



Less Can Be More

by

Dave Lehman, Principal
Alternative Community School
Ithaca, New York

Here at the Alternative Community School we have been working on the essential principle — less is more — in various ways for a number of years with considerable success. Now, as a member school of the Coalition, we are beginning to seek new ways to expand on this as we look to reevaluate and revitalize our curriculum. We have seen how less really can be more in the following ways:

1) *Staffing* — Our public middle school and high school of 215 students is staffed at the same "pupil-teacher ratio" as all other secondary schools in our District (1.0 full-time equivalent teacher for every 18.65 students!). Yet, we are able to meet the Coalition guideline of fewer students per teacher. Our full-time teachers teach five classes averaging fifteen students per class, thus averaging 75 students per teacher. *It can* be done.

2) *Program* — We offer full middle school and high school programs, but we do not try to do everything. In our middle school program we do not try to offer a separate course for every single state and local requirement. Rather, we try to integrate those requirements into a more limited number of courses and projects. Thus, for example, we incorporate the state's requirements in library skills as part of all other major studies. Our high school Family Groups (which advise, support, counsel, fund-raise, etc.) in combination with our other democratic self-governance structures (e.g., committees and weekly all-school town meetings) enable us to meet the state's new social studies requirement of a half-year course in "Participation in Government" without creating yet another required class. Thus, in our high school program, we do not try to offer multiple courses which lead to the shopping mall effect. But,

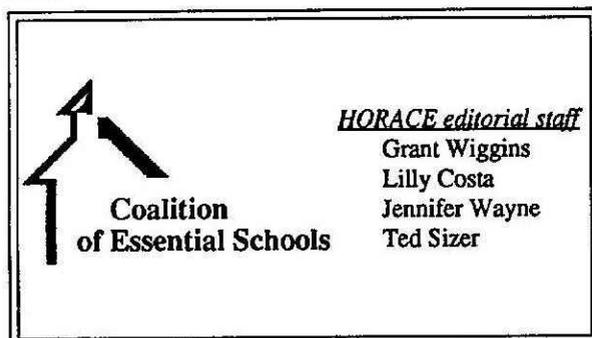
if a student has a special interest, we make every effort to arrange for that student to gain outside exposure to this interest through internships, both academic and practical. *Less can* mean more.

3) *Scheduling* — Our classes meet only four times per week rather than the conventional five (we all learned this could work from the old "Trump Plan," remember?). We meet for a total of two fewer weeks in the total school year and we meet for one to two periods less each nine-week cycle due to the weekly all-school meetings. Yet, our high school students *do* pass the New York State Regents examinations in those courses in which they are given. Our students also usually do as well as or better than our conventional school student counterparts on the Stanford Achievement Tests. Since some students may genuinely need more time, we provide separate sections in some math courses, and we provide individualized workshops and science labs. *Less does* work.

4) *Curriculum and Teaching* — We have begun looking for additional ways to do "less" within our curriculum and courses. We have been offering some interdisciplinary courses and would like to do more, particularly in the middle school. We presently have two large blocks of time each week (all Tuesday afternoon and all Thursday morning) devoted to special "Extended Projects," many of which are interdisciplinary in nature and often involve doing things out of the school building in the greater Ithaca community. These have included "Cross Country Bicycle Touring" (physical education with a first aid/CPR component), "Video Project" (meeting after school hours to use a local community-access television studio to produce youth-oriented programs once a month on such topics as teenage sexuality and violence in America), "World Resources Game," "Nature and Survival," "Super Law" and "Trains, Planes and Electricity." We have adults from the community, many of whom are parents, come in and teach on such project days. Students, particularly high school

students, help teach as well, both as individual tutors and as teaching assistants. Thus, our teachers can do more with individual students because they are responsible for less. In the near future, we hope to work even more on individual courses so that there may be less worry about coverage and a greater emphasis on the quality of work done. One example of this might be coverage of the many social, political and historical implications of the Holocaust over a semester rather than the usual passing paragraph that it usually receives in a European History textbook.

