loria for support, materials and encouragement. In 1983-84, Pinewood enrolled about twenty regular students and twenty part-time students or homeschoolers. In 1985-86, the scales had tipped towards the homeschoolers; only three or four children spent their school days with Loria, while she taught twenty or twenty-five from afar. Rather than lamenting her loss, Loria facilitated and encouraged this trend towards homeschooling. Because she was in constant contact with Pat Montgomery, she saw how successful home-based cooperatives could be; Clonlara had swollen to include over a thousand homeschoolers. Finally, Loria decided to completely eliminate the Pinewood school "as a physical entity," and be a full-time homeschooling coordinator.

In 1996, mostly for publicity and name recognition (Clonlara had become widely known and respected in homeschooling circles), Pinewood dropped its original name and became Clonlara West. Loria's job mostly entails coordinating materials, gatherings, trips and advice for homeschoolers west of the Mississippi. Here Loria summarizes her interactions with the homeschoolers she supports:

¹⁵Reasons for this, mostly economic, will be explained in Chapter IV.

I write, send emails, talk on the phone with them. I end up giving a lot of advice about how to use certain materials, or what a good activity to learn through it. People often get stuck on certain things, and I try to help them through it. And I also do a lot of hand-holding. Because people get nervous. It's their children's education, and they're afraid they're not going to get it right. I do a lot of reassuring.

Loria is in contact with about 800 families, 300 of whom she recruited when Clonlara West was still Pinewood. Even though she thinks that "the ninties has not been favorable to alternative schools," she believes that the homeschooling movement will continue to grow.

Pinewood/Clonlara represents the last of our Four Fates: the shift from free schooling to homeschooling. Numerically speaking, this last fate was probably the least likely route for free schools to follow, but symbolically, the transformation was very important. This shift symbolizes an even more radical rejection of the conventions, structures and curricula of American schools. With the number of homeschoolers nearing 600,000,¹⁶ the homeschooling movement has to be considered a major, growing force in American education. And without the free school movement, according to Jerry Mintz, the homeschooling movement would never have gotten off the ground. Schools like Pinewood in the seventies and eighties paved the way for the homeschooling collectives like Clonlara West in the ninties.

Journals, Networks and Conferences

There is more evidence of the free school movement's demise than simple statistics and these four fates of individual schools. Trends in free school journals, networks and conferences – the organs of the movement – confirm the picture of a movement that

¹⁶No one knows exactly how many homeschoolers exist in the United States. Two years ago, a pro-homeschooling author asserted the preposterous figure of 3,000,000, but even the current director of Holt Associates, Susannah Sheffer, rejects this claim. Considering all the known homeschool networks and estimating the number of unregistered homeschoolers, Sheffer came up with the estimation of 600,000.

peaked intensely in the early seventies and then faded away during the late seventies and eighties.

Free school journals exploded in popularity around 1969 and 1970. Jack Douglas, a professor at New College in San Jose, California, wrote a review of free school journals called "Free Schooling America: Alternate School Publications." Here he described the early proliferation of journals:

A lively outgrowth of all action in the free school movement has been the proliferation of radical school publications. A whole new genre of underground literature has evolved through various free school networks and centers.... They are usually part of a larger overall program, school, or commune. A great many people, especially students in and around colleges, are vitally interested in all alternative publication and especially alternative school material. In my own institution, New College, experimental approaches to learning have become the overriding interest of the students.¹⁷

By 1970, there were about 18 of these journals devoted exclusively to free schools, with names like "The Ark," "Big Rock Candy Mountain," "EdCentric," "The Innovative Education Newsletter," "The Teacher Paper," and "Outside the Net." Like the "Red Pencil" and "No More Teacher's Dirty Looks," these free school journals usually emerged from a local network or clearinghouse. The sheer numbers of early journals reflected the strength of the free school movement in the early seventies.

By 1980, all the original free school journals had closed. Popular interest in free schooling had waned so much so that not even the New Schools Exchange Newsletter, which once had a subscription list of over 5,000, had enough subscribers to warrant publication. The only journal to survive from the seventies was the NCACS Newsletter, started in 1976. In sheer numbers,¹⁸ the journals went from about 18 in 1970, to eight in 1974, to one in 1980. Today there are three free school publications – ΣKOLE (1985), the NCACS Newsletter (1976), and AERO-Gramme (1992) – and all three have gone far beyond the role of the original free school journals. All three are heavily involved in

¹⁷Douglas, Jack, "Free-Schooling America" (San Jose, California: New College, 1972) p.5.

¹⁸I surely missed some of the small, regional newsletters, just like my statistics about the number of free schools surely missed some of the more isolated schools. However, like those statistics, these numbers of journals are useful because they show change over time.

international education, in public school alternatives, in politics (especially surrounding children and education) and in homeschooling. Still, they continue to serve the function of the original journals—connecting the few remaining free schoolers together.

Trends in free school networks, both local and national, mirrored the fates of the journals. On the East Coast, Len Solo's Teacher Dropout Center managed to struggle through the seventies until it finally closed in 1979. Not surprisingly, its mailing list had peaked in about 1972 with over 3,500 addresses. As the seventies progressed, interest slowly declined, until the Center printed fewer than 1,000 newsletters a year and only sent out half of them. By 1979, the minimal costs of the Center far outweighed the revenue it generated from running advertisements and personals, and the Center closed. On the west coast, the New Schools Exchange disbanded in the same year. In 1974, the NSE had changed leadership and moved its headquarters to Pettigrew, Arkansas. Each year the NSE directory got thinner and thinner, and became increasingly dominated by open classrooms and alternative public schools for dropouts. Unable to make any money or generate any interest, the NSE produced its last issue in 1978, and dissolved in 1979.

The Education Development Center, which had once been a vital network for East coast free schoolers, followed a slightly different path. As interest in free schooling declined, the EDC began to focus more on open classrooms and public alternative schools. Their materials and classes started costing much more than free schoolers could afford. The EDC also stopped performing its clearinghouse function for free schoolers, as it focused on producing packages of materials for public school-sized budgets. Like School One, the EDC made a transition that could either be considered a regrettable co-option or an intelligent survival technique. Today the EDC is an international school reform organization, with funding from sources like Mobil Oil, IBM, the World Bank, and almost all the major foundations (Carnegie, Danforth, Annenberg, Ford, and Rockefeller, to name a few). Clearly, the EDC is no longer an organ of the free schools.

