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THE MOUNTAIN PATHWAYS SCHOOL A HISTORY OF THE FIRST YEARS:
FOUNDING AN EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVE IN THE
NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAINS

A Dissertation

by

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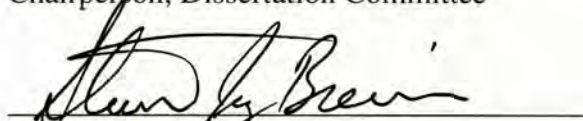
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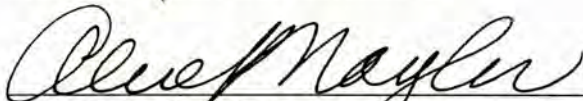
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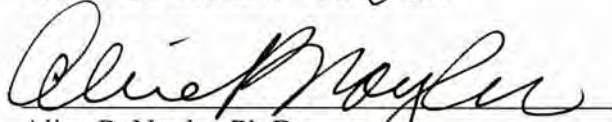
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ABSTRACT

THE MOUNTAIN PATHWAYS SCHOOL A HISTORY OF THE FIRST YEARS:
FOUNDING AN EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVE IN THE
NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAINS (December 2004)

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Many alternative schools do not survive; those that do have a clear mission in place and tailor their programs to their populations (M. D. Fantini, 1976; D. Duke, 1978; and M.A. Dunn, 1998). Education and outreach to the public, teachers, students, and parents about an alternative school's mission and philosophy are critical to success. Studies of alternative schools that survive beyond the crucial first years could inform not only those educators interested in successful alternative education but also those who are interested in broader educational reform. Mountain Pathways School for Children is an independent Montessori school situated in the mountains of western North Carolina that began as an independent alternative school. The school's original philosophy of putting the child first in an ungraded, nongraded environment promoted a love of learning and self-discovery in elementary-aged children. This study examines the founding of Mountain Pathways through the interviews and historic documents of its founders, parents, and board members from the first few years of its operation through the decision to adopt a Montessori curriculum while maintaining its philosophical identity.

To my family, thank you for your constant love and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....vi

Preface.....vii

Chapter I - Introduction.....9

 Organization of this Study.....17

 Operational Definitions.....18

Chapter II - Literature Review.....21

Chapter III - Method.....37

Chapter IV - Building a School.....42

Chapter V - Conclusion and Recommendations.....101

Bibliography.....114

Appendix A - Interview Questions.....121

Appendix B - List of Articles.....123

Appendix C - Founders.....125

Appendix D - March 31-April 1, 1989 Retreat Minutes.....129

Appendix E - Board of Directors Report of Goals and Objectives.....135

AUTHOR RESUME.....142

Preface

In 1987 I enrolled my daughter in a new alternative school in the Boone area. We had recently moved back to Watauga County so that I could take courses for teacher certification in my degree area. Having my daughter in an experimental school allowed me to view firsthand the practices of individualization, whole student learning and integration that were being promoted by the College of Education at that time. What I saw working with my daughter and other children made a difference in how I approached my own teaching a year later when my degree was complete and we moved out of the area again. The experience also created an interest in alternative education that I never lost.

Although I have always remembered the school as a positive experience for my own daughter, I only casually kept informed over the years. I remember hearing about their switch to Montessori, but it was not until I was in the doctoral program in 1997 when the charter school movement began in North Carolina that I began to hear more about the school. In our program we were reading heavily about the charter movement and keeping informed as well as possible about the legislature's decisions around charter schools. We heard that Mountain Pathways was seeking charter status and that their application had been approved by the state. Soon afterward we were informed that the school chose to refuse the charter. Our seminar class discussed why that might have been but did not follow-up with the school.

Years later, when asked by my dissertation chair, “what are you interested in?” I began talking about alternative education practices and our conversation eventually led to my interest in wondering how it is that a group of people can start a school. What does it take and how are all of the myriad details that embody a community of learners molded into place so that the end result is a school? In that conversation, we realized that seeking the answers to those questions would make a valuable study. The story I have discovered so far has been interesting and informative. I have found that there is a rich history in the 17-year life of this small school. This study relates only the beginning years. I look forward to discovering the rest of the story.

Chapter One - Introduction

M. A. Dunn (1998) has noted that the ability of the “alternative schools movement to foster diversity among learning institutions has had the potential to galvanize educational reform. Yet alternative schools have had a poor survival rate, and those that survive have tended to drift toward the conventional over time” (p.1). In the literature on alternative education, the continuing, frequently passionate, interest in alternative education, by parents and educators, despite evidence that many alternative schools do not survive, is intriguing. There are a few questions that can allow exploration of this ongoing interest in alternative education and alternative schools.

First if, as Peterkin and Jackson (1994) assert, alternative schools are schools that are “designed to provide additional opportunities to those students who found traditional schools, both public and private, incompatible with their learning needs and social conditions” (p.128), what opportunities are educators and parents, who open alternative schools, hoping to offer which are not being met by public institutions? Next, despite the work and investment involved in opening an alternative school, many close after only a few years, or revert to traditional models. How do some alternative schools survive the crucial first years of operation? Dunn (1998, 2000) finds that pressure to move towards the traditional comes from new parents, new teachers, and the community. Is it possible that concessions are made by teachers and administrators in schools that remain alternative allowing some movement towards the traditional while still retaining most of their alternative identity? Since survival for alternative schools is in part dependent on

their ability to tailor their programs to their populations (Dunn, 1998), do they tend to be changes in the first few years in the focus, mission, or philosophy that still serves the vision of the school founders, yet provides newcomers with a sense of familiarity in a new environment? Fantini (1976) wrote that if educators who support alternatives can learn from early problems and controversy, alternative schools could become a major thrust in educational reform. Studies of schools that survive beyond the crucial first years can inform educators interested in successful alternative education and those who are interested in broader educational reform.

Qualitative studies have already been undertaken that provide insight into the steps taken toward survival by a few public and private alternative models. Dunn (1998, 2000) has written historical case studies on two public alternative environments in different cities, Moore's Creek Elementary, in an undisclosed sun-belt city, and Irwin Avenue Open Elementary School, in Charlotte, North Carolina. Both schools were established as Open Schools in the early 1970's and have maintained the Open School philosophy to the present day. Open Education models are part of the progressive alternative schools movement that began in the 1960s and 1970s, based on the theories of John Dewey. Open Schools feature active learning opportunities such as learning centers, field trips, and the use of manipulatives. Learning is individualized, with students completing learning contracts at their own pace. Open Schools commonly use multiage groupings and team teaching. Students are encouraged to move freely among activities (Dunn, 1998). In her studies, Dunn explored the political and cultural forces that pulled the two schools toward the conventional. She finds that success in retaining their original focus is in part attributable to teacher leaders who are passionate about indoctrinating

new teachers in the school's way of operating. She asserts that positive experiences, and word-of-mouth in the wider school community (parents and others), with the alternative school's environment, fosters an expectation that the school is innovative. At Moore's Creek Elementary, a commitment to open education through continuity in leadership has been another key for that school: "in some ways principals *have* 'taught philosophy' (italics and quotes in original)" (p. 21). Four of the five principals, at her writing, had open education experience and two had taught at Moore's Creek. Continued in-house survival and positive community perception have allowed the schools to resist returning to a more conventional curriculum and philosophical base (Dunn, 1998, 2000).

In *The Story of the Albany Free School: Making It Up as We Go Along*, Chris Mercogliano (1998) recounts the history of the Albany Free School, a private, community alternative school established in 1969 as a Free School. Free Schools are yet another name used to identify alternative schools. Mercogliano describes the first years of this successful alternative as tumultuous ones. Parents and teachers "battled over educational philosophy and practice" (p. 6) while various agencies attempted to shut the school down. As was the case in the two schools studied by Dunn, outside forces attempting to pull the school toward the conventional were strong. He notes,

The working-class parents wanted the Free School to look and function like the local public school....They wanted their kids to have desks, textbooks, mandatory classes, competition, grades, and lots of homework. The absence of these trappings of a "real" school became fertile ground for the fear that here their kids would "fall behind," lose their competitive edge....In the end, it was decided that kids would be

required to spend their mornings engaged in lessons and projects to improve their basic skills. Afternoons would be left open....As the young school gradually gained confidence and experience, and as it established a certain respectability in the larger community, it would take a more and more relaxed approach to academic learning; but for the time being the majority of the school's parents appeared to be satisfied with this initial compromise. (p. 9, 10)

The founders of the Albany Free School discovered for themselves what researchers like Duke, Dunn and Fantini later confirmed; although alternative schools must tailor their programs to fit the needs of their populations, "you can't be all things to all people" (Dunn, 1998, 2000; Fantini, 1976; Mercogliano, 1998). Researchers who study alternative education assert that education of and outreach to the public, teachers, students, and parents about an alternative school's mission and philosophy are critical to its success. Schools that survive must have a clear mission in place and must tailor programs to fit the needs of their populations. Fantini (1976) also suggests that professional educators need to clearly define what is meant by alternative education. He believes that in order for the alternative movement to have a chance in mainstream America it needs to be defined in a manner that is palatable to the middle class. Fantini's warning appears to have had merit when looking at the founding of the Mountain Pathways School in Boone. Ann Norwood, one of the founders of the Mountain Pathways School, explained that she was careful to call their school an Independent School and never used the term alternative school, especially during the planning and first years of operation. "We felt that 'alternative' had more to do with cultural and social

attributes.” Ann Norwood’s persistence during the months of planning prior to opening the school and in the first years to never use the word “alternative” due to the negative connotations held by many people about alternative schools illustrates Fantini’s fears that educators and the middle classes would need a clearer definition of the term “alternative school” to buy into the alternative movement:

00:24:38 We were afraid [to be associated too closely with the alternative movement]. Independent schools were known for high standards, very strong academic liberal arts, arts and music. That and the very strong curriculum of the school I was in, and the older tradition of independent not being contradictory to [the] public [schools], just a choice with often smaller classes, maybe a little more high-powered types of offerings, that maybe public schools couldn’t do. Sometimes ‘alternative’, at the time we were founding the school, seemed to be a major criticism of the public system. And it’s a fine point but it’s a point we knew, if we set up too much in terms of being different and critical of schools, we could create in a small county a negative impression of the school that could reflect on the children when they transitioned back in. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

Despite the poor survival rate of many schools and the continued use of muddy definitions, a review of the literature on alternative education, over three decades, from 1971-2003, indicates increased interest in alternative education since the 1970’s and some influence by proponents of alternative schooling on school reform initiatives. Duke (2000) writes, “While the age of customized learning is yet to dawn, many signs point in

its direction. Influenced by the successes of advocates of special education, parents and educators are recognizing the benefits of individual education plans that take into account the unique characteristics and needs of each student” (p.12). With interest in alternative education practices, both public and private, on the rise, Dunn (1998), encourages proponents of alternative education to “look not only forward, but backward, to learn from the experiences of the small number of alternative schools that have not only survived, but prospered over the decades” (p.1). She identifies a need for studies of long-standing, successful small alternatives that can stand in contrast to the poor survival rate of alternative schools in past decades (Duke, 1978; Dunn, 1998; Fantini, 1976). Studies of successful alternative schools can provide a blueprint to educators interested in encouraging longevity in new innovative programs (Dunn, 1998).

Mountain Pathways School has been established as an alternative educational choice for families and educators for 17 years in Watauga County, North Carolina. The literature on alternative schools identifies characteristics and practices that successful alternative schools (i.e. those that survive beyond the first few years) have in common. Those characteristics include size, choice status, mission, and leadership. Dunn (1998) lists the following characteristics the literature suggests are common to successful alternative schools:

1. Careful planning and systematic development -- successful alternative schools are carefully planned. Growth should be systematic and cautious.
2. Funding -- Seed grants are not sufficient. Plans need to be in place to continue to provide adequate funding beyond the school's initial stages.

3. Small size -- Alternative schools are typically smaller than conventional schools, frequently enrolling less than 200 students. Small size allows for a sense of community, commitment to common goals and philosophy, decreased bureaucracy, and greater responsiveness to student needs.
4. Choice -- Parents, children, and teachers are all involved with the school by choice. Teachers have a role in hiring other teachers.
5. Clear mission -- The school's goals and mission are distinctive and clearly articulated. Rather than trying to be all things to all people, successful alternative schools are able to tailor their programs to their populations. A mission that is understood and shared by all members of the school community allows staff members to work collaboratively and effectively on what they are able to do best.
6. Strong leadership -- The principal or director (when a part of the school) is an effective leader who is able to motivate teachers and students. He or she is actively involved in promoting a curriculum that is grounded in the needs and backgrounds of the students.
7. Cooperative Relationships -- Planning, operation, and evaluation involve students, parents, faculty, community and administration. Community resources are utilized.
8. Continuity in leadership -- Raywid (1994) finds considerable continuity in leadership among successful alternative school program (plural missing in original).

(Dunn, 1998, p. 3-4)

As yet, few in-depth qualitative histories of alternative schools identified as successful have been added to the literature base. In the case of the Mountain Pathways School, I hope to relate what additional opportunities (Peterkin & Jackson, 1994) its founders hoped to address when they established the school in 1987. I also explore what it is that continues to draw parents, students, and educators to this small alternative school. Unlike many alternative schools in the literature, Mountain Pathways resides in a district reported to have excellent public schools. In addition, the research on alternative schools has typically been done in urban school districts. While Watauga County is in appearance rural, the town of Boone and surrounding area cannot truly be characterized as rural with its combination of a mid-sized liberal arts university and year-round high levels of tourism, the area has a unique population.

The focus of this study centers around the research questions stated earlier:

1. What opportunities are educators and parents, who open alternative schools, hoping to offer which are not being met by public institutions?
2. How did the Mountain Pathways alternative school survive when many close their doors after only a few years?
3. Is it possible that survival is dependent on concessions by alternative school teachers and administrators to allow some movement towards the traditional?
4. Since survival of alternative schools is in part dependent on their ability to tailor their programs to their populations (Dunn, 1998), in the quest for survival do there tend to be changes, in the first few years, in the focus, mission, or philosophy, of the schools that survive, that continue to serve the

vision of the school founders but provide newcomers with a bridge between educational traditions?

In its first year, Mt. Pathways housed two teachers, a director, and ten children whose ages were between five and nine years. In its fifth year the school changed its focus from the Free School concept to Montessori. It now has seven fulltime teachers and three teacher assistants, serving approximately fifty children each year from preschool through middle school ages. The fifty-student limit was required by the size of the original building's septic system. In November of 2003 the school opened an annex for the older children, after purchasing additional property and building an annex which houses the new middle school program beginning with the 2004-2005 school year. The board of directors initiated a pilot program to provide services to home-schooled children in the area, beginning in the fall of 2003.

A history of the Mountain Pathways School, viewed in relationship to the characteristics of other successful alternative schools, will form a picture that can add to the literature on school reform, institutional survival, and alternative education. The findings may be of interest to other groups of parents and teachers who may wish to start alternative schools, and to alternative schools in the beginning stages that may be struggling with the process. The study will add to the still-growing qualitative research base on alternative education in the United States. By providing feedback to the school community about steps that were taken that were successful and steps taken in times of strife to bridge differences, the study may benefit members of the Mountain Pathways School community as its leaders plan for the future. As a successful small alternative

school, Mountain Pathways provides an excellent opportunity to study the changes and processes that have contributed to its survival during the past 17 years.