Increasingly, our teachers have been able to articulate that what we want to be providing is "purposeful learning" in which the content is often selected by the students themselves or at least in conjunction with the teacher whose primary responsibility rests on continuous skills progress. Here, the content is not unimportant; rather it represents the personally-motivating factor which can hold a student's interest and through which specific skills can be developed. It is about this which the teacher can be particularly excited and interested. Therefore, content can be relevant and real both to the student and to the teacher. Thus, we are increasingly coming to believe through our experiences here at Alternative Community School that less, in actuality, is more.



**Teachers Motivating Students
by
Students of Thayer High School
Winchester, New Hampshire**

This project was constructed by students at Thayer High School under the supervision of several instructors to help teachers discover ways to motivate students to progress and to learn. It was the goal of this project to help teachers perceive student attitudes and to utilize activities that might allow students to learn better or more easily.

LET STUDENTS KNOW THAT HELP IS AVAILABLE, BUT, AT THE SAME TIME, PUSH THEM IN A POSITIVE LEARNING DIRECTION.

TEACHERS SHOULD PAY ATTENTION TO ALL STUDENTS AND SHOULD BE EQUALLY FAIR.

TEACHERS SHOULD BE CONCISE, FRIENDLY AND CONSTANT IN ATTITUDE.

TRUST AND KNOW THE STUDENTS INDIVIDUALLY AND USE THE STUDENTS' IDEAS AS PART OF THE CLASS.

STUDENTS HAVE A NEED FOR A FUN TEACHER AS WELL AS FOR A GOOD WORKING ATMOSPHERE.

THERE IS MORE TO A CLASS THAN JUST BOOKS AND LECTURES.

PLAN SOMETHING EXTRA TO GO ALONG WITH THE MATERIAL BEING COVERED.

TO PRAISE... OR NOT TO PRAISE

THE "A" STUDENT IS NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO SHOULD BE PRAISED. LET STUDENTS KNOW THEY ARE WORTH SOMETHING. WHEN STUDENTS DO SOMETHING CORRECTLY, COMPLIMENT THEM. DO NOT PUT ONE STUDENT DOWN FOR NOT BEING AS SMART AS ANOTHER.

"The feel of a school, its morale, the subtle engagement of its students: these and analogous qualities have to be seen close up, on a regular basis."

Ted Sizer, HORACE [Vol. 4, No. 2]

This supplement is an attempt to facilitate more familiarity and networking among Coalition members; to help create a "tight community of pioneers." This is the second installment, completing the first "tour" of the CES schools. The next four pages of vignettes are taken from phone conversations with principals, headmasters, coordinators and teachers from each of the schools. Taken individually, they hopefully capture some unique feature or activity in each school. When seen as a group, they should give an impression of the multi-faceted and incredibly complex context of school restructuring.

Gary Obermeyer, *Learning Options*

Andover High School

Andover, MA 01810
Wilber Hixon, Principal
Craig Simpson, Coordinator
617-470-1707

CES affiliation has given Craig Simpson a way to describe the process his team used intuitively before the Coalition was founded -- and the means to design and facilitate a week-long training for the new team which will begin working this fall.

Brighton High School

1150 Winton Road South
Rochester, NY 14618
Thomas Jones, Principal
Sue Groesbeck, Dick Esner, Co-coordinators
716-442-1500

A steering committee representing all disciplines plus the building administration has begun planning for the expected implementation of a CES team in the fall of 89. In five years they will have created an alternative high school.

Catholic Central High School

1200 East High Street
Springfield, OH 45505
Fr. Unwin, Principal
513-325-9204

School-within-a-school is on hold as a faculty committee addresses problems stemming from too much isolation from the rest of school. The charge is to identify "reasonable and practical ideas for school-wide practice" and to rethink the way the project fits with the school philosophy of providing individual attention to all students.

Finn Hill Junior High School

8040 NE 132nd Street
Kirkland, WA 98034
Robert Strode, Principal
Bryse Nelson, Librarian, coordinator
206-821-6544

A seventh grade block program integrates gifted students in a cooperative learning environment. Students are identified but not pulled out. Instead, all students have the option to do enrichment work and teachers receive in-classroom support from specialists.