The notable exception to these trends is the NCACS and its related conferences and journals. In 1975, as the free school movement declined, a group of serious, dedicated alternative educators gathered together in Chicago with the intention of starting a national organization. This group of free schoolers, homeschoolers, and public alternative school leaders all perceived that radical education was becoming harder and harder to sustain as the zeitgeist of the Movement faded away and larger cultural trends swung back towards conservatism. These alternative educators knew that it would be much easier to maintain their schools, programs and ideas if they had a national support system; that if they did not band together, the progress they had made in the sixties would be swept away. The Chicago Conference, as it became known generated much excitement and enthusiasm. However, no one followed up the first conference with the necessary paperwork and logistical planning needed to launch a national organization. A year later, the NCACS was finally incorporated at the second Chicago Conference, largely through the leadership of Patricia Montgomery.

Since its foundation in 1976, the NCACS has maintained its original function, but has slowly decreased both in number of schools and in overall vitality. Attendance at NCACS Annual Conferences has steadily decreased, from a peak of about 500 in 1980 to around 300 in 1992 to only 125 in 1997. Members of the NCACS recognize this trend. In fact, Patricia Montgomery, the NCACS's first chairwoman and still an active member, sent out a mass mailing in the fall of 1997 to all NCACS members. She warned that if the organization continues on its current slow decline, it will become obsolete before the year 2000. According to Montgomery, the NCACS lacks direction and purpose; instead of encouraging new educational innovations, it simply struggles to maintain the status quo. This history of the NCACS – holding on since the mid-seventies, trying to survive in a hostile landscape – is representative of the history of what remains of the free school movement.

An Unexpected Frost?

Allen Graubard's second chapter of *Free the Children* described the dramatic growth in the number of free schools from 1964 to 1971. Graubard titled this chapter, "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom," likening the first years of the free school movement to flowers in the spring. The metaphor was justified: compared to the mainstream educational landscape, the free school movement from 1964 to 1971 truly was as dramatic as the first flowers of spring. But because Graubard published the book in 1972, he never saw what happened to his hundred flowers after they bloomed. To synopsise the fate of the free school movement, let us extend Graubard's metaphor to today. Where have all the flowers gone?

Our metaphor is set in a New England field in early April. As the snow melts and the sun begins to warm the soil, the first crocuses show their petals. The climate continues to be favorable, and the crocuses bloom by the hundreds. But then the weather reverts to a wintry chill, and the weak crocuses cannot survive the frost. While the cold does not destroy them all immediately, it spells eventual death for most of the flowers. Some wither quickly, while others slowly wilt away; some go peacefully, while others struggle for life; some bloom twice or three times before they die. However, a fraction of the more hardy crocuses do survive. They remain a tiny minority compared to the other plants, and are constantly struggling against the natural elements for a chance at life. Nevertheless, they live on as a small, but noteworthy, fraction of the field.

Such was the fate of the free school movement. After a dynamic period of growth, the vast number of free schools withered, drooped, and folded back into the educational landscape. Some survived but lost their unique petals, and came to resemble the rest of the schools in the established educational landscape. A few survived long enough to mutate into homeschooling networks. The hardiest free schools survived thirty years of history, and still offer unique alternatives to mainstream schools. Numerous reasons contributed to all these different fates. The following chapters are devoted to exploring those

numerous reasons, and to isolating the lessons we can learn from the fate of the free school movement.

IV. *Reasons for Those Trends*

The complicated trends of the free school movement – on the whole, gradual decline and failure, but with a number of exceptional schools that continue to form an insulated, tightly-knit community – evoke two separate questions. First, why did the free school movement *as a whole* fade away in the mid-seventies? What was the “frost” that stopped the movement in its earliest years? And second, why did *individual* free schools close, change or get co-opted? What happened to those “hundred flowers” after they first bloomed?

My answers to these questions come from two different places. First, they come from my analysis of the data presented in chapters two and three. Second, they come directly from the lips of my interview subjects. In the end, my analysis of the data and my interview subjects’ perspectives mutually reinforced each others’ conclusions. Of course, the interview subjects had numerous explanations for the trends in the free school movement, some of which disagree with the facts that I collected. In these rare cases, I relied more on my interpretation than on the subject’s perspective. If, for example, a subject told me that free schools rarely closed because of money (as Jerry Mintz vehemently tried to convince me), but that perspective did not square with the majority of other perspectives or the facts that I collected, I usually discounted such a perspective as anomalous. But more often than not, free schoolers agreed with each other and with my

independent analysis. So I have blended my own analysis with quotations from informed free schoolers in answering the questions above.

Why did the Movement as a Whole Decline?

More than any other factor, the decline of the Movement in the early 1970s caused the decline of the free school movement. As explained in chapter two, free schools were firmly embedded in the counter-culture that was the Movement, especially in the popular resistance to authority, the quest for personal liberation, and the push for social equality. Jerry Frain, who directed a community free school in Brooklyn from 1968 to 1970, emphasized this free schools-Movement connection.¹ "The free schools were a subculture of a larger subculture," said Frain. "It all came from the same place, the same ferment, the same social dissent. Without the chaos of the sixties, we [educational radicals] would never have gotten off our asses." However, the Movement did not last forever. When the broader social trends moved away from the radicalism and counterculture of the Movement to the more conservative seventies, said Frain, "We became like a raindrop on an elephant's ass in a monsoon—irrelevant."

Historians have never agreed on a formal date or event that marked the end of the Movement. How could they, given the breadth and vagueness of its definition? Peter Clecak tried to define the end of the Movement in vague terms: "By most accounts... it ended, say, by 1973 when members of the Symbionese Liberation Army murdered Marcus Foster, the first black superintendent of schools in Oakland, California."² Clecak neither explained what the Symbionese Liberation Army was or why this murder marked the end of the Movement. This made his definition even less clear. He then went on to admit that the Movement "eludes precise definition." None of the subjects I interviewed

¹I met Jerry Frain at the NCACS Regional conference at Goddard College, before I had developed a formal interview protocol. Although I did not tape record my conversation with Frain, I did take relatively detailed notes. The quotes attributed to Frain are reconstructed, in my opinion accurately, from those detailed notes. Whenever possible, I have tried to preserve as much of Frain's "colorful" language as possible.