Organization of this study

This study contains five chapters with accompanying appendices. Chapter I is the introduction to the study and provides operational definitions for some of the terms and referenced organizations contained in the study. Chapter II is the literature review on alternative education with emphasis on what alternative education is and how it has survived in recent decades. Chapter III discusses historical method and how it will be employed in this study. Chapter IV contains the results of the study in a narrative timeline based on oral histories and documents collected in the study of the Mountain Pathways School. Chapter V relates my conclusions and recommendations for further study of the Mountain Pathways School.

Operational Definitions

Alternative School: In education, the phrase alternative school usually refers to a school based on a non-traditional, new, or non-standard educational philosophy. A wide range of philosophies and teaching methods are offered by alternative schools; some have strong political, scholarly, or philosophical orientations, while others are more *ad-hoc* assemblies of teachers and students dissatisfied with some aspect of mainstream education. In the United States, most alternative schools are private or independent schools rather than public schools funded by the state; however, some public charter schools and magnet schools offer benefits similar to those of alternative schools and are inspired by similar ideas. Some U.S. states and school districts, such as those in western

Massachusetts, also call their special-needs and remedial education programs "alternative schools" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_school).

Independent School: An independent school is a school which is not dependent upon government for financing its operation and is instead operated by tuition charges, gifts, and perhaps the investment yield of an endowment. An independent school differs from a private school in that the former has no religious affiliation, while the latter may have religious affiliation. Though the terms "independent school" and "private school" are essentially synonymous, the latter has elitist connotations for many and the term "independent school" has been encouraged by the backers of such schools, especially since the 1970's (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_school).

Humanism defines a socio-political doctrine whose bounds exceed those of locally developed cultures, to include all of humanity and all issues common to human beings. Because doctrines of cultural distinction and exclusivity are often phrased in terms of religion, secular humanism grew as an answer to the need for a common philosophy that transcended the cultural boundaries of local moral codes and religions. Many humanists are religious, however, and see humanism as simply a mature expression of a common truth present in most religions (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanism>).

ITA: The Initial Teaching Alphabet is a phonemic alphabet based on the phonemic sound system of the English language. It was designed to present the beginning reader and writer with a logical and reliable reading and writing system. The phonemic alphabet consists of 44 sound-symbols with each symbol or character representing one sound in a word. The alphabet adheres closely to traditional orthography. The symbols are

lowercase. Certain conventional English spellings have been retained such as the c and k, which have the same sound (<http://www.ita.org>).

NOVA: On March 10, 1960, Dean Dessenberger, Chair of the Broward County School Board, proposed the development of the South Florida Educational Park on Forman Field in Davie, Florida. Plans called for a complex of schools for students from elementary to university level to be constructed on the land that had been used as an air naval training base during World War II. Funded by the Ford Foundation, and referred to as the Nova Educational Experiment, students needed to pass a test to gain acceptance. Nova schools operated on a longer school calendar than others in the district and offered a self-paced learning atmosphere for self-motivated students. The schools were considered very progressive. Students were given Learning Activity Packets and instructors served as guides. Nova High, which graduated its first class in 1966, was the first school in the complex to open. It was followed by Nova Blanche Forman Elementary in 1965 and Nova Eisenhower in 1967. There was no middle school initially. The two elementary schools served students in grades 1-6, and the high school, grades 7-12. In 1977, Nova Middle School opened its doors. Today the Nova schools differ little from others in the district, but they continue to serve self-motivated students. In 2000, Nova High School was selected by Newsweek magazine as one of the top 100 high schools in the nation (<http://www.browardschools.com/history/1960.htm>).

Chapter Two - Literature Review

Two of the most persistent questions that have been asked about alternative education, since it began to be a popular movement in the 1960's, are first, *what are alternative schools* and second, *what is their purpose?* Peterkin and Jackson's (1994) definition of alternative schools as schools that provide additional opportunities to families who find traditional schools incompatible with their learning needs and social conditions is fairly clear. Duke's (1978) definition is simply, schools accessible by choice, not assignment. School models identified as alternative vary in nature depending on their purpose, including schools that would ordinarily be designated as traditional. Fantini (1976) asserts that alternatives to traditional models have been around for a long time, many crippled by controversy (Dewey's progressive model for example). Fantini has described the "alternative school movement" as a reaction to decades of frustration during which educators attempted to improve a single model of education "wherein we attempted to change the learner to fit the school" (p. xvi). Fantini suggests that professional educators need to define what is meant by alternative education clearly. He cautions against using the label "alternative" to cover everything from special needs schools for at-risk students (those who have been administratively removed from traditional schools) to radical "deschooling" approaches (advocates of deschooling believe that school, as an institution, is unnecessary). In answer to the question on the purpose of alternative schools, Fantini remarked that alternative educators' goals generally assume a flexible stance that looks beyond the boundaries of school walls to

include the community and its resources. They establish smaller educational units, to humanize the experience for all, and relate educational experiences back to the community. Additionally, he offers a set of ground rules for what he calls a new system of "educational options" for public alternative schools (p. 30).

In Fantini's new system, alternative schools:

1. are not superimposed, but a matter of choice for all participants--teachers, parents and students.
2. are viewed as another way of providing education alongside the existing pattern, which continues to be legitimate.
3. are different from special programs for dropouts, unwed mothers, and the like.
4. do not practice exclusivity.
5. do not make exaggerated claims of accomplishments that may be deceptive in the long run.
6. are aimed at a broad, common set of educational objectives, not just limited objectives.
7. do not cost more money than existing per student expenditures.
8. are evaluated. (p. 31)

Fantini's system contrasts with the traditional education model as viewed by Bonstingl (2001), Charlesworth (1989), Clinchy & Kolb (1992), Dunn (1998), Mercogliano (1998),

Willis (1993). In their view, the traditional model reflects:

1. mandatory attendance.
2. competition-based environment-- success is inevitably limited to a few.

3. large class sizes.
4. results-oriented (grades and rankings).
5. externally-controlled curriculum subject to frequent change.
6. single discipline instruction.
7. central command, authoritarian, hierarchical.
8. instruction set up to generate right answers, with testing as the primary means as assessment.
9. students as products of the school.
10. parents as outsiders.

Finally, Fantini noted that public alternatives could become the major thrust of educational reform in the coming decades if proponents can learn from the mistakes of earlier reform efforts such as progressive education. Education and outreach to the public, teachers, students, and parents about an alternative school's mission and philosophy are critical to its success. Misunderstanding a school's purpose and mission by stakeholders and the public can lead to a quick demise. Many alternative schools do not survive; those that do have a clear mission in place and tailor their programs to their populations. Other writers (Peterkin, & Jackson, 1994; Mercogliano, 1998) have added to the knowledge base on what alternative education is, or should be, over the years, with remarkable consistency, including agreement that the label "alternative school" confuses the public and professional educators alike due to its application to a myriad of special needs facilities and programs. To summarize the key concepts, in this review, alternative schools should be small, as affordable as existing traditional schools, student-centered, non-exclusive schools (both public and private) that are attended (by choice) by teachers,

parents, and students when those individuals determine that a traditional model does not fit their educational needs.

The increase in public acceptance of alternative schools, since the 1980's, shows that in some ways changing or qualifying the label might make a difference. Alternatives such as magnet schools, charter schools, and other schools of choice in the public sector have become trusted educational options and have increased in number (Peterkin and Jackson, 1998). In order to discover if, as Fantini (1976) predicted, alternative education has become a major thrust in educational reform, I conducted a simple experiment. Using the online ERIC databases, I performed a search on alternative education in 10-year increments. Using the keywords "nontraditional education" and "alternative education" over approximately, a three-decade span from 1971-2003, I found that there has been an increase in interest (based on numbers of articles and other documents) in alternative forms of education over the past 30 years. In the years between 1971 and 1981 the document retrieval returned 125 documents. Between 1982 and 1992, interest increased slightly and 131 articles were documented with 46 (almost a third) of those published between 1991 and 1992. After 1992, the number of publications increased the most in the four decades, with 222 documents listed by ERIC between the years of 1993 and 2003. These numbers are just indicators and may or may not refer to studies that support Fantini's prediction on alternative schools and educational reform, but they do indicate a continuing interest in alternative education. An exploration of topics and titles in each decade reveals continuity in the purpose of alternative education proponents. That purpose, as already noted by Peterkin and Jackson, has always been to provide additional opportunities to meet the needs of students who discover an incompatibility with

traditional school models and their personal educational needs. The following paragraphs will provide a brief summary of the trends present in each decade.

In the 1970's, most references to alternative schools centered on the Free School Movement, Open Schools, Magnet Schools and other child-based alternatives.

Alternatives in this decade espoused philosophies that borrowed from the writings of educational reformers like John Dewey, Neill Summerhill, Ivan Illich, Maria Montessori, and Rudolph Steiner (Mercogliano, 1998; Fantini, 1976). The groups of parents and teachers that began these schools hoped to focus on ethnic diversity, civil rights, on the whole child, and on bringing democracy into the classroom. Additionally, in the early to late 1970's, articles on alternative high schools began to appear in the literature, describing schools that, for the first time, offered troubled (now termed "at risk") students alternatives to dropping out or, in many cases, expulsion. Alternative high schools initially opened their doors only to students who had already dropped out of school but quickly grew to meet the needs of students identified as at risk early as the 8th grade year (Cohn & Finch, 1975). Alternative public high schools in the 1970's, like other alternatives, focused on educating the whole child, and on democratic ideals, a focus many have continued through the present (Sehr, 1993).

Articles and other documents on nontraditional education after the publication of "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 begin to reflect middle class movement away from traditional public education and toward private schools, church related schools and trusted, established, public alternatives such as magnet schools and other "controlled choice" options (Clinchy, 1992; Peterkin & Jackson, 1994; Education Commission of the

States, 1999). Magnet schools had been developed in the 1960's and 1970's to provide incentives for voluntary desegregation and have become trusted public school alternatives in the eyes of parents and school professionals (Peterkin & Jackson, 1994). The options for matching student interests to various foci in magnet alternatives have come to be attractive to parents. In an article in *Educational Leadership* in 1991, Launa Ellison, an urban parent and teacher, reported that she had thought about moving to the suburbs but "could not buy into" a school system that believed there was only one way to educate all children. She supported her position by writing about the many magnet school choices available to her daughter in Minneapolis in 1991:

As my last child prepares to enter high school, her choices are even broader [a reference to the public alternative elementary and middle schools in her area]--the Open Magnet, the International Baccalaureate, the Arts School, the Technology Magnet, the Liberal Arts Magnet--and if none of these fully meets her needs, she has the right to enroll in classes at the University of Minnesota. (p. 37)

Occasionally the confusion surrounding the various definitions of alternative school choices have had a negative effect on parent perception. Jones-Wilson, Arnez, and Asbury (1992) document a marked increase in the number of urban, middle-class, Black families choosing private schools in the mid-1980s. The authors note that although Black parents have historically supported public education they had become increasingly disenchanted with traditional public schools in the 1960's and 1970's. The primary reasons cited for the movement to nonpublic schools, by middle-class Black families, were "smaller student-teacher ratio, a greater sense of caring, and higher quality

education” (p. 126). Mixed feelings by Black Americans, who would have preferred to promote the values of public schools for all, were fueled by the intense debate on school choice and its possible negative affect on minorities, one of which made public alternatives less desirable for many (Jones-Wilson et al., 1992).

The umbrella terminology, used to describe alternative choices presented a problem for the public during this decade. Black parents, for example, looking for a better educational fit for their children, had difficult decisions to make when confronted with current alternative school labels. Schools listed solely as alternative consistently brought to mind the “last chance” vision of alternative high schools. Schools listed as “freedom of choice schools” and “free transfer schools” (both early synonyms for controlled choice public alternatives) drew even greater negative associations since these terms were “associated with state efforts to prevent school integration in Virginia and Tennessee” (Jones-Wilson et al., p. 127). Jones-Wilson et al. reported that, in the early to mid 1980’s middle-class Black parents in urban areas chose to place their children in traditional private school settings, despite the historical preference by Black families to support the ideal of public schools. In addition, a few years after the debate surrounding terminology, the authors were surprised to report that in 1990 that 72% of minorities favored public school choice alternatives, compared to 62% of all Americans in the national survey. Both percentages, in any case, indicate more than a passing interest by all Americans in alternatives to a standardized, single education model.

Articles on home schooling began to surface more frequently during the 1980’s as well, but the home school movement did not begin to explode until the following decade. After years of legal battles, legislation, in 1993, made home schooling legal in all 50

states. In the final decade searched, 1993-2003, the number of ERIC listings on alternative education increased significantly from 131 to 222 retrievals. Events in the alternative education arena such as charter school legislation beginning with Minnesota in 1991 and the legalization of home schooling in all 50 states by 1993 support Fantini's assertion that alternatives would become a major factor in school reform (Education Commission of the States, 1999). The report of the Education Commission of the States notes that, although only one in five public school parents in areas that support open enrollment (a form of controlled choice) was aware of his or her options, participation in open enrollment programs grew over the ensuing decade to nearly four million students, according to U.S. Department of Education estimates (Education Commission of the States, 1999). The more recently popular alternative of home schooling has garnered large gains in the 1990's: "Approximately 850,000 students were being home schooled during the spring of 1999" according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/HomeSchool/estimate.asp>).

The Small schools initiative also began during this decade affirming an important goal, long supported by the alternative schools movement. This initiative supports the principle that schools be small enough to humanize the experience for teachers and students (Fantini 1973, 1976; Mercogliano, 1998). In the traditional model school and class size are determined largely by the size of the population near the school, or by district distribution of building and staffing resources. Most alternative education models operate with small student numbers and small student to teacher ratios (Dunn, 1998). According to Raywid (1999), the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform in Chicago set the size limits for small schools at 350 students or less in elementary schools

and 500 for High Schools, while Lee and Smith (1997) recommend 600-900 students for high schools. Small size allows for a shared sense of community where teachers, parents and students can understand and be committed to common goals and their school's chosen philosophy (Fantini, 1976; Dunn 1998; Clinchy, 1992; Mercogliano, 1998; Sherman, 2001). The small schools formed by the New York Networks for School Renewal (NYNSR) in an effort to build a neighborhood atmosphere, encourage parental involvement and raise graduation rates for disadvantaged children, average only 300 students per school. Their efforts have proven successful with attendance and graduation rates exceeding city averages, since the program's inception in 1994. In addition, parental involvement and satisfaction are high (Libby 1999).

According to Clinchy (1992, p. 20), Friedland (2000), and Mercogliano (1998), small schools more easily support ungraded and multiage classrooms, giving students the opportunity to grow at their own developmental levels and to interact with other children belonging to multiple age groups and abilities. Teachers and other school leaders are able to work intimately with pupils in small classrooms. Intimacy provides educators a better opportunity to identify learning styles and educational needs of individual students. In ungraded and multi-age classrooms, educators are able to teach basic skills more efficiently by grouping children by developmental level rather than by attempting to teach multiple skill levels to one age group-- a practice that holds some children back while leaving others behind (Clinchy, 1992; Mercogliano, 1998).