Gordon School

Maxfield Ave.
East Providence, RI 02922
Dary Hall, Headmistress
Joann Watson, Coordinator
401-434-3833

"The biggest problem is smallness," in this parent-owned and-operated school. Summer work is focused on creating more flexibility in scheduling. A team of seven teachers currently works with grades 5-8, within 45-minute periods; sharing art, music, studio arts teachers with lower grades.

Heathwood Hall

3000 South Beltline Boulevard
Columbia, SC 29201
J. Robert Shirley, Headmaster
Lark Palma, Dean of Faculty
803-765-2309

In an expansion mode -- With all ninth and tenth grade students in a block schedule, plans are to add 11th and 12th grade blocks. Middle school and lower school staff, housed in the same building, are examining CES principles and considering first steps.

Hixson High School

5705 Middle Valley Pike
Chattanooga, TN 37343
Tom McCullough, Principal
Cheri Dedmon, Coordinator
615-842-4141

There was enough interest among the faculty to implement CES in grades 10-12, but problems with state requirements (especially certification) led them to opt for a tenth grade pilot. Four teachers will work with 120 students. Cheri Dedmon will work with students on study skills and community service, and will substitute for CES team members.

The Judson Montessori School

705 Trafalgar
San Antonio, TX 78216
Gay Jones-Judson, Director
512-344-3117

A yet-to-be created high school -- Thirteen 7-9 graders, most of whom started at Judson as pre-schoolers, work together with a core teacher and several part-time support teachers. Gay notes that age span lets students work much more freely and sees the possibility of creating 6-7, 8-9, and 10-12 combinations.

Lincoln High School

1433 South 8th Street
Manitowoc, WI 02186
Douglas Molzahn, Principal
Roger Alexander, Coordinator
414-683-4830

A four-teacher CES team divides 45 sophomores and juniors into three groups while the fourth teacher works one-on-one. The day begins with a "good morning" session of varying length, for advising, housekeeping and special presentations. Teachers find CES style carrying over to their regular classes.

Mass. Advanced Studies Program

Milton Academy
170 Centre Street
Milton, MA 02186
Chuck Burdick, Director
617-698-7800, ext.222

A residential summer school enrichment experience for 200-300 selected high school juniors from all over Massachusetts, classes of 15 are taught by master teachers from Milton and from area high schools and colleges. Students do the equivalent of 2/3 of a year's work in six weeks -- three hours per day of concentrated work on the course for which they applied, plus a writing course. Afternoons are reserved for recreational sports and college planning.

Metro High School

1212 74th Street, SE
Cedar Rapids, IA 52401
Mary Wileynski, Principal
319-398-2193

An alternative school for 600 students (many with arrest records, many with children) provides an interdisciplinary approach called "vocademics" -- practical application of basic skills. The school week is Monday through Thursday. Friday is for staff meetings and home visits. Staff shares in decision-making about interventions with specific students.

Mid-Peninsula High School

870 North California Ave.
Palo Alto, CA 94303
Phillip Bliss, Chairman
415-493-5910

Teachers are responsible for four classes with no more than 15 students in each. Teacher advisors, in teams of two, work with 16 students in daily, half-hour mid-morning sessions. A Learning Resource Center, staffed with a counselor and two professional staff, provides diagnostic and skill work. Students work in groups, getting help where they are "soft" and giving help where they are "strong."

Note: Nova Schools are on adjoining campuses, referred to as the Nova complex, and share a CES coordinator.

Pat Ciabotti
c/o Nova High School
3600 SW College Ave.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314
305-476-8340

Nova High School

Larry Insel, Principal
Pat Galbreath, school-based coordinator
305-475-7705

Pat Galbreath, a humanities teacher, will have worked in each of the start-up years of interdisciplinary teams: beginning with a 10th grade; then, 11th grade; next year, a 12th grade; and the year after next, a 9th grade group.

Nova Middle School

Suzanne Alvord, Principal
305-475-7758

An all-school effort emphasizing staff ownership is facilitated by department chairs and grade-level "team leaders" who develop recommendations for discussion and decision-making by the whole faculty. Many of the staff work as facilitators and trainers in areas of special interest.