²Clecak, *America's Quest*, p. 188.

offered a watershed date or event that marked the end of the Movement. However, most agreed that the Movement, or the Sixties, or the Revolution (whatever they called it) ended in the early seventies, somewhere between 1971 and 1975. Of course, both the Movement and the free schools declined over a period of time, not at one specific date, so pinning down a watershed event is a fruitless endeavor. Though historians may argue the exact date, I will use the estimation of 1973 as an approximation of when the Movement ended.

Historians also argue about what caused the decline of the Movement. I could fill reams of paper analyzing exactly what cultural, political, economic, and social trends contributed to the decline. However, that would also be far beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I can point to a representative few of the numerous factors that pushed American culture away from radicalism and counterculture back to the more conservative seventies and eighties. For instance, demographic changes influenced cultural trends; the baby boom generation had passed its youth, and the swell of twenty-something radicals were becoming thirty-something parents and homeowners. Political disintegration of the Far Left into isolated interest groups rendered political radicalism less unified, and therefore less powerful. After Watergate and the ugly finale of the Vietnam War, many members of the Movement became disillusioned with social change, and chose to turn further inward, rather than to continue their resistance to authority and push for social justice. Furthermore, consequences of the "freewheeling," hedonistic lifestyles of the Movement caught up to many popular celebrities of the young generation: Janice Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Jim Morrison, to name a few. These are just a few of the hundreds of interrelated causes that contributed to the decline of the Movement.

The decline of the Movement around 1973 caused people's desire for free schools to wane. Allen Graubard spoke eloquently about this transition:

The free schools were so intimately related to the sixties... to the sex, drugs and rock and roll culture... and without that culture they never would have survived. But the sixties dissolved, and when it dissolved, the free schools felt

the change. Hippies got tired of living in teepees and not getting paid to teach... Parents weren't looking for the same kind of radical lifestyle. On the whole, people got more conservative. They wanted some stability, maybe. We still believed in peace and love and happiness, but we didn't have the same self-sacrificing commitment.

Jerry Mintz, who is still intimately involved in promoting alternative education across the country, voiced a similar perspective. Mintz talked about the free school movement "going underground" concurrently with the larger Movement. Like the radical press, food cooperatives and communes, Mintz claimed that the free school movement went into "a sort of remission" when the popular counter-culture no longer supported it.

Outside observers also confirmed that the end of the Movement brought down the free schools. Connie Pesch, now a veteran teacher at the Alternate Learning Project (ALP), never identified herself as a free schooler, but interacted closely with free schools in the early seventies. Even in the mid-seventies, she noticed that free schools had not survived very long without cultural support:

I don't think you can take the alternative school movement out of the element of the sixties.... Downstairs from us [in ALP's original building] there was a little school for elementary kids, and they called it a free school. And it truly had no parameters. Kids learned when they felt like learning. They learned whatever they felt like learning. There was virtually no accountability at all. After a couple of years, it didn't work anymore.... The free school teachers grew up, educationally I mean. They couldn't just be hippies anymore, like in the sixties, talking about children's freedom. Because society changed, and that rhetoric just wouldn't fly anymore.

Denice Jenkins, the current principal of School One, also observed from afar the cultural shift's effect on free schools. Although she came to School One in 1991, Jenkins had a thorough understanding of the school's history. When I asked her what about the school had changed most, she told me that "School One – the freewheeling thing that it was – realized that times were changing, and it adapted to those changes." Specifically, parents demanded more structure, more stress on college preparation, and a second generation of teachers emphasized academics over student freedom. "[School one] moved with society as a whole," said Jenkins, "while a lot of those freewheeling schools closed."

More than just causing existing free schools to close or mutate, the end of the Movement prevented more free schools from opening. That is, people who sought alternative education for their children or communities no longer had the same cultural framework that encouraged them to create free schools. Len Solo, who founded the Atlantic County New School in 1972, said, “Everyone [in the late 1960s] thought starting a school was easy. And, in a way, it was—the mood was right.” However, he explained, after the “naïveté” of the Movement passed, those who might have started free schools five years ago were more aware of the harsh realities of running institutions. Since free schools were often quite short lived, the number of new school openings was almost a better indicator of the free school movement’s strength than the absolute numbers of schools. In *Free the Children*, Graubard presents his statistics about the “growing free school movement” in terms of school openings per year, not in terms of absolute numbers. According to Graubard in our interview, the first symptom of the free school movement’s decline was that “less and less schools were being opened each year.” So, in a way, this decrease in the number of school openings was the most profound effect of the Movement’s end on the free school movement.

Concurrently with the end of the Movement, America’s educational zeitgeist changed. On a very broad, federal level, we can see the changes in the educational zeitgeist reflected in different federal education policies. In 1965, the federal government pledged 33 million dollars to funding alternative education through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act’s Title III. Title III money was to be distributed to local school districts in block grants to promote local boards to experiment with new, innovative modes of schooling. The Title III grants ran out and were never renewed after about 1974, because alternative education was no longer top priority. Throughout the 1970s, federal policies increasingly focused on interest groups, granting money and support to the disabled, the poor, and to girls’ education.

An even more dramatic shift away from alternative education came with the infamous "A Nation at Risk" report in 1983. "A Nation at Risk" claimed that our schools had become "mediocre" in the past generation, and that new rigorous standards would raise our level of student achievement to surpass the rest of the world. To the Commission on Excellence in Education, who wrote "A Nation at Risk," alternative educational systems like the free schools were part of the problem, part of the reason why American education had become mediocre. "A Nation at Risk" represented the "back to basics" sentiment that has largely influenced the American educational zeitgeist throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

A number of my interview subjects, most notably Olivia Loria of Clonlara West, spoke about these changes in America's educational zeitgeist. "There's much less of those [alternative education] ideas floating around now," said Loria. "Now it's this 'back to basics' approach—it's been like that for ten, fifteen years." The consequence of this shift in national thought, she said, was that "now is not the right time to start a free school.... People have to have these alternative educational ideas, or else free schools won't ever happen." Loria's assertion that the changing educational zeitgeist crippled the free school movement squares soundly with the facts.