Debates on small school size have centered most on funding, staffing, and equity. Smaller student-teacher ratios would appear to exacerbate financial burdens, especially if the trend towards decreasing the tax bases that pay for public schools and teachers

continues in the United States (Baines & Stanley, 1999). Yet, the alternative school movement has, from its inception, made a concerted effort to be non-exclusive (Fantini, 1976; Mercogliano, 1998), and to keep costs at or below existing per pupil expenditures (Mercogliano, 1998; Stiefel, Iatarola, Fruchter, & Berne, 1998; Raywid, 1999). The literature indicates that costs in smaller schools, while somewhat higher on a per student basis, are counterbalanced by “much higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates” (Stiefel, et al, 1998, p. 11; Brownell, 1999). Stiefel, et al, conducted a cost-benefit analysis of alternative schools in New York State and found that the smaller schools have among the lowest costs per student in the New York City system. Many private alternative schools, such as the Free School in Albany, NY, operate well on a much smaller per pupil expenditure than traditional public schools in the same area (Mercogliano, 1998). The numbers of disadvantaged students who remain in school through graduation are higher in small alternative schools than in traditional schools (Peterkin & Jackson, 1994; Stiefel et al., 1998; Brownell, 1999; Raywid, 1999).

Peterkin and Jackson (1994) note the national debate surrounding school choice and the concerns of critics who believe that the increase in the number of small alternative schools of choice would increase the disparity between advantaged and disadvantaged students. They argue that although no large district has been able to spread the success of individual programs, the successes of individual subdistricts in urban areas, such as New York’s District 4, Cambridge, MA and Montclair, NJ “must be organized into a powerful system that delivers on the promise of excellence and equity for all public school children” (p.126). A recent study on the effect of school choice on the social capital of New York’s District 4 credited the small schools there with having raised

achievement levels throughout the district, not just in the small schools. Thus, the researchers concluded, critics' fears of creating a system of "haves" and "have-nots" had not been realized (Schneider, Teske, Marschall, Mintrom, & Roch, 1997). Students in small schools feel more connected to teachers, to one another and to the community; they progress more rapidly towards graduation, and they behave better, presenting far fewer minor and serious infractions (Pittman & Haughwout 1987). A community atmosphere is key to teacher satisfaction and student success. Teachers can focus more on individual student needs and curriculum matters when their attention is not focused purely on the classroom management issues prevalent in large schools (Dunn, 1998).

There are indications, such as the significant increase in the number of documents on public school alternatives, that Fantini's hope for accessible options in the public sector has begun to take root. Questions and debates surrounding alternative education have changed little in the decades since Fantini published his alternative education source book. Questions about funding, teacher credentials, program stability, cultural diversity, assessment (both of the school and the students), and leadership are tied into some of the major debates in education such as school choice, vouchers, accountability, accessibility, faddism, and ultimately to national standards for public education.

A major debate that has always surrounded alternative education centers on student and school assessment. Should alternative schools use standardized assessments and tests developed for traditional schools? Continued disagreement in this area could hamper the growth of alternatives as the movement towards national standards and high stakes testing grows (Bonstingal, 2001; Meier, 2003). Noting a "trend" towards high stakes testing in the 1970's, Fantini warned alternative educators that it was on the

horizon. The call for national standards became a full fledged movement in the 1990's and threatens to weaken the public alternatives movement if proponents of alternative schools cannot provide internal and external means of assessment that are acceptable to meet state and national standards of educational quality. Fantini stated in 1974:

...it may make good sense also to remind ourselves that while we are trying to come to grips with pluralism in education, another trend is gaining momentum before our very eyes. It is a trend which grows out of public dissatisfaction and a demand for accountability and which stresses a single no-nonsense return to the 3 R's--strict adherence to standardized measures of achievement, ability grouping by IQ, nonpromotion policies, lowering the compulsory school attendance age, placing more police guards in schools. In short, this trend calls for a return to the way schools were earlier in this (20th) century.... They call for more uniformity supported by a law and order policy within the schools. (p. 32)

Bonstingal (2001) asserts that we must begin to build a culture of authentic achievement and let go of high stakes tests that tell our students, "school is a place of zero tolerance for those who cannot, or will not, do well on one-shot, no-second-chances tests that measure memorization skills and the recall of discrete and unconnected pieces of data..." (p. 8). Cooperation-based alternative schools work on the assumption that learning does not occur in a vacuum and that students need to talk and work with one another and with teachers, parents and other trusted adults to learn to think and communicate that thinking to others (Aksoy, 1998; Dunn, 1998; Kohn, 2003; Meier, 2003). Deborah Meier reminds us that "public schools are intended, at a minimum, for a

social purpose: to pass on to the next generation something this generation values and to generate new ideas that might benefit future generations. They do not exist, in short, primarily to give each individual student a better chance to beat out other individual students in a race to succeed” (2003, p. 16). In alternative schools, the common use of ungraded (including multi-age) classrooms creates an atmosphere where students are subject neither to the embarrassment of being constantly compared to others nor to the stigma of ending each school year as passing or failing (Yarborough & Johnson, 2000). McLoughlin (1967) found little difference in achievement between students in graded and ungraded schools in a review of studies through 1966. In a similar review, however, examining studies through 1991, Pavan (1992) found that students in ungraded schools generally achieved at higher levels than those in traditional schools when studies were conducted using standard objective measures. Additionally, she noted that contrast was even greater when affective factors were added for blacks, boys, and disadvantaged children.

Most alternative schools use some form of authentic assessment of achievement such as portfolios, in-depth projects and other demonstrations allowing students to reveal their understanding in context and with a purpose (Beane, 1998; Bonstingal, 2001; Clinchy, 1992; Dunn, 1999; Kohn, 2003; Mercogliano 1998). Authentic assessments “involve tasks that are contextualized, complex intellectual challenges involving the student’s own research or use of knowledge in “ill-structured” tasks requiring the development and used of meta-cognitive skills” (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, Falk 1995, p. 11). Authentic assessment provides teachers and students with an idea of what students are actually able to do with the knowledge and understanding they have as well as a

means to help the students see progress and set new goals (Bonstingal, 2001; Beane, 1998; Friedland, 2000; Mercogliano, 1998). Traditional forms of assessment are increasingly a cause for concern due to the lack of accuracy for decision-making about student achievement levels and potential academic problems (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995).

Teachers, students, parents and school leaders are viewed as teammates rather than adversaries in the decision-making processes of successful alternative schools. Adults work to discover the interests of students, to provide learning opportunities and to remove barriers to learning (Aksoy, 1998; Clinchy, 1992; Dunn, 1998; Friedland, 2000; Mercogliano, 1998). Most alternative schools bring students and parents into the decision-making process in all aspects of the education process, believing that students, especially, need to “see themselves as members of a community with all the give-and-take, the compromises and complexities that entails” (Meier, 2003, p. 18; Kohn, 2003; Mercogliano, 1998). Additionally, within the school community, parents are considered to be integral to the operation of the school as decision-makers, educators, volunteers, and advocates for the school and for their children so that their contributions to their children’s education are highly regarded (Dunn, 1998; Mercogliano, 1998).

The expectations fostered by alternative schools which promote democracy, that students will be active participants in their own educations and in the decision-making structures in the school (Meier, 2003) is a cause for concern among those who see alternative schools as permissive, unstructured institutions. Advocates of active participation claim that students who are encouraged to invest in their own education have higher self-esteem and are more likely to graduate and to become productive,

satisfied, and caring citizens. For many alternative educators, the ultimate goal of school is to develop self-directing, autonomous individuals. Students, who participate in directing their own learning, and in school decision-making processes, experience learning and work as interrelated, pleasurable, and rewarding and learn to be content with their decisions (Goodlad & Anderson, 1987).

The growing attraction of alternative education, whatever its nature, appears to result from shared belief systems and common goals that are characteristic to all alternative schools. In traditional schools, the curricula are set by external agencies that are subject to public and political opinion. Teachers are rarely aware of the school's philosophical basis, or even their own, such concerns mattering little in institutions that are constantly forced to change goals and curricula. In the United States alternative schools are usually founded by parents and educators who have studied educational and developmental theory or, who have strong beliefs about the purpose of education in a democratic society. Strong beliefs about education have always been part of the American culture and have been used by politicians as election tickets. It was only after the publication of the report *A Nation at Risk* (US Department of Education [USDOE], 1983), that public schools became subject to increasingly intense scrutiny and control, including high stakes standardized tests and published "ranking" of schools (Baines et al., 1999; Bonstingl, 2001). Perhaps it was in reaction to the negative portrayal of public education in the 1980's and 1990's that the trend towards alternative education has accelerated so greatly in the past two decades.

Competition for students concerned some school systems so greatly that in efforts to avoid a voucher system (Friedland, 2000; Sherman, 2001) and save public education,

states began to institute first magnet schools, and then charter schools (providing a public version of alternative schools) that would possibly keep middle class students and parents in the public sector (Dunn, 1998; Sherman, 2001). This move towards charter schools by the states has also been attractive to groups of teachers and parents struggling to finance small alternative schools. In some states, the charter program is flexible enough to allow innovation and promote a healthy variety of schools from which to choose while in others the rules for developing charter schools are so restrictive it is almost impossible to get past the paper work (Sherman, 2001). With the increasing numbers of alternative schools in the United States, both public and private, defining what works and what types of support are critical to survival has become more important than ever, especially in those states referred to by Sherman that create surprisingly restrictive environments for any public school groups that wish to attempt a more student friendly educational experience. This is particularly true since alternative schools tend to have exceptionally short lives (Fantini, 1976; Duke, 1978; Dunn, 1998).

Chapter Three - Method

It is my intent to examine the Mountain Pathways School (MPS) using historical methodology. I have constructed a narrative that explores MPS as an alternative educational institution in the mountains in western North Carolina. The narrative can provide some insight into the attributes that continue to draw parents, students, and educators to Mountain Pathways as an alternative to traditional education model.

An historical study of this alternative school from its inception in 1987 through the board of director's decision to adopt a Montessori curriculum in 1992 highlighting pivotal turning points in the school's survival can shed light on the challenges and successes met by the founders and later school community. Dunn (1998) suggests that, due to the poor survival rate of alternative schools, extensive histories of schools that survive are needed. She states, "if the movement is ever to have a significant and lasting effect on education, it must look not only forward but backward, to learn from the experiences of the small number of alternative schools that have not only survived, but prospered over the decades" (p.1). Duke (1978) writes that alternative schools are, in the simplest form, those schools that have been attended by choice, not assignment. He, like Dunn, notes that histories of alternative schools are rare due to their typically short lives, but concludes: "They (schools) do not exist in isolation from other organizations. When a relatively dramatic departure from conventional practice--such as the emergence of alternative schools for competent, middle-class students--occurs over a short period of time, it merits the notice of those concerned with educational change" (p.3).

Historical studies explore the relationships among events in the past, asking questions about the causes of those events in the unique historical contexts that help to shape the people and organizations being studied (Rampolla, 1998). Gay (1992) states that “historical research is the systematic collection and objective evaluation of data related to past occurrences in order to test hypotheses concerning causes, effects, or trends of those events that may help to explain present events and anticipate future events” (p. 205). Through the use of primary documents and oral histories, historical studies of institutions provide a chronology that places seemingly unrelated events into context.

The historical evidence that was used to provide the necessary information to construct a narrative chronology was evidence from documents and from oral histories. Historical inquiry entails the collection and analysis of hard evidence in the form of primary documentary evidence such as:

- board minutes
- charters
- school records
- newspaper articles
- director’s reports
- reports to the director or board

This documentary evidence is supplemented by oral history in the form of personal accounts from involved participants such as current and former:

- teachers
- directors

- parents
- board members

Thompson (2000) records the importance of accumulating a variety of documents and reports, written and verbal, in order to compare and cross check reliability of sources. He includes in his descriptions of types of evidence reminders that all sources are biased towards their intended audience and must be considered with that in mind. Minutes recorded from meetings of the board of directors, for instance, will tend to place the best possible light on decisions made by that group. Personal recollections, such as diaries and interviews, are subject to the same human tendencies and frequently involve lapses in memory. Thompson writes, “more often the role of oral evidence is complementary or supplementary, reinterpreting and filling in gaps and weaknesses in the documents” (p. 155).

The following steps from formal historical methodology were used to obtain and categorize evidence that was then analyzed to construct a chronological narrative about the founding years of the Mountain Pathways School:

1. Identify, list and categorize documentary evidence.
2. Using *historical imagination* ask questions such as:
 - a. What was the context in which this was written?
 - b. Who wrote it, and what was their purpose?
 - c. Who comprised the intended audience?
3. Then, interacting creatively with the documents:
 - a. Survey the documents to develop a chronology

- b. Find key points of stress and tension (turning points) to further generate research questions to ask of the documents
4. Return to the documents, answering the research questions.
5. Through a careful analysis of the documents, apply the research questions in order to create a database of notes and categories
6. With a basis in hard evidence, begin to identify people for the supplementary oral history
7. Use screening interviews to select subjects for the in depth, thematic interviews
8. Create an instrument containing both controlled and open questions for the interviews (Appendix A)
9. Interview selected subjects
10. Review, index, and categorize the oral histories for comparison with the documentary evidence
11. During the interview process, new questions may become apparent that will need investigation when returning to the documentary evidence
12. Return to the documents to check the oral histories for accuracy (dates, people involved, etc.)

In January of 2004, Fred Racey (director 2002-2004), informed me that all documents dated prior to the 2000-2001 school years had been destroyed in a flood that affected their new building, the Norwood House, in mid November 2003. Mr. Racey had moved older documents to the new school building for storage earlier in the fall. I began to adjust my method to include only oral histories after our conversation but due to a

fortunate circumstance was able to continue the study as planned for the earliest years of the school's history. Dr. Peck Garner, M.D., one of the founders of the school, had retained a collection of planning notes, board agendas and minutes, research articles, newsletters and other documents related to the planning and implementation of the school from 1987-1991 when he resigned from the board. His comment was that he hoped that one day someone would want to know the history of the school. His foresight provided a wealth of information about the philosophy and planning for the new school and its future that might have otherwise been lost or difficult to verify. Dr. Garner kindly donated his original documents to the study. Another founder, Dr. Eric Hatch, Ph.D., had kept a folder of documents in his office, primarily from the 1988-1989 school year. Other recovered documents from parents and board members range from two audio-taped board meetings in 1991 to teaching materials and pre- and post-Montessori student evaluations. The collected data, both oral and documentary, was compared each with the other in order to construct a narrative of MPS's history and interactions with the surrounding community.

Chapter Four - Building a School

No matter how ideal an educational model or system, it is always rooted in local conditions. (attributed to a humanistic educator [Journal of Humanistic Education]-- quote used by Ann Norwood at Norwood house opening, Nov. 2003)

In the late fall of 1986, the idea for the Mountain Pathways School for Children originated when two local families began to talk about the kind of experiences they wanted their children to have in school. The children of Peck and Suzanne Garner and Bob and Esther Kelly were enrolled at Anderly Academy, a private day school in Boone, NC. Peck Garner, a local dermatologist, and Suzanne Garner, a graduate student in psychology, had taken their daughter Sara out of public school after her kindergarten year because they had concerns about the large class sizes, extrinsic reward systems, and accepted use of corporal punishment in the county schools. The Kellys moved their son David into the second grade at Anderly and their daughter Christine in the 4-year old kindergarten the same year for other reasons. Esther Kelly was a licensed elementary teacher with an endorsement in remedial reading and had some concerns about her son's progress in reading under the curriculum at his former school.