Park Heights Street Academy 3901 Park Hgts. Ave.
Baltimore, MD 21215
Deneavo Robinson, Headmaster
Marcus Ampadu, Coordinator
301-367-3446

Students as workers organize and present material to the class and write quizzes to check results. The whole class is involved in a critique of the lesson and reflection on the responsibilities of teacher and learner.

Parkway South High School 801 Hanna Road
Manchester, MO 63021
Craig Larson, Principal
Patrick Conley, Coordinator
314-394-8300

CES classes are centrally located in the building to minimize isolation. Additional classes, this fall, will be spread around the building to facilitate greater co-mingling. One indicator of success is the involvement of CES student government leaders in school-wide student government.

Paschal High School 3001 Forest Park Boulevard
Fort Worth, TX 76110
Radford Gregg, Principal
Larry Barnes, Coordinator
817-926-5463

CES students take two electives, giving them "the best of both worlds... a heck of a lot of personal attention, and the choice and diversity of a comprehensive high school." The trade-off is that the 9-12 school-within-a-school has to match with the regular bell schedule for two periods in the middle of the day.

Portland High School 284 Cumberland Ave.
Portland, ME 04101
Barbara Anderson, Principal
Ellen Endter, Coordinator
207-775-5631

The steering committee is leading a transition from school-within-a-school to a school-wide effort. Data gathering, including extensive surveying of students, provided the basis for identifying issues and organizing task groups. Each will develop written proposals for faculty review.

The Putney School Elm Lea Farm
Putney, VT 05346
Barbara Barnes, Director
Sven Huseby, Dean of Faculty
802-387-5566

Putney School's organic garden provides about 60% of the vegetables for the school and fertile ground for developing a "constituency for responsibility." Students demonstrate in one academic and one non-academic course, at the end of fall and spring terms, as a preliminary to final exhibitions.

School One

75 John Street
Providence, RI 02906
Bill O'Hearn, Principal
Beverly Vileno, Assistant Director
401-331-2497

Students learn to assume responsibility by running weekly general meetings. They are also represented on hiring committees and graduation boards of review -- the group to which graduating seniors present credits and answer the questions: What did I do here? and Where am I headed?

Seneca High School

3510 Goldsmith Lane
Louisville, KY 40220
John Whiting, Principal
Judy Phillips, Coordinator
502-454-8323

Essential Schools Lab is open to four classes at a time on a six-week cycle. Classes are split. Each half spends three weeks in the lab developing thinking and decision-making skills. Meanwhile, back in the classroom, teachers take advantage of smaller class size to concentrate on personalizing and seminar-style learning. Lab grades are included in the final grade.

School Without Walls

400 Andrews Street
Rochester, NY 14604
Dan Dramcich, Program Administrator
716-546-6732

The real focus is on citizenship and responsibility. Thursday mornings the staff meets while students exercise options in gym, computer lab, community service or (if all work is done) a break. Friday morning the whole school meets in "town meetings" and problem-solving groups.

Springdale High School

Springdale, AK 72764
Harry Wilson, Principal
501-751-4838

Fran Flint reports that students and teachers were engaged and eager right up to the end of the school year. "May be a reflection of the engaging nature of the work," says Fran. Several of the CES team will be engaged in planning and conferencing right through the summer.

St. Andrew's-Sewanee

St. Andrews, TN 37372
 Rev. William S. Wade, Headmaster
 Sofia Wentz, Dean of Faculty
 615-598-5950

Junior writing exhibition is a set of essay questions with four opportunities to meet standards judged by panels of three faculty members. The focus is clear thinking and support for positions taken. Upper-level teachers also critique 10th grade writers to help them prepare for the exhibition.

The Stowe School

Mountain Road
 Stowe, VT 05672
 David Gibson, Headmaster
 802-253-4861

Interdisciplinary classes of two and one half hours provide lots of personal attention in a school staffed for twice the current enrollment of 30. There are five key staff; 12 total.