Another broad trend that brought down the free school movement was the economic downturn of the late 1970s and 80s. Free schools were always underfunded institutions that relied heavily on tuition and community largess. Post-war economic prosperity that continued throughout the Movement provided the perfect economic environment for such underfunded schools. With more discretionary money in their pockets, parents were more willing to pay free school tuition. Free school businesses (like Albany Free's textbook rental and real estate business) flourished in the affluent economy. Community organizations that funded schools like Harlem Prep and the Roxbury Community school had a more comfortable economic base. Also, because the cost of living was low, most free schoolers did not worry much about money. Many free schoolers were able to live on salaries of \$50 or \$100 per month, or less, because their

parents or spouses could easily support them. Furthermore, because of their anti-materialism, many free schoolers shunned money and chose to live simpler, poorer lifestyles. Eileen Landay described the flippant attitude towards money at the Learning Tree:

For the first year, we actually paid two teachers. But then we decided that we really couldn't pay teachers anymore. So I never got paid. At some point we may have drawn some kind of very modest—something to reimburse us, but no, I never got paid. Which was exactly right, for me, at that point in time. You know, we were very counter-culture and we didn't think money mattered at all. To ask to get paid was unheard of....

It seemed easier, back then, to get along with almost nothing. It seemed possible, and do-able. And that's what we did, we got along with almost no money. And we were so proud of that....

Since the economy during the Movement was still so affluent, the young generation did not worry about finding their next meal. It always had come, and it always would. So free schoolers could adopt flippant attitudes like Landay's.

In the seventies, however, the American economy hit troubled times. Skyrocketing inflation rates sent the economy into a downward spiral, hitting a low point in the mid-eighties. The trickle-down economics of the Reagan administration did not trickle down very quickly at all, and the middle class found itself with less and less discretionary funds. Consequently, parents in the late seventies and eighties were less willing to pay extra money for their children's education. Free schoolers who had survived the cultural and educational shifts of the seventies found themselves in very vulnerable positions. Sandy Hurst, founder of a free school called Upattinas,³ nearly had to close her school in the mid-eighties due to lack of funds. When talking about the factors that led to the "receding of the free school movement" (her words), Hurst said:

One of the big things was the economy of the eighties, and the influx of extreme conservatism. The economy scared people, sent people back into their houses, and made them go back to the schools and say, "put my kids

³The school's unusual name has a humorous story behind it. When it opened in 1971, the school had no official name and no school building. For the first two years, the school took place in the house of a teacher named Tina, who happened to live at the top of a steep hill. Both the students and staff started referring to "the school up at Tina's." When she incorporated the school in 1973, Sandy Hurst shortened that informal name into one word, and the school's name was born—Upattinas.

back in rows, I don't trust these free schools anymore." Because they (the parent) weren't making enough money. There just wasn't enough money. My experience with people in general, and my psychologist husband agrees with this (laughs) is that... when we get to the point of being under absolute and total stress, we tend to revert to the way it used to be, to our old patterns. And my feeling is that in the eighties, people were scared about money, and they reverted to their old ways.

This quote also points out that the cultural, educational, economic and political trends of the seventies and eighties were all interrelated. By laying out these themes separately, I fear that I may have given an impression of "laundry list" history: that the free school movement declined due to a list of unrelated societal factors. That, of course, is far from the truth. These cultural, educational and economic trends influenced one another tremendously. For example, "A Nation at Risk" was a response as much to the economics of the Cold War as to any educational changes. This point – that these broad changes were all inextricably related to each other – is almost too obvious to state. What is less obvious, and important to repeat, is that the free school movement was also inextricably linked to these societal changes. As the Movement declined in the early to mid-seventies, cultural support for free schools bottomed out, and consequently, the free school movement suffered its own decline.

Why did Individual Schools Close?

The end of the Movement, the changes in American educational zeitgeist, and the economic downturn of the seventies and eighties all explain why the free school movement, as a whole, lost momentum. These factors explain why new schools stopped opening as frequently, why free school conferences and networks declined, and why free school journals lost subscribers. But they do not explain why individual schools failed. In short, the demise of the Movement left individual free schools vulnerable to the harsh realities of running a successful institution. Where cultural patterns had once supported these relatively shaky institutions, free schools now had to contend with all the mundane problems that schools as institutions suffer from on their own. Free schools no longer had

the cultural support of the Movement, so they suffered from the problems that all private schools contend with: money, staff turnover, personal dynamics, leadership, accountability, and state or local authorities. In different degrees and situations, these problems led to the closure of many free schools.

Lack of money, according to nearly every free schooler I interviewed, was the primary factor in the demise of most free schools. In fact, lack of money was such an obvious cause that many of my interview subjects did not even elaborate on it. They talked about lack of money as if it was a given, and went right on to other subjects. When I asked why free schools closed, I often got answers like this one, from Lucia Vorys: "Well, most schools ran out of money, that was the primary reason. Other than that..." Len Solo said, "Free schools went broke and closed. Happened all the time. Also..." Patricia Montgomery said, "Most of the time it was money. We (the Clonlara School) operated in the red for many years, but we had a long term plan, and we finally pulled out of debt. Most schools didn't. But there were other reasons, too..." So according to most free schoolers, financial problems were the obvious reason that most free schools folded. But how exactly did lack of money cause the demise of so many schools?

In about half the free schools I encountered, money had never been available. These schools had always operated in the red. Their teachers drew little or no salary, their operating costs were next to nothing, and they charged minimal tuition. As long as free schoolers could eat, pay the rent on their schools, and buy materials for their classes, they could operate schools with their energy and idealism alone. Most free schoolers dipped into their own pockets (or into their parents' or spouses' pockets) or even worked at second jobs to augment their meager salaries. Many free schools survived on this energy and self sacrifice alone—for two or three years. At that point, reality started to set in. Free schoolers' personal funds ran out. Student loans and personal bills had to be paid. Banks repossessed unpaid mortgages. Olivia Loria left the Detroit Free School for a public school job because, "I had a family to support. My youngest was four, and my second was

just one at the time. And I knew I couldn't make any money unless I was teaching at a public school." Part of the reason that Wendy Rolnick left her job at the Roxbury Community Schools was to "actually make money, to be able to support myself." Some free schoolers simply got tired of being penniless all the time, which was undoubtedly related to the waning of the Movement, as anti-materialism became less popular and sustainable. As the mid-seventies approached, free schools faced the choice of somehow raising more money or closing their doors.