The Garner's concern was with the philosophy for classroom management in area elementary schools:

00:01:52 "She (Sara) went to Hardin Park's pre-school (kindergarten) and didn't go long. I think we had problems because they

started rewarding behavior with candy and, so that bothered us; and we started checking around for what else we could do.” (Peck Garner, 2004)

00:08:24 “Some of what they said about why they were somewhat concerned about having these three particular children in the public schools included the fact that corporal punishment was still acceptable; not very used but acceptable as a climate and they felt it generated more fear than was necessary in discipline. Plus there were other educational issues about the size of classrooms and different things.” (Ann Norwood, 2004)

The Kellys were in search of an individualized approach to curriculum when they moved their children to Anderly:

00:09:21 I could see that he was having trouble with his first grade reading in that he was confusing his spelling and his reading words. The connections weren't being made in the classroom. If they were working on the phonetics of the “a” sound in reading, for some reason they were working on the phonetics of the “i” sound in spelling. I brought that to the attention of the teacher and her reply was “you know, I don't really have to teach spelling, so you should just be grateful that I'm teaching him spelling at all.” I said, “well, there is a problem here, I would prefer that you not teach him spelling if it is going to confuse his reading skills.” We started looking for an alternative place where David could get some support. They did have reading specialists in place at Valle Crucis school but they didn't seem to be able to help him either and it didn't alter the classroom curriculum in any way, shape, or form so, all it did was identify

him as needing help. As time went on, I didn't feel that the school was supporting him in his special needs at all, though the teacher was lovely.

(Esther Kelly, 2004)

The Garners and the Kellys were friends. Esther related that they spent quite a bit of time talking about their children and about the idea of providing another option for them and perhaps other children in the area. The Kellys were friends with Carol Rapp and had a good deal of respect for her. They knew she taught at Anderly Academy and through contact with her decided to enroll both of their children at the school.

00:11:25 What he [David] did with the remedial reading teacher was not what I thought should be done, I wanted him to succeed in the classroom. We began to look around. We were really good friends with Ann Norwood and with the Garners. Their daughter was two years younger than David and we were also friends at church with Carol Rapp. Carol Rapp went to work as a teacher at Anderly Academy and that was the only private school in Boone. So we looked at Anderly Academy and said, "well, if Carol Rapp is teaching there it must be an okay school." We talked to the teacher and there seemed to be more of a creative type curriculum, more of a writing-to-read type program, more experiential as far as the social sciences as well as the arts and sciences... We tried that for one year.

They had a pretty good experience but while it was happening, you know how the light bulbs can start really going off? As it was happening we could see that we could do it better. (Esther Kelly, 2004)

During their year at Anderly, the Kellys and Garners continued to think about and discuss what they considered to be limited educational options. Eventually they brought Carol Rapp into the conversation. Carol Rapp's teaching career had, by this time, spanned almost 20 years in both public and private settings. Her understanding of the different ways classrooms can be shaped began when she was a child and was reinforced by her eclectic experiences as an educator.

00:08:17 I had gone to a school when I was younger that had two classrooms, grades 1-8 and so I had been educated in an environment where there were other children in the same classroom doing other projects and where a lot of times, if it seemed appropriate, the teacher might ask somebody who wasn't normally in *this* group to come and sit in on *this*. It was done in such a way that it was never called to your attention that this was an older person coming back for 'this' skill or a younger person going up for 'that' skill. (Carol Rapp, 2004)

She graduated from Kent State University's teacher education program in 1960 and began teaching in 1961. During her second year of teaching, she and a few other teachers who had training in Kindergarten education were asked by the school system to develop a curriculum for Kindergarten in the district. She credits this early experience with providing her with the background and confidence that she could set up an appropriate curriculum. A few years later she was introduced to, and taught, an experimental reading program called ITA (Initial Teaching Alphabet¹). In 1965, the year following her ITA training, she moved with her husband Al to Florida where he had been invited to teach in the innovative NOVA high school. As it happened, NOVA was just starting an

Elementary School program that year and part of the curriculum happened to include the ITA reading program.

00:10:17 When they saw that I had been teaching this experimental reading program they were very excited and ... felt that I might be able to have some input because I had all kinds of materials for teaching ITA. But [my experiences] also made them feel like I was the kind of teacher who was willing to step outside of the box. (Carol Rapp, 2004)

Carol felt that her first hand experience with ungraded programs as a child combined with the practical experience of creating developmentally appropriate curricula in her first district program, followed by her tenure at NOVA, had an impact on her career decisions as a teacher. "I knew that after teaching at NOVA, I could never go back to a regular school" (Carol Rapp, 2004).

The Garner and Kelly families knew that they had both been impressed with her as a friend and to her dedication to all of the children she taught, reaching each and every child where they were, academically and developmentally. While the Kelly's children had other teachers at the academy, Peck Garner volunteered in Carol Rapp's classroom on Fridays giving the children lessons in astronomy and providing Carol with some much-needed planning time. Dr. Garner's volunteer work in the classroom gave him an insight into some of the challenges teachers at the academy faced. The school was always short on supplies for students, and the priority of the school's director seemed to be to keep the school open to the extreme of asking the teachers (including Carol) to change less-than-stellar student grades.

00:01:12 Peck and I were just discussing the situation we were in at that point. Sara was in my class and it was a different private school . [Anderly] had fallen short in my view, and Peck's view, in many different ways, one of the greatest of which was lack of parent involvement. Parents had little or no say about what went on unless she [the director, name withheld] felt they were going to withdraw their child and then I was told to give their child a different grade. Which I refused to do and I explained that she could give that grade if she wanted to but I would hand in to her the grade I thought the child earned. At that point we didn't have the supplies we needed, the emphasis at that point was keeping the school going rather than on the student and getting the materials and things we needed to use for the student. Peck had started volunteering with me and he began doing a lot of different kinds of things with our class. He liked the idea that his daughter was not being put through a particular textbook and we were doing a lot of hands on things and how we were trying to put together his volunteer work with our class work and that sort of thing. In an effort to get that to be part of the philosophy of the school where we were, both of us had tried really hard to see that happen and it was very apparent to us that it was never going to happen. Because he liked what I was doing, he had said on a number of occasions, "it's too bad that we don't have a school around here that would do these kinds of things." That's really how my first thought and his came together at the same time. But I did not think it was very realistic that we could start another school.

He's the one that made further contacts with other people and got it to the point, where we in fact had our first meeting. Obviously I was asked to be at the first meeting so, he let me know as he was doing things. But he was really the one who spearheaded it, although I did tell him, that there was no doubt in my mind that if he ever got a school like that started I would love to teach there. (Carol Rapp, 2004)

That year, the Garners worked with Carol and the academy director to develop a list of necessary materials for the classroom. They paid their tuition in advance with a promise from the director that Carol's classroom would receive the materials they ordered. It was discovered later that the director canceled the order soon after their meeting. The families were concerned, but not surprised, when Carol confided to Peck that she was considering relinquishing her position at the academy due to the continued lack of funding, the grade change issue, and other stressors associated with working at the school in its present state. Although the materials issue was important to Carol, it seems that the lack of academic rigor at the school was what most made her consider leaving, "Every school has problems but when she asked me to change student's grades..." (phone conversation, 10-7-04). That request was the breaking point for her. As the year progressed, it became apparent to the Garners and the Kellys that, while they agreed that Carol Rapp was an exceptional teacher, the academy was not going to continue to meet their children's needs, especially if teachers like Carol Rapp resigned.

The earliest conversation about designing their own school recalled by Ann Norwood was when she, Suzanne Garner, Esther Kelly and another friend had been on their way to visit a friend. While driving, Esther and Suzanne were talking about wanting

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The earliest conversation about designing their own school recalled by Ann Norwood was when she, Suzanne Garner, Esther Kelly and another friend had been on their way to visit a friend. While driving, Esther and Suzanne were talking about wanting

to find a new school for their children. At one point in the conversation, according to Ann, they all half-joked that if they wanted a school that really met their needs they would have to start one themselves. She remembered that they just “sort of laughed about it and then went to lunch and enjoyed the afternoon” (Ann Norwood, 2004). Many discussions followed, culminating one Sunday morning when the Garners began yet another day talking about the issue. They decided to call Carol at home and ask her if she would be interested in working at another school, if they could start one, and would she come by that morning to talk about it. They were also able to contact their friend Ann Norwood, who had been involved in a conversation about starting a school with Suzanne earlier in the year:

00:04:44 On the day that we actually... the straw, I guess, that broke the camel's back... it was a Sunday morning I remember and Suzanne and I got up and we were talking about 'what are we going to do?' and we said, 'well we probably need to start a school and we want Carol to teach.' So I picked up the phone and I called Carol Rapp, it was before Mass, we're all Catholic, and it was before Mass and we said, 'Carol we're talking about doing a school or something, would you like to come over?' and she said, 'okay.' I think, but I'm not sure, but I think Ann came too, I think we called Ann. Tom and Esther Kelly, we tried to call them too but they had already gone to church. (Peck Garner, 2004)

Ann Norwood received her Ed.D. from Boston University and was finishing a post doctorate Masters in School Psychology at Appalachian State University when she met Peck,

Suzanne and Esther Kelly through their involvement in a Jung discussion group. The broader community surrounding that study group became, according to Dr. Norwood, a foundation of support through the first years of their school.

00:08:54 “One thing that I think influences how and what level of friendship we all operated at was: from the beginning we were, (Suzanne, Esther, Peck and myself were) in a psychological study group called the Jung Study Group which Chuck Blanck from St. Luke’s and John Hoover from St. Elizabeth’s had kind of organized. There were other people in it, the Kindts and everything. But right from the beginning, it’s interesting the ties with St. Luke’s and the ties with St. E.’s carried over into a lot of the population; the different communities that helped build the community of the school. And that connection turned out to hold throughout the founding years. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

Their friendship and mutual interests in philosophy and education eventually led to that first Sunday morning meeting in the Garner’s kitchen, where “the consensus was that we would continue to meet.” (Ann Norwood, 2004). The next few meetings took place in the Garner home during January of 1987. The group of parents and educators that came together the spring and summer of 1987 to found the school included Dr. Ann Norwood, Dr. Eric Hatch, Dr. Carole Hatch, Carol Rapp, Tom and Esther Kelly and Suzanne and Dr. Peck Garner.

Eric Hatch, a professor of psychology at Appalachian State University, was well regarded by both Ann Norwood and Suzanne Garner. They had both been in classes with him and believed his interests and knowledge would be a valuable asset to the group. As

Dr. Hatch related it, “Ann was my graduate student; she was doing a bit of post doc after earning her PhD at Boston University... one day she came into my office and asked, ‘do you want to start a school together?’ In my naïve way I said, ‘sure, let’s do it’ [and] what seemed like thousands of hours later, we did.”

00:14:08 We met Eric [Hatch] through Ann and it was social, but with us nothing is ever purely social. We always talked about things higher than merely social! And because of Ann’s background and my experience and my interest in education (at that time I really thought I would go on and get a master’s degree if not a Ph.D. in education). We started really investigating if we could actually do it better than Anderly Academy, and what we could provide for our own children and a widening circle of other children that we came into contact with. (Esther Kelly, 2004)

Ann Norwood recalled the group beginning in earnest soon after the New Year; “as soon as the holidays were over we decided if we were ever going to do this we needed to get together.” The group moved to Peck Garner’s office in late January where they began sharing research, brainstorming, and planning the school. They were soon joined by Carole Hatch and Carol Rapp’s husband Al. Al Rapp was serving as the chair of the Technology Department at Appalachian State University that year and was considered critical to the effort but is not mentioned in any of the school documents as a founding member, possibly because he never served on the board of directors. He seems to have worked mainly as a resource person but was present in most of the planning meetings and frequently attended board meetings in later years.

It should be noted, prior to continuing, that due to Ann Norwood's positive experience with independent schools in New England and since the group wanted, from the beginning, to distance themselves from what they perceived as the somewhat disaffected groups who sometimes start alternative schools, they made a conscious decision to use the term independent school, rather than alternative school during the planning stages and into the first couple of years of operation:

00:24:38 "the word alternative education and alternative schools...

I never used the word. We never wanted it to be seen to be in conflict with the public (at least the founders didn't). My model based on my own New England experience was Independent schools; it also influenced the type of schools we visited... we only visited schools that had been quite well established.... (Ann Norwood, 2004)

Among the first things the group did was to dialogue about what education meant to them as individuals and as a group. Before and during the time they began visiting other schools, they read extensively about holistic education, school influences on young children's socialization, private schooling, alternative education models, developmental psychology, learning theory and curriculum (for a partial list, see Appendix B). Esther Kelly shared that the research was an integral part of the founders' way of doing things and was meant to continue throughout the life of the school.

00:53:00 [We continued to do] research, as we visited the schools.

A lot of things happened concurrently; that was the only way we could do it as fast as we did, so we didn't stop doing research when we started visiting, we continued and as the school opened we continued to do

research. That is the way we all felt it should be. We hoped that the school would continue to evolve. We knew, from our own background, that there are lots of accepted educational modes that become obsolete. We know that we can evolve a better way, that as we keep observing that we need to evolve. We just see how we learn more every day and if we are paying attention, we will see that we can do it better than we did today. (Esther Kelly, 2004)

They spent time discussing and agreeing upon a philosophy with which they all felt comfortable for the new school and their children. According to Ann, as she looked back on their discussions, the terms they used, and the ideas that they had, were not centered around one specific theory but agreed most with humanist philosophy:

00:08:54 One thing that I think influences how and what level of friendship we all operated at was: from the beginning we were, (Suzanne, Esther, Peck and myself) in a psychological study group called the Jung Study Group which Chuck Blanck from St. Luke's and John Hoover from St. Elizabeth's had kind of organized. But right from the beginning, it's interesting, the ties with St. Luke's and the ties with St. E.'s carried over into a lot of the population. The different communities that helped build the community of the school. And that connection turned out to hold throughout the founding years. You asked the question, 'how on earth did we even dream of starting a school?' Well I think we had a community that came together that loved children; that definitely wanted more family input.

Out of the founders everyone but Peck was an educator....

Everyone had a perspective and if I had to name the perspective in education, it would probably at that point have been humanistic education. We used words like “child-centered” we used words like “family-friendly” and “community-friendly”. Everyone in it was concerned for the environment... What we didn't have is what you would love to have us have... some nice neat philosophical model that we could say... okay, here's the school! (Ann Norwood, 2004)

The humanistic leaning may possibly have been due, in part, to the Jungian study group that the Garners, Esther Kelly and Ann Norwood attended regularly. The group was co-founded by Rev. Chuck Blank, from St. Luke's Episcopal Church, and Rev. John Taylor, of St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church. Ann Norwood, Peck Garner, Eric Hatch and Esther Kelly mentioned the group as a source of community and support for the founders. The ties to the communities in those churches and the legacy from the study group would stay strong through the first years of the school's operation.

00:41:56 The Jung study group was another miracle in my life... Really as we studied that together the revelations of how to work together came about. It was all mixed together. We spent just a lot of time together. When I think about how we were involved in that while we were building the school... Yikes. The Jung study group we were involved in long before the school. It [the school] was like the practical reflection of the philosophical, the psychological ... and the examples that we brought together [in the group].... (Esther Kelly, 2004)

As Ann noted, they did not have a neat philosophical model. The lack of one made it necessary for the founding group to come to a consensus on the school's mission and philosophy before they could truly begin.

00:17:21 We attempted to do everything by consensus early on.