St. Xavier Academy

225 MacArthur Blvd.
 Coventry, RI 02816
 Joyce Blum, School Liaison
 Kathy Siok, Coordinator
 401-826-2130

There are three 100-minute class periods per day. Most of the 155 students (all girls) also do a 4th and 5th course through independent study. Many complete college course work throughout the high school years. Staff collaborates on a once-a-month half day interdisciplinary experience.

Thayer High School

43 Parker Street
 Winchester, NH 03470
 Dennis Littky, Principal
 603-239-4381

The science department gives the final test on the first day of school and four times during the year, a practice used to some extent in other departments. Teachers are specifying entry and exit level skills and competencies into the curriculum. Three block-scheduled teams begin next year.

University School of Nova University

7500 SW 36th
 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314
 Joseph Randazzo, Headmaster
 Dr. Jerome Chermak, Coordinator
 305-475-7500

A developmental effort is intended to produce a model "interactive classroom" using computer-supported learning to enable application of CES principles. While up to half of the students work at self-paced computer workstations the teacher will work with seminar groups and shift more attention to higher level skills.

Walbrook High School

2000 Edgewood Street
 Baltimore, MD 21216
 Sam Billups, Principal
 Marian Finney, Coordinator
 301-396-0721

The school-within-a-school starts at 8:00, a half-hour before the rest of the school and sometimes extends beyond normal school hours. The day begins with a tutorial and often ends with field-based learning. According to Marian, students really like the community-based work.

Walden III

1012 Center Street
 Racine, WI 53403
 Charles Kent, Principal
 414-631-7000

An exhibition called ROPE (Right of Passage Experience) has been a part of Walden III since its founding in 1972. Seniors demonstrate from among 16 different areas of competence. Other traditions: no study halls, no bells and no last names required.

Westbury High School

5575 Gasmer Road
 Houston, TX 77035
 Bill Morgan, Principal
 Karen Owen, Coordinator
 713-723-6015

After three years of work, the CES team went back to the drawing board to tackle problems of isolation and to get the project on a firmer footing. They met with staff, students, parents and administrators and submitted plans to the state education agency. TEA endorsed it, the board designated Westbury as a special school (meaning students can transfer in) and additional teachers volunteered to join the effort.

Whitfield School

175 South Mason Road
 St. Louis, MO 63141
 Mary Burke, Headmistress
 Adrienne Lyss, Coordinator
 314-434-5141

A new building is planned to fit CES principles, accommodating an expected community of 250 student/workers. Each teacher will have a place for "coaching" classes of 15. All staff will share a common office space. Teachers and students worked together to define a combination of high tech open spaces and nooks and crannies that would retain the close-knit feeling from the old building.

Gary Obermeyer, Learning Options
 P.O. Box 06382, Portland, OR 97206
 503-771-7963

Using the Coalition Principles
in the Classroom

by
Sue Groesbeck
Brighton High School
Rochester, New York

UPDATED LESSON TO ADDRESS THE
COALITION PRINCIPLES:

Activities:

To write a letter to a place of interest in Germany, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Austria or East Germany

To be able to figure out an appropriate address for the institution being written

To mail the letter(s) without the teacher's assistance

To make a poster with the material received

To give a five-minute speech in German about the material

To write five/six questions about the report in advance

Goals:

To believe that a letter could be written without the teacher's assistance which would be understood abroad

To be responsible for mailing one's own letter

To gain confidence in writing to institutions

To organize materials for the construction of the poster

To give a speech and to feel comfortable addressing the class

To learn independent planning for a long-term project

To decide in advance what is to be learned by the class from the speech

Procedures:

October. The unit was introduced to the students by my saying that I wanted to take my children to Albany. We brainstormed, in German, of course, as to where we might write for information. We made up a wild address from our best hunches and I modelled the activity by writing to the

"agency" in Albany for information. Similarly, I pointed out, the same tactic could be used to write to Europe for any information on any topic. Their homework for that night was to think of something in Germany, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Austria or East Germany that really interested them. They needed only write down the topic. Anything was fine as long as there existed a place to which they could write for information. The topics were staggering! For example, Jazz in Germany; Beer; Swatch in Switzerland; Youth Hostels; Sailing Clubs in Northern Germany; Heilbronn, the city; The Bundestag and Volkswagen, to name a few. The list of topics was much more varied and more exciting than I could have come up with. In fact, they were much more difficult than I would have dared!