Some schools responded to the need for more cash. For example, when the Albany Free School's original money from Mary Leue started to run out, they opened up a business and invested in real estate. Other schools increased their tuition, turned to the public for money (like the Thoreau School in Wallkill, New York), or, like Sandra Hurst's Upattinas, instituted work-study programs. But many continued to ignore the realities of money until it destroyed them. Like Eileen Landay at the Learning Tree, many free schoolers were proud of their ability to survive on nothing. Many were also dedicated to anti-materialism or back-to-the-land environmentalism. Consequently, they put little time and energy into fundraising. When the free schoolers' initial zeal and dedication ran out, lack of money easily persuaded them to find new occupations.

In the other half of the schools I encountered, money had once been available but then waned or disappeared in the mid to late seventies. Some lost money because student enrollment decreased, as parents became more conservative and discretionary money became tighter. Some lost a patron, endowment or grant, and were unable to replace the lost funds. This excerpt written by a former free schooler tells a fairly common story:

In the fall of 1969, I was one of four public school teachers who quit their jobs to open an alternative school in Rockland County, New York. We were heavily influenced by A. S. Neill's *Summerhill* and George Leonard's *Education and Ecstasy*, and we designed a school full of learning environments where nobody had to attend classes unless they wanted to...

Over the years Rockland County became more conservative. Our parents were not wealthy, and they began to want assurances that their children would learn enough skills to be able to support themselves as adults. We increasingly lost revenue from tuition.... The school, which had been dependent for many

years on a small endowment, ran out of money and students in 1980, and closed in June of that year.⁴

This history was repeated scores of times, in both Summerhillian schools and community schools. Occasionally schools, like Upattinas, experienced a severe economic crunch but were able to pull through it. Otherwise, as Jerry Frain said, "When the money dries up, poof! It's done."

Money also caused a number of free schools to die by forcing them to change their curriculum. The Columbus Free School of Columbus, Ohio, is a perfect example of a school that died as a free school, but still exists because of money. In 1969, the Columbus Free School opened with three teachers and 70 of the poorest children in the city. The school's founder, Lucia Vorys, was married at the time to a very wealthy corporate lawyer who, in her words, "had many connections to the establishment people." Vorys asked him if he could get some of those "establishment people" to financially support the school. Within a month, he had established a Committee for the Free School and raised \$700,000. At first, Vorys was overjoyed, until she heard the committee's condition: that they become the sole board members of the school. Vorys realized the ramifications of having corporate lawyers and bankers on the board, and tried to reject the money. Her fellow free schoolers overruled her and voted to accept the \$700,000 and the new board members. At the first board meeting, Vorys's fears came true; the board unanimously fired all three teachers and replaced them with a conservative headmaster of a local prep school and five of his teachers. As a community free school, the Free School died within a year of its opening day. School One suffered this same fate, but over a much longer period of time.

Another interesting case of money causing a free school's demise is Jerry Mintz's Shaker Mountain School. In the late seventies Shaker Mountain went through a period of low enrollment and very tight budgets. To sustain their financial base, the school agreed

⁴Girard, Alice, "Reunion," in Leue, Mary ed., *Challenging the Giant: The Best of ΣKOLE, Volume III* (Albany: Down to Earth Books, 1996) p. 16-17.

to take on twenty or twenty-five juvenile delinquents who were wards of the state of Vermont. The state paid Shaker Mountain a sizable recompense for each student, which brought the school back from the verge of bankruptcy. Freed from the regimentation of their reform schools, the so-called juvenile delinquents fared quite well at Shaker Mountain, and the school was happy to have them. However, in 1984 the state canceled the program that had funded the juvenile delinquents' tuition. Shaker Mountain, which had become dependent on the state money, folded in 1985. So money occasionally caused free schools to close in roundabout ways.

While money was the primary reason that individual free schools closed, there were numerous other reasons. Volatile staff turnover killed many free schools. Free schoolers, especially those in the more Summerhillian schools, were not known for their ability to stay in one place. They feared, as Eileen Landay said, becoming locked to an institution. So they dropped in and out of free schools, or started schools without the intention of maintaining them for more than a year or two. Early issues of the New Schools Exchange Newsletter and the Teacher Dropout Center's Bulletin were filled with personals like this:

Alexander M., 221 E. 8th St., New York, NY. At this point in my life, due to a combination of the laws of chance and my conscientious objection to an immoral and illegal war between my country and Vietnam, I am forced to migrate to Canada. Could anyone find me a job in an experimental free school north of the border? Canada's immigration policies being what they are, the prospects of admission to the country would be immeasurably enhanced if I could demonstrate the certainty of a job awaiting me.

Jo Ann L, 3100 College Ave., Berkeley, CA. Lived in Brazil 3 years, worked for a while on an experimental education program at the Brentwood school. I write poetry and do modern dance, both of which, in a non-teaching sort of way, I could teach.

Dan H., PO Box 171, Elliot City, MD. Hates dirty snow. I need somewhere to be for a while. F**K education.

Allan G., 130 N.W. 57 St., Miami, FL. Wish to work with kids. One year experience volunteer poverty work. Speak Spanish. Will go anywhere. Salary need only be enough to cover living expenses.

One gets the sense that these young, highly mobile free schoolers might not stay at any one school for a long time. In our interview, Len Solo complained that free schools were often populated by "flaky people" who saw them as convenient institutions to drop into for a short while before moving on. This high degree of staff turnover weakened free schools by destroying stability and continuity. Many schools could not develop the base of dedicated individuals that young institutions need to make it past the first few years.