Eventually that led to chaotic board meetings but it didn't matter. I think it needed that kind of together, everybody invested, for a long time. Then I think they went through a bit more formal board. I know they did because I stayed on the board for a while and then I also stayed in touch with the directors all the way up to two years ago. In the early days it seemed very important that we not make any major steps without everybody being together. We had lots of fun at those things, we were people with lots of strong ideas and very apt to not give up too easily if they thought they had good ones. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

Most of the founders had backgrounds in education and this common element in addition to their commitment to working together for the good of the whole is possibly one of the keys to their initial success and growth. Esther described the connection as a shared mission to educate children:

00:55:44 I think that what connected most of us, really, in the endeavor to build the school, [was that] we really felt a mission to educate children and to help them fulfill their purposes in life, help them find a way to love themselves and to fulfill their purpose in life. I think that was our common connection; before people wrote mission statements and all that stuff, we had that connection. I think that's why it was a success, why

we continued to be blessed, even through the growing pains. (Esther Kelly, 2004)

The group of founders could not have been more suited to meet the criteria Dunn listed for successful alternative schools, in particular, Dunn's belief that successful alternative schools be carefully planned and that "the role of the director ideally should be filled by an effective leader who is able to motivate teachers and students" (Dunn, 1998).

Ann Norwood, the Hatches, Tom and Esther Kelly and Carol Rapp had over 43 years of teaching, and public and private school experience (Appendix C). The entire group was committed to reading all that they could find on the subject from holistic education to developmental theory and non-profit funding. They brainstormed, wrote, and through many meetings, shared with one another their vision of what the school's philosophy could be. In a March 29, 1987 meeting, the agenda included tentative dates for working on the outline and key points for a) philosophy and goals and b) public brochure or booklet. Then, on April 12, 1987, item 2c on their agenda was to distribute philosophy statements they had individually written to be discussed, and then synthesized into a single statement of belief. Documents available from the March and April meetings include both typed and hand written philosophy statements. Samples from the submissions that were later compiled into a single philosophy are:

- 1- Children are not things to be molded but persons to be unfolded
- 2- It is the duty of those who dare to educate to create an environment which will stimulate, challenge, and guide each child's natural curiosity and interests. This environment should honor the unique backgrounds,

beliefs, talents, and stages of spiritual, social, physical, emotional, and intellectual development of each child. School should be a place which inspires self-confidence by rewarding effort, as well as the correct answer; where trying again is success.

3- ...Balance is equally important. There must be continuing opportunity for solid grounding in all the academic subject areas such as the 3 R's, the sciences, etc. -- we need to know what others have discovered and tested about flowers -- one cannot just smell a flower to be fully educated about it. And we must attend to all the arts in addition to the sciences--music, painting and drawing, body movement, and dance are all important and legitimate ways of learning about ourselves and about the universe.

4- Child-Centered - committed to teaching individual and group in ways tailored to the specific need and pace (individually) ... without sacrificing academic standards, nurture individuality, initiative, and creativity.

...Foster cooperative rather than competitive approaches toward living and learning...Nurture all dimensions of a child's being - physical, mental, emotional, aesthetic, social and spiritual... Establish the educational program as a cooperative effort involving open communication and active participation among teacher, student, parent, and administration.

5- Well rounded curriculum - academics, social, physical development, art, music, ... Emphasis on the pleasure and value of learning rather than the task .. internal rather than external locus of control... Foster curiosity

and creativity... value the individual rather than conformity, but emphasize the value of others as individuals.

6- The curriculum is relevant to life and brings together various subjects in a related way and offers material that students are interested in.

7- Encourages individuality, downplays blind conformity.

8- Disciplining procedures are not damaging to child's self-esteem__ there's learning involved for the individual and possibly the group.

9- Small student - teacher ratio - each child is an important part of the whole.

10- Parent involvement encouraged -- cooperative efforts at home important.

11- There must be continuing opportunity for solid grounding in all the academic subject areas such as the 3 R's, the sciences, etc. -- we need to know what others have discovered and tested about flowers -- one cannot just smell a flower to be fully educated about it.

12- A school is a place where a sense of awe should prevail. By awe I mean the feeling that things in the universe (and the immediate environment) are wonderful, mysterious, worthy of attention and concentration, and meaningful to the warp and woof of human existence.

Interviews and board minutes point to a time in late January or early February of 1987 that the planning committee decided that if they were serious about opening the school, they needed to identify and visit established independent schools to research what those schools were about and how they had begun and continued as schools. All of the

visits seem to have been completed prior to the formalized meetings on consolidating the school philosophy. Prior to March 29th the planning committee had identified and visited several well-established child centered schools in North Carolina. By the time of the March meeting, they had collected school philosophy statements and documents from the schools they visited. It is not clear whether they used the statements before they began to brainstorm or after but no more mention is made of visits in the minutes or agendas after the April meeting. The first item on the March 29 meeting agenda was “report on school visits since our last meeting on March 6th (Duke, Emerson/Waldorf, Friends and Rainbow Mountain.)” Finding these schools had been, primarily, a matter of consulting friends in the education community in the Boone area. Friends and colleagues suggested the schools they chose to visit as models for success and academic excellence. “The school of education at ASU always had the most helpful people, and so did Eric and Carole Hatch. We had a lot of people willing to name (schools) for us and we all had friends telling us which schools to visit in the state of Carolina” (Ann Norwood, 2004).

Dr. Norwood mentioned in her interview that the independent school model that was foremost in her mind greatly influenced the schools they visited.

00:20:18 We began at the top, the Duke School for Children, I called up and told them what it was about, and that we were hoping to come to visit and that we didn't have any idea whether we could do this and whatever.... I'll never forget that interview... we walked in the door and immediately fell in love with the place, she (Suzanne) was ready to move to Chapel Hill and Durham just to have her kids go to school there. I recognized it immediately, I had gone to a small independent school

myself ... the spirit of the place and a lot, lot of things... the way the whole space looked. So, they were marvelous people who wanted to share curriculum, the director walked us around and we stayed a long time... they were just so open and sharing all sorts of things. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

The Duke School for Children had been open approximately 20 years and became the primary model for the planning group. Janet Clement, the director, and Margaret Wilson, curriculum developer, at the Duke school provided much needed advice, documentation and help, especially during the first years of Mountain Pathways existence. The curriculum person for the Duke school visited Boone to work with the teachers a few times during their first three years. Ann Norwood noted that one statement the director made, with emphasis, was during their first visit to the Duke School:

00:21:20 The director's last comment to me has always echoed with me. As we were leaving, she looked me straight in the eye and I said, 'do you think we can do this?' She said, 'Of course you can, almost any group of caring people (something like that) can start a school.' And then she put on this big smile and she said, 'the challenge is keeping a school alive.' At that point of course, very naively, I had no idea what she was saying but she was saying it with such emphasis you know, it kind of stuck, we even talked about it in the car on the way home. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

While the Duke School for Children was the first school they visited and had the most influence on their plans, other schools they visited included the Emerson Waldorf

School in Chapel Hill (est. 1984), the Carolina Friends School locations in Durham and Chapel Hill (est. 1963), and Rainbow Mountain Children's School in Asheville (est. 1977). As they visited schools, foremost in their minds was the curriculum and supporting philosophy of each school, and how they fit into the communities they served:

00:22:29 We visited the Friends schools, both the upper and the lower school, and they were kind of, of a style, curriculum and atmosphere that we were very impressed with... they gave us more thoughts. We went to the Waldorf school, and although it was a beautiful school we knew we were not strict enough in our attitudes ... we liked some of what they had to say and lots of what they did but it didn't fit us and then we went to a school that was called an alternative school in Asheville. We didn't pick a lot of schools, we went and spent quite a bit of time at, the ones that had been recommended to us. We went to a school in Asheville that actually, partly a Sufi community and others in the community had kept going for quite a long time and ... There were a lot of educators connected to that and it probably had in a large scale, a determinedly alternative parent group and others. They were very solid educationally but they were more unusual perhaps... they were using a mixture of Waldorf, Montessori and more like the child-centered styles, different points of view. Now they had been going a long time but they had quite a bit of money behind them, they had very wealthy financial backers that helped start it. We liked it, when we were there the different activities the children were doing... Nothing was an exact model but the educational level of the Duke School

and my own experiences with independent schools... *that* began to turn us on. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

Ann, Peck and Carol and Esther all mentioned that early in the process there were brief discussions of the Montessori and Waldorf models as well as a possible affiliation with the Catholic Church (all of the founding members attended St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church). The Montessori and Waldorf schools seemed too structured for some and, in some ways, according to Esther, too unstructured for other learning styles they wanted to address:

00:59:45 [On philosophy] We were concerned for some children's need for more structure than that. We felt that we needed to be open to all different types of learning styles and we were concerned that if we put a Montessori stamp on it that it would have too much of an open feel. I know that sounds silly but we did have some learning styles represented that really needed a different kind of styles than what we saw typically in a Montessori situation. So, I know that Montessori has come a long way too though, I see the growth of that, so I'm excited that Mountain Pathways has gone that way. And... we did think of affiliating with the Catholic school at one time but we didn't want all those rules. We knew that it was possible to give that kind of education, the strong academics [of parochial schools] if we weren't too open. I think we came up with the right thing at the time. We had many alternatives, and that was part of the discussion about the title [Mountain Pathways] there's not just one way to do things

right. Each child is an individual and they need a combination of those right ways. (Esther Kelly, 2004)

In addition to being perceived as limiting, the Montessori and Waldorf methods also involved more extensive and expensive training than they could hope to accomplish on their time schedule. The cost both financially and in terms of available time for training also seemed unattainable in the first year, and, as Suzanne Garner recalled, Carol Rapp's teaching style was already in line with the Montessori philosophy of putting the child first:

00:17:45 I think Carol was kind of doing Montessori, we weren't really calling it that early on I mean she just was a natural, and I guess some of the other teachers we attracted to MPS were sort of schooled in the more traditional methods. (Suzanne Clark, 2004)

Affiliation with the church was not a direction Suzanne, Carol or Ann wanted to pursue. The reason for that choice was not provided in the interviews though the desire to be more independent than that choice would have allowed was apparent. It was the focus on developmental, child-centered education in the liberal arts environment of an independent school that most matched what the founders were seeking. In addition, with Carol Rapp on board as lead teacher and Ann as director, they knew they already had a base of experience with which to create developmentally appropriate, child-centered curricula:

00:22:55 I also was asked point blank about philosophy; I said if I were forced to pick one, I would pick Montessori. There was no doubt in my mind. At Nova we even used a lot of the Montessori things. We couldn't call ourselves a Montessori school because we weren't doing it

exactly the Montessori way but we had a lot of their materials. And they even used the Montessori materials into the higher grades... So, I said to everyone there, that if they were expecting me to help determine a philosophy, I would use Montessori as the basic philosophy because her whole philosophy was, the child first, and the child was an absorbent sponge, and that sort of thing, set the environment for them, and try to be a step ahead of the child so that in discipline, you try to deal with the things that might come up ahead of time so that it doesn't become a problem. But I felt that there were so many other things out there that wouldn't necessarily fall into a typical Montessori program that my choice would be not to limit ourselves to Montessori. Esther Kelly was also an elementary teacher and she agreed, and Peck said 'whatever you're doing with my daughter is working, so let's keep it up.' And the Hatches seemed to agree as well, so that's how we got where we started. (Carol Rapp, 2004)

Having agreed on a curricular philosophy, they began their visits knowing the general direction in which they wanted to go for a child centered school, but needing examples and guidance to get there. As Ann Norwood noted, the Duke School had been first on their list to visit and it remained a model for them for the first few years as they began the process of becoming a school.

The influence the Duke School for Children on the development of the new school is illustrated by the similarities between the educational philosophy of the Duke School for Children and the final version of the Mountain Pathways purpose statement and philosophy for the 1987-1988 school year:

The purpose of the Duke School for Children is to provide education of the highest quality for children of all racial, cultural, religious and economic backgrounds based on a child-centered philosophy that is committed to teaching children in the ways they learn best. Our approach emerges from well-accepted research in child development and learning. It is also our purpose to participate in the public debate on improvement in child education and to share knowledge and skills with the broadest possible constituency.

Over the course of their preschool and elementary years at the Duke school our students will be encouraged to develop:

- an eagerness to learn and explore, and an appreciation for the variety and wonder of our world
- confidence in their own ability to learn and to express their ideas
- respect for themselves and for others, and for individual differences among people
- self-motivation, self-reliance and the ability to complete and critically evaluate tasks or projects
- an ability to do logical problem-solving, both as an individual and as a member of a group
- a command of skills and knowledge - academic, physical, social and artistic -that are needed to express themselves and to expand exploration of and understanding of our world
- an inquiring, creative and critical mind

The following purpose and statement of philosophy for Mountain Pathways school is taken from the invitation to a public informational forum held on Sunday, May 17, 1987:

School should be a place where the child is able to feel a sense of well-being while experiencing the joy and excitement of learning. The goal of such an educational atmosphere is to foster self-reliant, self-disciplined children who develop a lifelong love of learning. The school and the child's family should share common goals and experience a high degree of contact with one another, Mountain Pathways will rely heavily on family interaction and involvement.

1- In our school we intend to establish an atmosphere of cooperation where individual freedom is balanced with recognition of the rights of others. Discipline problems or other conflicts will be solved via compromise and reason. Discipline issues will be solved without the use of corporal punishment.

2- Our curriculum will develop the essential skills of written and oral expression, mathematics, and reading needed by each child to understand and contribute to our world. Curriculum goals will make use of, but will not be limited by, North Carolina State guidelines. Within a planned structure there will be room for spontaneity and joy in learning endeavors as the children develop at their own pace and in their unique ways.

3- We expect to cooperate with the public schools in giving and receiving academic records with the parents' permission. Solid curriculum planning will insure a smooth transition should a student leave Mountain Pathways to attend another school.

While they were visiting other schools and settling on a philosophy, they thought about identifying families who might be interested in joining them, searched for name for the school and began in earnest to find it a home. In the first newsletter published by Peck Garner after the March 29th meeting, the intense activity by the group is illustrated in their list of future meetings and notes about the policy statements; the school naming session from March 29 is also addressed:

Mark your calendars! The next meetings are as follows:

April 12--Peck's office--Ann will have draft of policy statement

April 26--Peck's office--? printed brochure

May 3-- building secured (he he...just a joke)--Peck's office

May 17--meeting at SHERATON with parents (no joke)

We should all be thinking about quotations to be included in an informational brochure.....especially one that might be tied to a name for the school. Next, the policy statement was addressed. Everyone pointed out what they felt was most important about their draft. Ann will try to condense this into something that might be printable. We will discuss this next meeting. The greatest amount of time was spent discussing a strong policy on nonviolent conflict resolution. Next on the agenda was the selection of a name. Mountain School for children was the most frequent, possibly because it is the obvious choice, not the best. Paceset achieved immediate notoriety because of its origin (first letters of our names) [Peck, Ann, Carole, Esther, Suzanne, Eric, Tom]. Pathways or Mountain Pathways was also a popular choice. School of a Different Colour didn't

make the final cut (actually it didn't make the first cut) so this will be the last issue of the newsletter with our old familiar title... Again, Ann will come to the rescue by compiling the list that DID make the final cut. We will make the final selection hopefully when all the board members are present. (Peck Garner, 2004)

The name of the school came from several brainstorming sessions and appears to have been a marriage of two of the suggested names, *Pathways a School for Children* and *The Mountain School for Children*. Once they had a name, Al Rapp designed a logo. Its significance was tied to their philosophy of learning: "the mountains, that is where we are, pathways because we all take our own path to knowledge" (Carol Rapp, 2004):

00:28:56 We had talked about it and the pathways idea (for the name), had to do with the individual children having a little more range to learn and create and once the mountain came in [once *mountain* was added to the name], one day he came in with a little logo that had a stylized mountain and paths with kids on it and then the underline and the name, it kind of cheered us up because it had a form, we all kind of laughed because it did capture what we were all trying to do in our inimitable wordy ways. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

The metaphor fit well with their thinking about learning and even seems to have become part of the way the children in the school thought about their school:

"I am not a first grader because at Mt. Pathways School there is more than one path to learning and we can all take the pathway that is

right for us.” Quotation from a six year old student at Mt. Pathways School (circa 1989-90- published on a school brochure).