After circulating around the classroom, speaking to each student individually about his/her topic, I explained that they were going to do a project based on their topics — that they would write away for information of their choice and would use they materials in a five-minute speech in February. The students' anxiety level went sky-high at this point!

I offered the students no model letter. There was no handing out of addresses. I did not mail the letters. I did not even know if they had written them, but on faith alone, I expected them to do it completely on their own.

The principles of Student-as-Worker and of Personalization acted as my guiding references.

November/December. The responses came in! Fabulous information. Samples of chocolates! An overhead projector presentation from Swatch! Photos from Volkswagen. The application, completed, for the International Youth Hostel Card!

January. I had appointments in the library after school every day to give any helpful pointers to the students who were having difficulty organizing their posters and their speeches. The students took advantage of this offer. I also indicated that they had to present me with five or six questions about their projects which they hoped their classmates could answer after listening to the speech. The questions had to be submitted to me two days in advance of each student's presentation date. The interesting thing about the questions was that they were much better, much more

global than the questions I came up with during each presentation. Their questions tended to demonstrate the organization of their speeches, becoming almost "essential questions" for their projects.

February. For the first week in February, the students presented their projects. Five were presented each day. I noticed something refined and subtle happening. The students were asking questions, real comprehension questions asked of their classmates at the end of each report. They were taking notes rapidly. They were critiquing each other with fabulous results. The questions were in German and were really pushing the "Student/Teacher" to explain whatever it was that the students did not understand.

Another subtle change — instead of collecting all the questions and grading them myself, I had the "expert" (the student who had given the report) grade them. I was interested to see if the grades would be all "A's," but they turned out to be done quite well. Some were sprinkled with comments. Some even had messages from the student to the report-giver, giving a compliment or a critique.

By the third day of reports, another subtle change had occurred. The report-givers were writing a few difficult words on the blackboard before they started. A few said, "This word was difficult for me, so I assume you won't know it either and it is important to my report." Why else do we need to teach vocabulary?

Summary:

Very subtly, I changed from the role of teacher to that of coach. I gave after-school assistance in matters of organization and grammar. But, they had to come see me. Otherwise, they worked completely independently. I can only begin to explain the quality difference in the projects. The level of personalization produced an engagement which I could not manufacture. How would I know that Josh is a chocolate freak and that Brad is a theater nut? How could I know that Karen wants to work in a zoo (and, interestingly, now has an East German pen pal — the son of the Zookeeper in Dresden!)? The experience was liberating for me and exhilarating for us all.

Many of the changes are obvious to me now and many of the results are self-evident. But I would not have risked placing so much responsibility onto the students in former years. Under the rubric of this new unit based on Coalition principles, the students got the joy out of the projects which had previously only been my reward.

Selected student comments regarding the assignment:

"It's rather hard for me to say [how I felt about this assignment] because, at first, I didn't notice much difference. After a while, I noticed that we were hardly being told what to do at all. At first, I felt a little deserted and frightened, but it, in essence, made the project much easier and took a lot of the stress out of it. If it had been mentioned every day, if you (Sue Groesbeck) had followed us every step of the way, it would have stifled imagination and made the project seem like the end of the world. We had been so well-prepared from the other speeches that we were capable enough to do [the assignment] on our own."

"This assignment was very challenging because instead of being given the information and making a presentation, we were forced to go a step further and take over the job of teacher. With this the student had to be able to use his or her writing skills in writing the letter and verbal skills with the presentation ... Here we had been given total responsibility and the outcome depended totally on us."

Announcing a NATIONAL FALL FORUM OF THE
COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

DATE: October 27 to October 29

PLACE: Biltmore Hotel, Providence, Rhode Island

PURPOSE: To gather together teachers, coordinators, principals and other administrators from Coalition Schools and other interested parties to share ideas, reflect upon the past and plan for the future. The program will provide ample time for frank discussion of the successes and difficulties in our common adventure. It should be great fun, quite provocative and reflecting Principle #5 (Student as Worker)! More details will be forthcoming.

For further information, contact:

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