Free schools also usually folded if they did not have a strong, central leader. In fact, all the surviving free schools that I know of have had one central leader for their entire history: for example, Mary Leue at Albany Free School, Sandra Hurst at Upattinas, and Dan Greenberg at Sudbury Valley, to name a few. Conversely, when those central leaders left, their schools quickly closed. When Jerry Mintz left Shaker Mountain in 1983 to become the NCACS Chair, the school closed two years later. When Tina Dawson left her brainchild, the Mountain Community School, for a teacher training position at a local college, the school disintegrated a year later. When Len Solo left the Atlantic County New School to work full time at the Teacher Dropout Center, the school only survived for another two years. This pattern is so common that Sandra Hurst, now 61 years old, fears that Upattinas will not survive without her. "We have to face the fact that I am a single leader about to retire. What will happen to Upattinas when I have to step down?" In preparation for her retirement, Hurst is rigorously training a replacement director to keep Upattinas from following the same fate as so many other free schools.

Personality differences between staff members also drove free schools to ruin. At the Learning Tree, the "five core folks" who had started the school became increasingly polarized about certain philosophical and curricular issues. After vain attempts to reconcile their differences, all five left the school in the 1974-75 school year. A second generation of teachers took over, but could not recapture the initial unity and energy of the first few years, and the school closed soon after. In some schools, personality differences led to

infighting and eventually split schools into warring factions. Olivia Loria stressed the mixed blessing of "strong personalities" in free schools:

The strong personalities are to the benefit of the free schools, and also to their detriment. Especially us directors. Those of us who have held on, there's a lot of chiefs among us, and not many followers. So that makes it difficult for others. I think there were a lot of struggles over big egos and personality traits that had nothing to do with the actual schools, you know, with children's learning and curriculum and stuff.

Regardless of the nature of the controversy, personality differences often wreaked havoc on small, intimate communities like free schools.

The last reason that some free schools folded was that they were simply bad schools where children did not learn. Most of the time, a bad free school was one that gave students complete freedom without giving them any support, guidance or focus. Len Solo devoted a whole chapter of *Alternative, Innovative and Traditional Schools* to these bad schools. He starts the chapter with a list of bad schools that failed within a short time after they opened:

I could illustrate this with examples from scores of alternative schools I have observed – the high school for dropouts in Vermont where the students either played ping-pong day after day or had spitting-water-on-each-other battles; the rich kids' school near Boston where the adults would only teach when asked by the children, who didn't seem to ask very often and sat around the kitchen constantly bored; the urban free school run by two hip white teachers who wanted the Black children to be joyful and loving and "to get into all kinds of neat things," while the parents wanted their children to learn to read and cipher, while the kids ran wildly around the building hurting each other verbally and physically and destroying any neat project that a child would dare to get into – I could go on with many such examples.⁵

He then goes on to describe one particularly bad free school, which "seemed to have no coherence, no unity, no place of calm in the eye of the storm." The adults in the school had decided to not introduce any materials or lessons until the children asked for them. The students, between the ages of 6 and 12, rarely asked for anything other than toys and games. Consequently, teachers in this school "had nothing to do; they sat around and talked to each other while kids built rivers in the backyard." Not surprisingly, the children

⁵Solo, p. 54.

rarely learned to read or write, and often became bored or frustrated. Solo described what happened after the first year:

By the end of the term, most of the parents realized the school was a failure and were not sure if it would open in September. Some kids moved out, some parents took their children out, and a few of the children even wanted to go back to public school. The kids felt that they weren't learning much at [name of school] and that it was a waste of time—which were my perceptions also.

This school may sound like a caricature, but it was a real school where some real children were failed.⁶

Without any effective structures or guidance, free schools could be as ineffective as the public schools they were rebelling against. Parents and children alike realized this, and pulled out of the schools. Simply put, some free schools offered a bad product, and when people refused to buy it, the schools failed.

When the Movement subsided in the early seventies and cultural, economic and educational trends became unfavorable towards radical education, free schools were left to themselves to stave off the realities of institutional life. Unfortunately, like spring crocuses, the free schools were often not such hardy institutions. They fell victim to problems that could destroy any weak institution. Most often that meant financial difficulties. Volatile staff turnover was probably the second most disabling factor, and lack of central leadership was the third. Less important, but still crippling, were personality differences and a poor educational product. In hundreds of different schools across the country, these factors caused individual free schools to close. Nevertheless, some free schools survived and continue to thrive today. The differences between those that folded and those that continued can teach us important lessons about school reform of today. The next and final chapter is devoted to those lessons: what legacy did the free school movement leave behind, and what can it teach school reformers of today?

⁶Solo, p. 60.

V. Legacy of the Free School Movement

So far, we have traced the free school movement from its roots in the early Sixties up to today. We have seen how the movement started off slowly, grew rapidly in the late Sixties, peaked in intensity in the early seventies, and then gradually declined in strength. We have explored the reasons for those trends; changes in the social climate, economic tightening of the 1980s, and internal problems with money, staff, and curriculum. Now we must examine the free school movement today. What happened to all the ideas, energy and people that comprised the free school movement? What legacy has the free school movement left for today's educators?

Every free schooler I interviewed agreed that the free school movement has affected American education of today. They used different metaphors and terms to explain those effects, but the ideas were generally the same. Eileen Landay used the metaphor of a lava lamp to explain how free school philosophy continuously "folds back into American education" in fluid, repetitive patterns. Jerry Mintz spoke of free school ideas that "are filtering into the public schools," and Allen Graubard said that free schools "opened people's eyes" and "pushed the public school monolith a little to the left." Whatever their choice of words, their message is the same: the free school movement nudged mainstream education in subtle but lasting ways.

My own research corroborated these testimonies. In fact, I found that the free school movement left its mark on American education in numerous ways. First and most

obviously, free schools continue to provide hundreds, maybe even thousands of children with a radical alternative to traditional education. The 35 free schools that still exist are still operating under the principles of non-coercion, self-governance and social awareness. The case study of the Albany Free School is the best example of a surviving free school, but it is not alone. The New Orleans Free School down in Louisiana still serves nearly a hundred children a year who, in the words of its brochure, "need to get out of the public system." Sudbury Valley and its clones all across the United States continue to teach students how to live and learn together without any top-down control or mandatory classes. The examples could go on and on, but the point has been made; part of the free school movement's legacy is the continued success of dynamic, individual institutions.

The continued existence of the NCACS is part of the free school's legacy. Though it started out as a freeschool network, out of 300 NCACS member schools, only about 15 are free schools. Many of the NCACS schools are public alternatives, Montessori schools, co-opted free schools or homeschooling collectives. Even though the NCACS is no longer exclusively a free school network, it serves some of the same functions that the original networks like the New Schools Exchange and the Teacher Dropout Center served: promoting communication and support between free schools, and providing information for those interesting in free schooling.