All of the founders remembered the constant activity that spring when they were alternately exhilarated and exhausted. Ann Norwood had this to say about the time:

00:30:03 So we had that [the name and the logo], and the somewhat distant hope of something, I mean we were still somewhat talking three kids and a basement! We had no building, we had no base, we were thinking of the greater Boone area. We also alternated between thinking ‘wow we can do this and what do we need to do if we do it’ and then there were days when I remember thinking we had rocks in our heads. But someplace, in that period of time, we began to think of ourselves as trying to do this...we decided we needed to introduce the school to the public, and that was the famous May meeting in Broyhill [Inn and Conference center on the campus of Appalachian State University]... it was advertised in the local paper and I think at ASU and we mailed out 60 or 70 post cards (we all brought lists of friends to send them too). We presented our school to the public... at the time of the opening meeting we had lots of ideas, we were able to describe it, sort of like in values and format, we were able to introduce ourselves. We had no building and didn’t exactly have a staff (Carol was still working to finish her contract) but we were interested in finding some children and families that might be willing to be part of the first year....I was scared to death, this was something we wanted to do well....but as soon as we settled into

the meeting it was such a delight, as soon as you began meeting parents who cared about kids, a lot of things fell away. And their questions helped us realize what we maybe hadn't thought of or maybe had. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

In an article published in the Watauga Democrat May 20, 1987, Nan Chase reported: "About 20 parents and a half a dozen children attended Sunday's meeting at the Broyhill Continuing Education Center. A second meeting there at 2p.m. June 7 will address more questions of parents who are interested in enrollment for their children." The article also corroborated reports that the school had been in "planning stages since January when a small group of parents banded together to found a school that would provide quality education in an atmosphere that nurtures children's independence and capacity for self discipline." After the famous Broyhill event (as they called it), the group activity became even more intense during the rest of May, June, July and August.

Ann began a series of visits all over the greater Boone area to interview families who had expressed an interest in joining their efforts. Several of the families who attended the meeting at the Broyhill Inn and Conference Center had children who attended the first year. Some who expressed an interest had children too young to attend until the second year but she visited every family who called.

Finding a home base was somewhat more difficult. At first, when they were thinking only of serving their own children and perhaps a small number more, the Kelly's basement was on the short list for creating the school space but when the numbers of interested families grew after they held that first informational meeting and continued advertising, the founders soon realized there would be a need to rent or purchase a school

building. They looked at many rental properties but were unable to find a building that could be retrofitted to meet their needs, and the state requirements for a school building:

00:16:00 We also started looking for a place, and we involved the Sardinians, the Webers, Dylan Wrights' father (an attorney) and as we talked about it and as we got more serious. Fortunately [we had] Ann and Eric and Peck, (Peck is a great secretary he just keeps track of things, and a scientist also)... then Tom (my husband) is a financial wizard, he took the responsibility for running all the numbers of the financial. He actually got a real estate license to help with that. He worked with Keith Weber there was a lot of running and looking at property and we were so excited when we found the right place and then we spent a summer of painting and organizing and working on curriculum. (Esther Kelly, 2004)

The realtors, Keith Weber and Jimmy Hodges (named as an "unsung hero" by Ann due to his commitment), also showed them some properties for purchase. Most of the rental properties were "pretty ratty, because well, we were poor" (Norwood, 2004 00:36:30). Things were "looking bleak" until one day Hodges called and told Ann that he thought he had found just the right spot, a building that was fairly new and had originally been erected as a church. The church group had been unable to continue funding and it had reverted to bank ownership:

00:37:00 So he took us out to the building, and we all just stood there in the parking lot, I can remember my heart... I remember thinking 'this is it,' I mean the setting was beautiful, we walked through; it just had the sanctuary a couple of bathrooms, a couple of offices, it was bare

bones, nicely situated, lots of land, and the creek, we all fell in love with the creek. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

The building had gone back to the bank, and being an unusual building (fully open in the middle with a small office and bathrooms) it was not an easy sell for the bank. Mr. Hodges explained that with a 10-20 thousand dollar down payment they could have an easily-met mortgage. The next step was to “go back and think about it with the business-minded people” (Norwood, 2004 00:37:45). Ann then went on to relate that one afternoon when returning home after a visit to a potential family, she came to the conclusion that they really needed to try to buy the building for their school. She decided to use some of the money from her retirement fund for a down payment:

00:40:34 Peck Garner and Tom Kelly, especially, had always been trying to protect us, keep the finances right and I don't know, just driving along coming back from something, I thought, you know, we need this building. I can take some money out of my retirement funds and make it.... I couldn't afford to give it to them I wish I could have, but we could make it a loan for the down payment, we can do this.... I remember thinking 'gosh, you are so involved in this, you're not going to be able to move out too quickly!' ... So Tom and Peck really got into the issue about protecting me, but the more we thought about it in a practical sense, what was the worst that would happen -- this was the way we made decisions -- the worst that would happen, we wouldn't make it, the building had value, they pay off the mortgage and still pay me the way land in that area was going. They wanted the risk to be minimal to me. They knew it was

coming out of my retirement, but we got to it and we thought, no this was a good decision, I mean it made sense and it gave us, when we were talking to people a place to visit. A place for kids to see and families to visit.... Anyway, once we decided we drew up the loan that it would be repaid to me, we drew it up initially as a no interest loan. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

During the search for and purchase of the building, others on the planning committee were busy with fundraising and finding materials for the new school. Once the building was purchased, they had a place for families to visit them as they began the task of retrofitting the space to make it into a school. It was here that Carol Rapp's husband Al was able to provide invaluable assistance beyond his experience in education. Al was, at the time, the chair of the Industrial Technology department at ASU. According to Peck Garner, without his expertise in building, building codes, coupled with his skill as a teacher (to show the rest how to use tools, build steps, etc.), the task would have been much more daunting:

00:90:30 Al to start with kind of, you know, built the whole thing.

We had work parties and Al, I think he was head of the technology department at ASU, came over and of course he's the typical instructor so, it was like little classrooms on how to build stairs. Those stairs at the front of the school Al Rapp built. He had it all done out on a CAD drawing... so Al did an incredible amount of work. We would go over and work, we would hammer and saw and drill and all that kind of stuff. We used to take the kids with us and I can remember Joe, I don't remember how old Joe

was, he would have been 3. Somewhere I have a picture Joe drew of Al. Of course it is a 3-year-old scribble but you can tell it is Al, he had his little Van Dyke beard.... (Peck Garner, 2004)

The group pulled together to do most of the construction needed for the school under Al's guidance. Getting the school ready from the time of purchase in June to the opening date in September that same year took many hours of labor. At the same time they were interviewing families, searching for a second teacher, collecting materials for teaching, and for a small library, and were still continuing to refine their curriculum:

0:43:12 We set the date to open, more typical of New England, after Labor Day. We needed July and August and we used it, non-stop. There were Peck and Al Rapp with saw horses and Eric would come out. Now Peck is not a carpenter, He's got one baby strapped to his back and Al is trying to help them make cubbies and teach them what to do. We're trying to get the space inside put together so that there is a space for older kids and one for younger kids. Carol Rapp was just a genius a that, she and Esther Kelly and Suzanne. We all had a lot to do and we had many meals out there. Friends, people, just pitched in and helped, they were people who just liked the idea of what was happening and the school just enchanted people, the setting, the creek, everything. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

With a home base, the planning meetings now took place at the school. Eric Hatch remembers sitting at the picnic table into the night talking about their philosophies, and just coming together as a community:

00:03:14 We would go out and sit, in what I call the backyard of Mountain Pathways at night and build a fire and philosophize together.

(Eric Hatch, 2004)

The first year they had 10 children from kindergarten age from 5 1/2 to 10 1/2 (Mountain Pathways School October 27, 1987 newsletter), two teachers, Carol Rapp and Carol Clark, (an ASU graduate with 2 years teaching experience) and Ann as the director. They wanted to make a commitment to keeping the cost down for families even in the first year by applying for grants and private monies to help fund the operation of the school and teacher salaries:

00:34:44 We didn't have any money. I mean the fact that Ann Norwood put all of her money and then some into it repeatedly... because we [the group] didn't have money to pay for tuition even. The tuition was a whole, huge, thing about who could afford what and how much we could afford to give for scholarships, if we could do that, and what you would have to do to earn a scholarship it was just an awesome work of art.

(Esther Kelly, 2004)

The first year, tuition was \$1500 per year and families could use one of two payment plans. Plan A consisted of two options, full payment by early September or half year payments each semester; Plan B allowed payments to be broken into two \$350 payments per semester (Mountain Pathways, July 26, 1987 Newsletter and Information Packet). Ann Norwood had agreed to take the position of director salary-free for three years since there was no feasible way the school could pay a director those first few years.

00:39:15 Well one of the things that happened all along, was, when I said yes to kind of move into this director role, I knew that we could never create a school that could pay an administrative salary in the first few years. We just knew it, we knew from what everybody said [other schools] that money was going to be a big thing, so we decided and I told them I was willing, that we would put what monies we had into staff salaries, you know, teaching salaries. That was crucial, and that I could give them three years, it was the most I could give them. I had to go back to work after that. Since I did have some retirement monies and I had always worked in education this was a kind of a transition [between education and private clinical practice]. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

Ann, as leader for the small school, had a demeanor that welcomed all. Her ability to work with parents, board members, teachers and students, helping individuals from each group to come together under a common vision gave the new school a balance and focus that helped it both survive that first year and gave it a foundation of cooperation for the sake of the children, one that is still in place today:

00:18:46 It was mostly Ann Norwood's sheer love, I mean it was her baby. She nurtured it in every way and we just kind of midwifed it with her but she was the mother in my point of view. We tried to be there with her and help clean the toilets and paint the walls and gather the books and make the library and all those kinds of things but Ann lived it. She carried it with her day and night and she just made it happen... I don't think anyone [of the founders] ever made a selfish decision and most

people were totally selfless and I can say that for sure with Ann. Just watching her was such an example. It is just unbelievable what she was able to do. (Esther Kelly, 2004)

After the school opened, the next 4 years were characterized by continued growth and community interest in the fledgling school. After the school opened, the board spent the first year applying for grants and building personal and community bonds that would allow them to continue financially. They continued to meet monthly and sometimes bi-monthly, further establishing committees that had naturally evolved into organizational units. The September 20th 1987 board meeting minutes listed “tentative assignments to organizational committees.” The committees were still, at this point, primarily staffed by the founders but movement to incorporate new members and parents can be seen:

Admissions (Eric and Ann), Curriculum, Communications (Suzanne, Ann, 1 or 2 new parents, Peck), Finance (Tom, Peck, Ann, -fundraising dimension adds Richard Stevens), Physical plant (Esther, Al, Ann, perhaps Warner or new parent Erin), and the Executive Committee (considered to be made up of the four officers of the corporation). The minutes also noted: “There was agreement that the time had come for more formal structure of committees. People volunteered for committee assignments. Other questions about procedures and areas of responsibility reporting to the board, were put off until the meeting of October 4th” (Notes from the meeting of the Board of Directors on 9/20/1987). During the October 4th meeting, by-laws were presented and agreed upon and Tom Kelly was reported to be working on tax-exempt status for the school. By this time in the fall, other areas were in need of attention as well, such as remodeling the bathroom for

handicapped access, developing plans to find ways to secure leftover building materials and securing donations of building materials from local supply companies.

Their commitment to relying on community resources for educational purposes as well was apparent in other fall and spring newsletters and board minutes. A newspaper article from the first year shows students meeting with Judy Hunt, a state representative from the county, when they studied the bi-centennial of the constitution. They spent a month studying the Grandfather Mountain viaduct through math, science, language arts and social studies, then met with naturalist Eddie Clark and experienced their parents as teachers who presented specialized knowledge in Astronomy, Language Arts, Visual and Dramatic Arts and Social Studies. The school continued to work on strengthening the curriculum working with professors in the Appalachian State University College of Education (those named included Gary Moorman, Alice Naylor and Connie Greene):

00:25:58 All year long it was how are we going to solve... from the plumbing to the higher needs of all of these special children. To what will become of this [school] when these children grow up? It was not just for them we wanted to see the big picture of what it is now. We never could have imagined it but we hoped for it. (Esther Kelly, 2004)

The second year the school had more than doubled in attendance to 25 children and they added a third teaching position Carol Clark was replaced by Nancy Nichols, and they hired Kathy Moorman to teach the youngest children:

00:46:52 The first year we had 10 children, the second we doubled up to 25 because we also at that point added Kathy Moorman who was clearly established as the early childhood, younger children person. We

added another teacher, the first year young Carol who was inexperienced, trained in special ed, worked as hard as she could but,... because of the school's needs and what she was able to do at that point didn't match. She loved the school though; she came back at the 10th anniversary and said that she learned a lot about teaching from all the work at Mountain Pathways and from Carol Rapp. So the second year we not only had Kathy Moorman but Nancy [Nichols], a teacher very flexible very experienced, you could have called her an alternative teacher I mean in the sense that she had been in public schools but also other settings. She had MS [multiple sclerosis] however, and she drove all the way from Banner Elk bringing the Banner Elk kids with her. So we had a handicapped teacher the second year and the students learned she could do many things but not others. So the first two years of staffing changed and by year three we were at 40 which I think was capacity and had a waiting list. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

Kathy Moorman was a certified public school teacher who had been working as the director for the Valle Crucis Day School and was hired to teach the youngest children. Kathy learned about Mountain Pathways through her friendship with Carol and Eric Hatch. She was initially opposed to teaching in a private school but after visiting the school and talking with some of the other founders, she not only started to teach there, she and her husband placed their two daughters in the school:

00:01:05 Carol Hatch and Eric Hatch are good friends of mine, and at the time, I was the director at Valle Crucis Day School and they knew I

had had experience with children, and that I had also taught in public schools, and they suggested me to Ann Norwood. Originally, I didn't think I wanted to be a part of a private school. But when I went out and I interviewed, and I saw what it was a beautiful piece of land it was on and, you know, got to talking to some of the people (I also knew the Garners) I agreed to teach there, or they offered me the job, and I agreed to do it. I was kind of ready to move on to a little bit older children, you know because I'd been working with 2-5 year olds, pre-kindergarten. (Kathy Moorman, 2004). Before I visited I just I thought 'I don't want to be a part of a private school, they're just too exclusive' and I didn't want to be part of a real exclusive situation. But, when I got to meet the people I felt, 'well, that's not what they're trying to do at all.' (Kathy Moorman, 2004)