Many free schoolers from schools that did not survive ended up teaching in, or even starting, their own public schools. When they did so, their free school philosophy influenced that new institution. Len Solo, who now directs the Graham & Parks Alternative School in Cambridge, is a perfect example. Solo opened a tiny free school called the Atlantic County Free School in the early seventies. When the school folded after only two years, Solo took his talents as a school leader into the public system. He was hired to direct the New Alternative School, which later became Graham & Parks, an open classroom elementary school. His free school ideals of non-coercion and self-determination, though tempered by years of experience, still influence the direction of

Graham & Parks today. Dave Lehman and the Alternative Community School (ACS) in Ithaca, New York, provide another example. First a teacher in a small, Californian free school and then the editor of the New Schools Exchange Newsletter for three years, Lehman was steeped in free school philosophy. He took that philosophy to the Ithaca School Board and convinced them to let him open up a public school with similar ideals. After many years of compromises with the public school bureaucracy, ACS is no longer truly a free school; its classes are mandatory, the school day is traditionally structured, and children have a limited say in the governing the school. But Lehman continually pushes towards those ideals, and even believes that he has influenced the rest of the Ithaca schools to follow ACS's lead. Both Solo and Lehman have become important figures in public alternative education, and the free school movement lives on through them.

Other free schoolers went on to become homeschoolers. Olivia Loria of Clonlara West was a good example of this transition, but certainly not the most visible. The most influential free schooler to become a homeschooler was John Holt, who himself had inspired hundreds of radical educators to start free schools. According to Susannah Sheffer, the current director of Holt Associates, Holt's transition to homeschooling occurred in the mid-seventies. After writing his second book, *How Children Learn*, Holt became further convinced that any form of schooling limited children's freedom, and hence their ability to learn. He set up Holt Associates as the first national homeschooling network in 1978 (just the time, incidentally, when Clonlara started networking for local homeschoolers in Ann Arbor, Michigan). From a tiny organization that Sheffer said was "just made up of John and his typewriter," Holt Associates has grown into a vast network that reaches nearly 30,000 families with its newsletter, "Growing Without Schooling." Holt and his organization exemplify how free schools "wedged open the door," in Sheffer's words, for the homeschooling movement.

Holt had come to believe that the schools as institutions were incompatible with children's growth. This idea appealed to many free schoolers who had themselves been

unable to sustain institutions, but who were still committed to radical education. Also, some free schoolers rebelled against their own schools because, as Eileen Landay said, they felt "locked to an institution, which was exactly what we were trying to avoid."

Homeschooling gave those anti-institutional free schoolers a chance to educate their own children without any of the conventions they had first rebelled against. After the free school movement challenged mainstream education's monopoly on American youth, parents were more likely to turn towards alternative forms of education for their children. So part of the free school movement's legacy was to "wedge open the door" for the homeschoolers of today.

Finally, many free schoolers have ended up in the field of education, but not in K-12 schools. They went into various other forms of child care, or educational reform, or consulting, or writing for educational journals, or into higher education. Eileen Landay serves as a perfect example of a free schooler who has moved into higher education, and specifically teacher training. Landay knows that her free school roots influence her work as a professor. When speaking about her experience at the Learning Tree, Landay explicitly made the connection to her present occupation:

I built my life around the Learning Tree. And it continues. I mean, I really think that what I do now is simply an extension of that. A more mature extension of it, I would say, but an extension nonetheless.... Although I certainly have modified my values, I think my fundamental values are the same. I still believe in social justice, and am enormously offended by the competition and inequalities in schools... So I have always applied some version of the values I had in those days to what I think education should look like now.

So the free school movement lives on through Eileen Landay. It also lives on through Wendy Rolnick, who was a teacher at the Roxbury Community School, which Jonathan Kozol had started in 1967. Rolnick only taught at Roxbury for two years, but those two years heavily influenced her subsequent thinking about education. My final question in our interview was, "Could you talk about your personal legacy with free school ideas?" She replied:

Well, here I am, back in education, but now as the director of day care center. I'm developing this method of teaching that's based on play. It's based on observing children, on watching what they're interested in and then extending their play... And it's very exciting, because I feel like I've come full circle, and here I am, helping teachers play with kids (laughs). The new buzzword is that play is "developmentally appropriate," but it's all the same thing, the same stuff I was doing at Roxbury Community School about 30, 31 years ago.

So the free school movement lives on through Wendy Rolnick and her Early Childhood Center in upstate New York.

According to Barbara Cervone, who now works at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the ideas of the free school movement live on at education reform centers like the Coalition for Essential Schools. Cervone had worked at both ALP and School One in Providence from 1970 to 1974, so she was exposed to free schools ideology in its heyday. When I asked her what happened to the free school movement, she said:

Even if the actual schools failed, the ideas lived on. Especially at something like the Coalition of the Essential Schools. Although TedSizer probably feels that he discovered those ideas, in fact they seem completely familiar to those of us who were doing that stuff in the seventies. All those issues about decision making, and community, and personalization, and learning outside of school—we were pioneers in those things, and they're still around. And now they've actually become relatively mainstream, through places like the Coalition.

There may have been a number of intermediate steps between the free schools and the Coalition of Essential Schools. For example, free schools may have influenced alternative public schools (through people like Dave Lehman and Len Solo), which in turn influenced the Coalition. Or maybe the staff of the Coalition read the works of Kohl and Kozol and A.S. Neill, and were indirectly effected by free school ideology. However many intermediate steps they filtered through, the ideas of the free school movement – and the people behind those ideas, like Cervone herself – live on through some school reform organizations of the 1990s.

* * * * *

Evaluating the legacy of the free school movement, as the above examples illustrate, is neither a scientific nor a precise endeavor. More than in concrete programs or curricula, the free school movement influenced American education writ large through its essential philosophies. No study could possibly quantify this influence, since it deals with abstractions. This conclusions are not based on such a study, but rather on a number of case studies and the perspectives of numerous free schoolers. So in addition to speculating about the effects free schools probably had on American education, let me say what effects I think they *should* have had. In other words, here are the lessons that American education writ large should learn from the free school movement.