With the hiring of new teachers who were not present during the planning and curriculum decisions of the first year it began to be apparent that, Carol Clark while inexperienced, would not be the last teacher to have some difficulty adjusting to the experimental environment. Kathy Moorman, Kathy Crutchfield and Diana Donovan (currently the senior teacher at Mountain Pathways) recalled the early years with fondness along with as memories of some confusion when it came to explaining an innovative curriculum to parents with different expectations. Kathy Moorman recalled a couple of frustrating experiences she had with parents:

00:03:27 I think their original idea was wonderful, but it was not organized enough. When I had parents that would come to thinking that

we were one kind of school and others thinking that we were another and it was frustrating trying to explain what we were doing. I had one parent come in who was horrified that I had the alphabet on the wall because she thought we were going to be more like a Waldorf school and she thought children shouldn't even be exposed to reading until they were 7 years old. Then I had parents of 4 year olds to ask me why I wasn't teaching, you know, formally teaching, them how to read. You know so it's kind between a rock and a hard place between explaining to the one parent, "Well, this is where you begin to introduce these ideas in fun ways" and other parents where I had to explain: at 4 and 5 years old, children are not developmentally ready to read. Some children are but those [children], you don't formally teach it to them, if they're ready they're just going to pick it up. So it was kind of frustrating not having a set curriculum the parents really understood. I think because they were trying to be so open to other ideas they pretty much described themselves as, 'anything you want is what we are' and that caused some problems [when parents brought their own interpretation to the philosophy].... While it was a wonderful atmosphere to teach in, there wasn't truly an organized curriculum, there was an idea of how they wanted children to be treated. All the teachers were supportive of each other. Most of the parents were very supportive. It was just occasionally we'd have someone who... we'd just have to explain, "well we're not a Waldorf school" or "we're not a Montessori" which they are now. I think that's the smartest thing that school ever did

was to adopt a curriculum where parents knew exactly what they were signing on for. Because I'm sure it was also frustrating to parents thinking it was one thing and not being sure. (Kathy Moorman, 2004)

Alternately, the teachers found the freedoms they had when providing rich experiences to the children were well worth the occasional confused parent. Kathy related her appreciation for the small school's flexibility:

00:08:36 We did have a lot of leeway for field trips and we had a lot of really exceptional people coming in to do activities with our school. Akal Dev Sharonne [a flutist who was an artist in residence at ASU that year] ... came and worked with our school I think for a week or two to help us put together a little play with music. Orville Hicks [local Appalachian folk tale expert] came and read stories and talked about making instruments. Poetry Alive, I think they're from Asheville but they do programs all over the country, came and they didn't just perform for our children, they actually worked with them and helped the children do some performances. One of the parents taught Tai Chi to the older children, the younger ones weren't involved, but he taught Tai Chi to the older children. So, we had a lot of leeway, bringing people in to do things. Eustace Conway spent a whole week there. He set up a teepee and taught different things to the different age levels. I remember my oldest daughter was totally grossed out when he was tanning hides. They really had some wonderful experiences there that public schools sometimes can't afford...The people that came seemed to really enjoy the atmosphere there

too. I remember Steve Dyche came over from the university, you know he's in Math and Science Center over there and he brought some equipment and all the children went out back and this was the whole school, went out back into our own little creek and did a creek study on whether or not we had healthy water based on the critters we collected.

(Kathy Moorman, 2004)

The school's philosophy and curriculum continued to grow and to be a source of debate through the first five years of operation. The philosophy was clear but broad enough so that they were able to revisit and refine the curriculum. To help indoctrinate new parents, teachers and board members minutes and parent letters from the early years list many forums and workshops with curriculum and philosophy as the featured topic. Ann Norwood was usually listed as the speaker when meeting with parents. Outside experts were brought in to work with the teachers and board members including the curriculum director for the Duke School for Children, and as several Appalachian State University professors (Gary Moorman, Lee Cross, Alice Naylor, and Connie Greene were among those listed). Dr. Cross conducted a workshop in the third year to determine guidelines for establishing curriculum and goals. Carole Hatch, Ann Norwood, Kathy Moorman, Carol Rapp and Nancy Nichols all participated in the sessions (from an attachment to the November 27, 1989 parent information letter).

In the second year the board expanded and in June of 1988 one of the agenda items was to discuss a "process for inviting new Board Members in July/August." During this year they also began to define ways to attract new families to the school to build policy, including personnel policy and to develop a 5 year business plan. They also

continued to strive towards their goal of having a school where parents were highly involved participants. Minutes from the June 29th meeting include a note that:

Ann wants a parent advisory board because she feels overburdened with the projects for the summer. She wants someone to communicate with the new parents concerning needs for the summer... Ann suggested it be composed of a cross-section of parents from children of the different grades. (Mountain Pathways School Board Minutes June 29, 1988)

Much of the content of the board minutes during the summer and fall of 1988 concerns continued fundraising, necessary renovations and additions for the already growing school, and the need for added volunteer personnel. In November a mention is made about accreditation for the school. The board felt it was a "possibility under our temporary guidelines and new policies" (Mountain Pathways School Board minutes, November 10, 1988). They held their first, formally recorded, Parents Forum on the "Educational Philosophy and Curriculum of Mountain Pathways." Parents were encouraged to "read over the materials previously sent home, in addition to two enclosed articles (not available in documentation)."

In the spring of 1989, as part of the continued research and development the board invited Robert Wiltshire, a consultant for non-profit organizations to spend time with them about fund raising. Mr. Wiltshire found that the school had made some good choices in its first two years and he was able to help them clarify goals for the following years. After their meeting with him, the board published a compilation of notes outlining their accomplishments and goals based on the retreat. In essence, they were able to identify and focus on plans for staff, curriculum and programming, finances, the student

body, and the facilities. Mr. Wiltshire also worked with them on Annual fundraising plans, something he considered crucial to a non profit organization (see Appendix D, Mountain Pathways School Planning Retreat, March 31-April 1, 1989).

As suggested by Mr. Wiltshire, at the beginning of the third school year, the Board of Directors published a report on the school's goals and financial status to inform parents and others interested in the school (Appendix E). Also, in the third year, Ann suggested that the school hold monthly parent forums in addition to the board meetings. The board began holding bi-yearly retreats to supplement its monthly meetings in order to solidify operating policies and to plan for the continued financing of the school.

Minutes from each September or October board meeting in those years include a director's report on the school opening for that year. The report in 1989 listed "38 students with one pending" (the number of teachers had grown to 4 with the addition of Martha Johnson as a teacher for the oldest group). That year the minutes also record Ann's suggestion for the parent forums:

Ann suggested that parents have a forum for making their wishes known, since they are our audience population. [The board] agreed in theory to include parents in discussions, but not decision-making.

Suggestion that we wait until November so new parents can acclimate.

This move towards more fully incorporating parents into the equation marked a step away from the small-group ownership of the school towards their vision of full parent involvement. Before joining the school, Kathy Crutchfield recalls her impressions from her first exposure to the school:

00:06:20 The philosophy as it was explained to me was that it was a sort of a child centered curriculum where children proceeded at their own pace and teachers were seen as much as facilitators as anything else. It was less structured than previous private schools and certainly than public school, but I was just impressed with the quality of the teachers [Carol Rapp, Nancy Nichols, Kathy Moorman] and I was also really impressed with the founders, Peck and Suzanne Garner, Ann Norwood, and Eric and Carole Hatch were the ones that I knew. And then the kids, I observed in the classroom and sat in and watched, and the kids seemed engaged and happy to be there. It is the only school I've known where the kids were upset if there was a snow day, they wanted to come to school. So that said a lot to me about the quality of the program. (Kathy Crutchfield, 2004)

The Crutchfields joined the school family in the second year and, at the end of the year, the board realized that there was a need for an assistant in the office area, someone to answer the phones and help Ann with her continually expanding responsibilities-- a need caused by Mountain Pathways' unexpected growth in the first few years (Kathy Crutchfield, 2004; March 1989 Board minutes; May 1989 Newsletter). The board approved a part-time position for Kathy, who would bring fresh grant-writing skills to the daily operations of the school. Her husband Brian had quickly been invited to join the board of directors in January that year.

The third year, the school grew to 36 children and 4 teachers. Later that year Ann Norwood took a leave of absence, during the winter months, due to some health difficulties she had been experiencing. In a letter to parents and friends her plans are outlined. Kathy Moorman was placed in charge of academic decisions as assistant director with Kathy Crutchfield continuing duties, by then as business director, with extended hours for secretarial work during the time she was away:

...Some of you may recall that I experienced some health problems last spring. During the summer I was able to regain my stamina. However, the school year has been quite demanding. Instead of just a winter vacation, I have requested a leave of absence for the winter months. I plan to be in warmer places than Boone for a few months and return in the spring.

In January it will be three years since we began our new school. It has always been my vision that school should be a collaborative effort of children, teachers, parents, and administrators. Wonderful families have taken part in our venture. Talented teachers have worked extremely hard. The sight of all those shining children's faces in the Boone parade was a bright reminder of the purpose and success of our work.

During my absence, Kathy Moorman will be Assistant Director. She and the Board of Directors will work together in decision-making and policies for the school. Kathy Crutchfield (K.C.) will continue to be Business Coordinator and extend her hours to function as a school

secretary to answer telephones and handle day-to-day chores. I will be checking in from time to time by telephone.

Mountain Pathways School is at a crucial juncture. We have established a good school. Becoming the best we can be will require generous amounts of time and energy on the part of parents and friends of the school. I know the Staff and Board can count on you.... (Ann Norwood, 1989)

There was more news, but it was not related to parents right away. Ann and the board of directors had been working since late in the previous year to define the director's role in anticipation of the end of her term as director. She had committed from the beginning to serving in that capacity for 3 years. She stayed on the board of directors as president in the 4th year and as an advisor after that for approximately twelve more years. Both Kathy Moorman and Kathy Crutchfield mentioned the difficulty of the transition time for the school:

I think losing that continuity was not good for the school. That was not necessarily a growth thing. I think when Ann came back it got a little better and then, you know since then, they've changed completely. (Kathy Moorman, 2004) [referring to the change in leadership roles and later curriculum changes at the school]

Susan Golden, a parent from the early years, had similar thoughts:

00:06:06... when Ann left it was a big gap and I don't think that was ever filled really. I think the people that were hired had some attributes but they didn't have the warmth and the charisma and it didn't

pervade the spirit of the school the way it did at the beginning. (Susan Golden, 2004)

Continuity in leadership is an important factor in the smooth operation of successful alternative schools (Raywid, 1994; Dunn, 1998). Ann's continued affiliation with the board of directors and the unified vision built during planning and the first few years by the founders, most of whom were also still on the board, eased the transition. The community of the school still experienced problems adjusting when she was no longer there each day, and the effect was compounded by the loss of Carol Rapp midway through the fifth year. In addition to the loss of the two founders, the school was having trouble keeping qualified teachers who fully understood the curriculum and were able to create individualize curricula each year:

00:04:28 I think the growth sort of surprised them in a way, and they really had to scramble to organize themselves to work in a more institutional manner. You know, it was sort of an anti-institutional school to start with so that was difficult. Then of course, there were teacher crises, teacher comes, teacher leaves in a month, upsetting the children.

(Susan Golden, 2004)

Carol Rapp began to be used more and more as a trainer and teacher resource after Ann left and when other teachers had to leave the school for one reason or another. She frequently was called on, along with other remaining teachers, to help teach the load of the absent teacher. Carol's dedication to giving each student an equitable experience plus the added duties of lead teacher and board member took their toll:

00:18:08 She was just a good teacher she was very perfectionistic about what she did. She was just a good teacher period. No child was ever left behind, she made sure that every child got whatever they needed and the attention they needed. If she got stretched between too many children she would die trying before she would ever not give every child what they needed. (Peck Garner, 2004)

The middle of the fifth year, (the second year following Ann's retirement) became Carol's last. She was having some health difficulties and, as Peck noted, did not want to give less than 100%:

1:14:48 When I left I really felt bad that I had to leave during the year but I was having health problems. I actually ended up having to choose between the pain and being there for the children the next day. I wanted to quit before people had to ask me to leave. And I'm sure that the pressure I was under wasn't helping either, you know anytime you have any kind of health problem being under pressure seems to add to it and you couldn't teach there without feeling under pressure at some point because it was so different. Anything that went wrong I sort of internalized. (Carol Rapp, 2004)

Without Ann's motivating presence in the daily operations of the school and, now, having lost Carol to help guide and acclimate new teachers, the board needed to provide a different stabilizing influence. Curriculum had always been something they worked to solidify and expand. They decided it was time to look at a central curriculum. According to Eric Reichard, a former board member and president, the school had now

been working with Dr. Nancy Wells on curriculum issues. Dr. Wells had her Master's degree in Montessori from Xavier College and had been guiding them to use more Montessori methods. They became more interested in the method as they realized that the school's philosophy was already in line with Montessori's philosophy. Dr. Wells introduced them to Cheryl Smith, who had also gone to Xavier, and was at the time, teaching in the college of education at Appalachian State as an adjunct instructor. Ms. Smith also happened to be a national officer for the American Montessori association. According to Mr. Reichard:

00:13:04 Everyone had just heard little snippets of it and no one knew what it really was. Cheryl came in and sort of beat it into our heads. It was such a fit. They were doing it but didn't know they were doing it in their alternative approach. It [the school's current practice] paralleled, in my mind, Montessori almost as though they had read Montessori and said "let's do it this way." As it turned out, no one knew anything about Montessori, it had just happened that what they wanted to accomplish and Montessori were very close. So, there was this curriculum already written, and its an established program. We just thought it would bring some legitimacy and that it would be easier on our teachers too. Instead of them having to develop all this new curriculum, they could have a manual and see how to do it. It would just give them a boost as far as planning and sort of backing up what they were trying to do because we weren't paying them anything [paying enough for them to teach and develop curriculum].

... that children learn at different times and at different paces, that was the big thing for me. If my daughter was ready to start reading at three you started at three, if she wasn't ready until seven you waited until then, so that was the big thing I think, it allowed the development that was appropriate for the child, not at 4 everybody should be doing this, at 5 everybody should be doing that. And it taught a love of learning, my daughter is in high school now and we could literally punish her by saying, 'you either straighten up or you don't do your homework.' I think that started there, they made it fun and going to school just made her day.

(Eric Reichard, 2004)

By the end of the fifth year, the teachers, parents, and board had agreed to make the switch from being an independent school to Montessori. The teachers that were there that year agreed to attend training during the summer and Cheryl Smith was hired as the director.