Public schools need to move towards the principle of non-coercive learning. Adults in schools need to give students more chances to direct their own learning, and at the same time they must provide adequate support that allows students to take advantage of that freedom. The best free schools have proven that given a healthy combination of freedom and effective support systems, students can learn a great deal. The Upattinas School's brochure quotes educator Paul Tillich as saying, "The fatal pedagogical error is to throw answers, like stones, at the heads of those who have not yet asked the questions." American public schools will take a great leap forward once they realize this truism and make changes accordingly.

Public schools need to grant more self-governance to parents, students, and teachers. Students' investment will increase if students have some control over the institutions that bind them, and increased investment almost always equals increased learning. Parents who are offered a real say in governing their children's schools will also become more invovled. Parent involvement in schooling is one of the most consistent factors that increases student performance, so parental involvement through governance will enhance student learning. Teachers who have real control of their institutions will bend the grammar of schooling to their will, instead of the grammar of schooling dictating their pedagogies and curricula. Furthermore, a school culture built on self-

governance creates dynamic institutions, institutions that change and grow, instead of the limiting inertia that grips most public schools. Dynamism and change can be dangerous, but I firmly believe that change results in increased learning more often than it results in decreased learning.

American schools also need to consciously embrace their role as agents of social change. Schools dominated the childhood of most Americans and indubitably forge many of our social ideals. Public schools must admit this fact, as the good free schools did, and embrace their power to effect positive social change. Until they more consciously consider and embrace that power, schools will continue to replicate the many injustices of the status quo.

These are the three central lessons that American education writ large should take from the free school movement. In fact, according to every free schooler I interviewed, and according to my own observations and research, those lessons did tangibly influence mainstream education. Admittedly, free schools did not radically transform American education, even in the early seventies. Compared to national school reform movements like progressive education of the early twentieth century, or even the Coalition of Essential Schools in the eighties and nineties, the free school movement seems insignificant, ineffective, like any other educational fad that comes and goes without leaving any legacy at all. However, the free school movement did not entirely fail. A core group of free schools still exists, and those schools continue to maintain their original ideals. A national organization, two journals, and yearly conferences still unite these schools. And the essential philosophies behind the free school movement – student freedom, self-governance and social equality – influenced mainstream American education in subtle but lasting ways.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Can you state your name and current occupation (title, affiliation, et cetera)?
2. Can you describe how you were involved with education in the late 1960s or early 1970s? What exactly did you do, where, and when?
3. What terms did you use to describe what you were involved with? What did you call the education you were providing?
4. What ideas, thinkers, books, schools, or programs informed your thinking about education?
5. Did you have any involvement with any educational journals, networks, conferences, organizations or societies?
6. Do you believe that you were part of a "movement" of any sort? (If not, was there an alternative/free school movement at the time that you were not part of?) How would you define that movement? What were its parameters?
7. What do you believe happened to that movement? Can you give a brief synopsis of its history from the late 60s to today?
8. Why? What were the main factors that affected the movement?
9. What do you believe is the current state of the free schools/alternative education? What evidence do you base your assessment on?
10. Is there anything else I should know about free schools/alternative education in order to understand this history?

Appendix B: List of Interview Subjects

- Barbara Cervone, Annenberg Institute for School Reform in Providence, Rhode Island. Recorded at AISR, 10/27/97.
- Tina Dawson, Director of the Mountain Community School, Roanoke, Virginia. Conducted (unrecorded) at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, 10/5/97.
- Patrick Farenga, Director of Holt Associates in Boston, Massachusetts. Recorded at Holt Associates, 12/8/97.
- Jerry Frain, Director of the LEAP Project, New York City. Conducted (unrecorded) at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, 10/5/97.
- Allen Graubard, author of *Free the Children*. First interview recorded in the Rockefeller Library, Brown University, 11/15/97. Second interview recorded at Graubard's home.
- Sandra Hurst, Director of the Upattinas School in Glenwood, Pennsylvania. Phone interview, 10/12/97.
- Denise Jenkins, Director of School One in Providence, Rhode Island. Recorded at School One, 12/16/97.
- Herbert Kohl, Author of *36 Children*. Phone interview, 11/6/97.
- Eileen Landay, Professor at Brown University. Recorded in Barus Hall, Brown University, 10/24/97.
- David Lehman, Director of the Alternative Community School in Ithaca, New York. Phone interview, 2/7/98.
- Mary Leue, Director of the Free School in Albany, New York. Recorded at Leue's home in Albany, 10/9/97.
- Olivia Loria, Director of Clonlara West in Pine, Colorado. Phone interview, 10/21/97.
- Chris Mercogliano, Teacher at the Free School in Albany, New York. Recorded at Mary Leue's home in Albany, 10/9/97.
- Ron Miller, editor of Holistic Education Review in Charlotte, Vermont. Recorded at Holt Associates and Graham & Parks, 12/8/97.
- Jerry Mintz, Director of the Alternative Education Resources Organization in Rosalyn, New York. Phone Interview, 1/23/98.

Patricia Montgomery, Director of the Clonlara School, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Phone interview, 2/6/98.

Ed Nagel, Chair of the NCACS in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Phone interview, 12/11/97.

Connie Pesch, Teacher at the Alternate Learning Project in Providence, Rhode Island. Recorded at ALP, 10/30/97.

Wendy Rolnick, Teacher at the Roxbury Community School, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Recorded at the Woodstock Therapy Center, Woodstock, New York, 1/31/98.

Arthur Sauls, Co-director of the School-Within-a-School Program, Queens College, New York City. Phone interview, 10/21/97.

Susannah Sheffer, editor of Growing Without Schooling in Boston, Massachusetts. Recorded at Holt Associates, 12/8/97.

Hal Sobel, Co-director of the School-Within-a-School Program, Queens College, New York City. Phone interview, 10/21/97.

Len Solo, Director of the Graham & Parks Alternative School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Recorded at Graham & Parks, 12/8/97.

Jim Turner, Teacher at the Alternate Learning Project in Providence, Rhode Island. Recorded at ALP, 11/6/97.

Lucia Vorys, Director of the Lamborn Valley School in Paonia, Colorado. Phone interview, 10/21/97.

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