Martha Cuttler was on the Parent Advisory committee in the 1991-1992 school year. She recalled that some of the reasons they chose to investigate the Montessori curriculum were in the best interests of the school and the teachers:

00:05:45 The second year I was a parent representative was the year we voted to implement a Montessori curriculum [for the following year]. The teachers had expressed concern about having a coherent curriculum so that it wasn't just Carol Rapp doing her wonderful and experienced thing with her kids while someone else was doing something different. They wanted to support each other in the best possible way and

couldn't because it wasn't a planned curriculum... For me, the important thing about the school was having small classes, having someone pay attention to my kids and notice what was going on and to not have them shut down about learning. So for me the education was not about curriculum but it certainly made sense to have something set out that you could turn to for help and that you could say to people, 'this is what we do and there is lots written about it' and not just be us out there doing things on our own, so we had lots of discussions about it. We had extra board meetings, some half-day sessions where Cheryl talked to us about Montessori. It wasn't easy but we committed to it and we had a phased plan and that worked well. (Martha Cuttler, 2004)

Mary Willis was also on the curriculum advisory team and concurred with Ms. Cuttler's recollection that the decision was guided in part by the desires of the teachers:

00:03:12 Especially the older children's teachers were saying, 'we need a curriculum we're tired of being an alternative school - what does that mean?' And I remember Diana specifically saying 'I don't know how to teach multiplication, except to have them memorize multiplication facts, and we all know that memorization is not alternative, but what else is there? I can't just create these things out of the sky...' They were so frustrated that we went on this very lame and aimless search for curricula. Someone found Cheryl Smith... and somebody knew that she had Montessori training. She was willing to hold our hand through this process and one of the things that happened was that she did a presentation

specifically on how Montessori teaches multiplication and Diana burst into tears [of joy]... is what I remember. (Mary Willis, 2004)

Diana Donovan is now the senior teacher at Mountain Pathways, having been there since the end of the fifth year when she was hired to replace a teacher who had only stayed for a few months. She remembers:

00:02:45 I was hired [that year] as a teacher of the older children. It wasn't Montessori then, it was an alternative school. And the children that I started teaching had had several teachers before me and they were 2nd/3rd graders, so there was a high turnover of teachers. They were looking stable teachers that would stay with the organization. So I was hired with that purpose, but I quickly found out after a month that it was beyond me. Because even with my training we were re-inventing the wheel as we went and I think that's why the teachers were so burned out because it's supposed to be alternative but nobody was really clear on exactly what that was. We weren't supposed to use textbooks or the normal things that that I'd been trained in, and I thought I was creative enough make curriculum up, but folks got burned out so quickly. We had a woman on the board, at that time, Cheryl Smith, and she was Montessori trained, and suggested to the board that we look into a curriculum that was standard. So the board researched Montessori and researched Waldorf and they went with Montessori. So all the teachers that were presently teaching agreed to get trained that summer in Montessori. (Diana Donovan, 2004)

The change to Montessori was not out of line with the vision of the founders, having been one of the options considered in the first meetings of the planning days when Carol Rapp had declared to the group “if I were forced to pick one, I would pick Montessori.” The transition was not without its difficulties, both in terms of retraining parents and teachers about what a classroom looked like and financially. The transition was eased somewhat, according to Mary Willis, when the school had again a director with a vision who was able to bring them all together with a shared purpose:

00:04:55 Cheryl was hired as the director for more money than we had ever paid anyone to do anything and she had asked for a budget which was more money than we could imagine but apparently someone on the board came up with it. So over the summer the teachers all started training and the school paid for them but I really don't know where they got the money. I remember Cheryl telling us it would cost \$30,000.00 to outfit the 3-6 class alone, which we couldn't imagine. Then she had to recruit all of these new kids because it was going to be a 3-6 class not starting at 4 like we had before, so she beat the woodwork.

Cheryl was charismatic and killed herself trying to convince us how wonderful it was and did a good job, especially that first year. She had Martha McDermott come, who was one of her supervising teachers from Cincinnati. So here we had a nationally known Montessori consultant come for free because she loved Cheryl. Cheryl also had Eric Reichard come and take videotapes each week that were sent to Cincinnati to people who had been her mentors and they would critique them and

send the constructive criticism back to the teachers. The video tapes were great because we also had parent information sessions every month and Cheryl could show us what our children were doing and say, 'this is a great example of .. this' and of course we loved seeing our children on video tape. (Mary Willis, 2004)

Diana Donovan remembers the in school training phase of the training as difficult but rewarding:

00:03:00 It was a great year [but] it was really hard because Melissa and I were both in training and trying to incorporate it [the curriculum] and build our materials because Montessori is based on setting up the classroom so the children are free to go to each shop and do what they need to do. (Diana Donovan, 2004)

Mountain Pathways now had both the child-centered philosophy that originally brought families and educators together, and a curriculum that matched the philosophy but that could be applied consistently by teachers across different developmental levels. The decision to change to a Montessori philosophy and curriculum was appreciated by all those interviewed in this study. Suzanne Clark related:

00:16:16 We just felt that we needed something more tried and true that also fit with the philosophy but that also had a structure to the curriculum. It was for the good of all, certainly the children came first and it was such a good fit. It would behoove the entire operation to have every one on the same page so to speak. There needed to be consistency with the teachers and the progression of the students from one level to another. I

think the Montessori method provided that internal structure that was needed amongst the different groups. (Suzanne Clark, 2004)

Once the curriculum debate was solved, the board could focus more of its efforts on the one area critical to all small independent schools-- funding. Funding, always a concern, could threaten survival despite unity on all other fronts. Dunn (1998) and Mercogliano (1998) caution that funding beyond the initial years must be addressed for an alternative school to survive. Mercogliano further recommended that small independent schools have their own means of support beyond grants and private donations if they want to avoid being available only to middle and upper class children. Since part of the founding principles of the Mountain Pathways School was that they would be available to all financial strata when monies were available, finding a means of funding that would not disappear was crucial to that goal. Until the Mountain Pathways School board of directors opened their Thrift Shop in 1998, absence of a consistent funding source continued to threaten the school's survival and was a source of stress for the director, the board of directors and the parents. As Eric Reichard put it, "that is just the reality." Martha Cuttler related the difficulties they had in the years after 1990, just keeping afloat:

00:10:30 The other thing being involved with the school was fundraising. It was just really hard to keep the school afloat. We always had to worry even if we would have enough kids for tuition to open and pay the teacher the next year. Especially the first year or two [that her family was there]. I understand they are not in that position anymore and a

lot of that has to do with the thrift shop, which has been a wonderful thing.

(Martha Cuttler, 2004)

It was partly the concern about funding that led the school to apply for charter status the first year North Carolina offered the option to private schools in 1997-1998. The ensuing debate, once the school was accepted, was emotionally charged and divided the school community. After heated debate, the final decision was to remain independent of the state public school system. That chapter of the school's history and the resulting changes in board policy and funding approaches would make an interesting follow up study but is beyond the scope of this study. Two resulting changes that are of note are the resulting change in board meeting procedure from Robert's Rules of Order to a structured consensus model that promoted a return to a more democratic decision making process similar to the one used by the founders. The difference being a strict agenda with time limits for each topic; if consensus is not met in the time agreed upon it is tabled until the next meeting. Topics are extendable in a single meeting only by consensus. The second result was the donation of a building for use as a thrift shop. The thrift shop had been suggested as a source of fund raising by parents who disagreed with the charter school plan.

Eric Reichard stressed the importance of fundraising most aptly when, near the end of our interview, he made a point to discuss finances more directly:

00:51:09 As bad as it sounds, I would venture to say that without an influx of money it would have gone under many times. We would get to the point where we would have to say, we can't pay the teachers next month, what are we going to do? Someone would come up with an idea or

someone would come up with a check. It was probably a lot more like that in the beginning than it was later on, it became a lot more stable later on.

We had a few grants, we had the Z. Smith Reynolds and it seems as though we had another after that of a pretty good size. But most of it was individual contributions or our annual fund drives. Debbie Stevens started an auction that we would have over at the Quality Inn. It was a big event, the whole community came and that was the biggest fundraiser we had.

There were people, on a regular basis, who would just write a check, or agree to match funds. You know, the teachers could not have stayed if they did not get paid. That was just the reality of it, without those people we would not have made it, it was a burden and we [the board] tried to help with scholarships because we believed that that blend [of all walks of life] was important. We had some students who fell below the poverty line and all those funds were privately raised. (Eric Reichard, 2004)

When looking at the continued viability of the Mountain Pathways school, it is certain that the early planning and careful considerations about growth, funding, curriculum and philosophy play an important role in the school's success. The literature does not directly address it but throughout the study it was clear that bringing in people who were inclined to be emotionally attracted to the ideas and philosophy of the school was another crucial factor. Esther Kelly recalled that they discussed the importance of emotional and philosophical characteristics that were important for new parents and especially new board members to have:

01:05:20 It's deeper than just academics. We knew that anyone who was involved or who supported us had to have a vested interest, and it had to be an emotional interest. We wanted people to feel like they were family. (Esther Kelly, 2004)

The family connection seems to have been successfully passed on to the present. Ann Norwood visited the school in 2003 for the dedication of a new building in her name. Her happiest memory of that event involves driving up and seeing a future board parent hard at work:

00:43:03 I drove up to what was about to be the new building and there was an about to be president of the board of directors, a young professional, shoveling gravel to finish the pathway [between buildings]. It's still a working school, parents don't just pay money they have to give, time and heart and everything else. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

Interviews with board members, teachers and parents from the years between 1995 and 2004 show that the school community continues to hold the children at the center of its philosophy and that greater good, or mission as Esther Kelly described it, motivates and buoys the school community even in times of debate and uncertainty. In closing a final quote from Suzanne Clark captures that spirit:

00:30:10 I'm glad there are people carrying the torch. No matter how much conflict was within the board, in all the parents involved it didn't trickle down to the children. I give the teachers a lot of credit for that too. The children seemed to thrive, the adults may be falling out from battle but the children always seemed to thrive. (Suzanne Garner, 2004)

Chapter Five - Conclusion and Recommendations

The people who work in alternative schools and the families of children who attend them have voluntarily selected an alternative to traditional education. The decision to participate or to leave is completely up to them. Alternative schools that fail have in some way lost, or never had, the characteristics that were sought by their target population. Peterkin and Jackson stated that alternative schools are “designed to provide additional opportunities to those students who found traditional schools, both public and private, incompatible with their learning needs and social conditions” (p.128).

Mountain Pathways School has successfully operated in western North Carolina for 17 years and interest in the school has grown rather than diminished over the years. It is simplistic to believe that the continued success of the Mountain Pathways School is in some way due to sufficient and affluent families in the area who are interested in private education. It is also unlikely that in an area that boasts excellent public schools so many young families would choose to pay \$4600.00 in annual tuition unless there were more to the school than its alternative status. Financial assistance is provided through grants and not always available, although many of the students at the school receive some form of financial assistance.

Today, The Mountain Pathways School serves approximately 80 students. There are 9 teachers and 3 assistants in two buildings. The new middle school program that serves ages 12-15 is housed in the newly acquired and renovated Norwood House adjacent to the original building. The school’s financial situation has stabilized after the

addition of a thrift shop that funds operational expenses; two thirds of the school's income still comes from tuition with fundraisers and donations filling out the rest of the budget. Parents are asked to maintain the school grounds, raise considerable amounts of money, and spend markedly more time involved in the day-to-day operations of the school than at any public school. So, the question remains: why? What is it that motivates families year after year to work extra jobs and spend extensive amounts of time and energy to keep this school afloat for their children? As the quote at the beginning of this study noted:

No matter how ideal an educational model or system, it is always rooted in local conditions. (attributed to a humanistic educator [Journal of Humanistic Education]-- quote used by Ann Norwood at Norwood house opening, Nov. 2003)

This study has confirmed some assumptions in the literature and challenged others. This study of The Mountain Pathways School supports the assumption that small size promotes a sense of community, a commitment to common goals and philosophy, minimal bureaucracy, and greater responsiveness to student needs. The Mountain Pathways School operated in its original building for many years with a cap of 50 students. The Montessori focus requires that it continue to maintain a low student-to-teacher ratio. The commitment to high parental involvement in the operations of the school promotes a family like school community.

Dunn's (1998) research strongly supported the literature that called for a clearly communicated mission and philosophy. The schools she studied spent considerable time studying their philosophy of open education. At Moore's Creek

Elementary, in the first year of operation the principal was able to hold a national search for teachers whose training or personal teaching philosophy matched that of the school. The study of the early years of The Mountain Pathways School finds that there was not a clearly communicated mission and philosophy and, in fact, that teacher turnover was partially the result of having to constantly create curriculum.

Ann Norwood stated that when they began planning the school a “nice clear philosophy” is not what they had. Interviews with teachers and parents indicated confusion about the school’s curriculum philosophy during the first four years of operation. More critical to the success of this school was the group persona constructed in previous relationships at church, school, and in a Jung study group. These relationships gave the founding community a uniformity of vision, a particular set of relationships that included similar philosophical interests, and a desire to respect and instill a love of learning in their children. Close social and professional ties to the university community fostered extensive interest in the continued success of the school and provided ongoing support outside the core group.

During the first five years, the board, the parents, and the teachers all struggled to come to agreement on a curricular philosophy. The data collected for this study indicate that coming to an agreement was not always easy. They never disagreed, however, on a shared vision to create an environment that respected children as individuals and fostered a love of learning. The Mountain Pathways School survived and thrived in its first five years with a broadly based philosophy that was open to many interpretations. It was the unified vision and commitment to always reach a consensus despite some differences of opinion that kept the board working together for the greater good of the school:

00:17:20 We attempted to do everything by consensus early on. Eventually that led to chaotic board meetings but it didn't matter. I think it needed that kind of together, everybody invested, for a long time... In the early days it seemed very important that we not make any major steps without everybody being together. We had lots of fun at those things, we were people with lots of strong ideas and very apt to not give up too easily if they thought they had good ones. (Ann Norwood, 2004)

Esther Kelly's statements agreed. She related:

00:35:28 With all of our backgrounds, all the education and all the spreadsheets Tom [Kelly] could put out there, no one ever questioned that the best interests of the school and the best interests of the children were at the heart. So, even when mistakes were made or when a decision was made that was not the way I wanted it to go or the way Tom wanted to go or the way Suzanne wanted it to go... Even when we couldn't come to a consensus (which was not very often) we all would give it a try because we knew that whatever the decision, it was made with love and with the best educated attempt that we can make. (Esther Kelly, 2004)

The internal dynamics of this particular founding group kept the school going where other schools, founded by groups that were not as close or as willing to stay together despite differences of opinion, would fail.

The founders' initial mission for their school was based on a desire to provide small student-teacher ratios, an intrinsic reward system, respect for children and teachers, and a love of learning. They saw themselves as being "not contradictory to public, just a

choice with often smaller classes and maybe a little more high-powered types of offerings that, maybe, public schools couldn't do" (Ann Norwood, 2004). Their most consistently stated goal was to offer a school setting that was ungraded and non-graded. Students who were ready, for example, to read at the age of four were taught at the age of four, students who were not ready to read until the age of eight or nine were not pushed to read earlier or made to feel as though this was a deficit on their parts. Mary Willis recalled how a learning-disabled child was voted the smartest child in his class. She was touched by the fact that, despite his reading disability, he was never made to feel less of a person in any way, but was instead recognized for the bright, inquisitive child he was as a whole:

00:46:12 He always thought he was smart. One year, the third grade age, I don't know why, but they [the children] voted who they thought was the smartest kid in the class and he was voted the smartest.

(Mary Willis, 2004)

Her perception was that, had the child been in public school and not reading, in a graded curriculum, he would have been labeled before the age of 9 and would probably have had less self-esteem:

He couldn't read but that didn't matter, it wasn't what made you smart or not smart. And when he was ready he learned to read. It would have been a very different situation in public school. (Mary Willis, 2004)

All other research questions in this study addressed alternative school survival. How did the school adapt in order to become a survivor when many alternative schools closed their doors shortly after opening? Dunn's (1998) eight key elements for successful alternative schools provide a lens for viewing Mountain Pathways' success. In part

success was due to the decisions that were consistent with Dunn's key elements.

However, there were other factors that contributed more to the success of The Mountain Pathways School in the early years.

The literature on successful schools suggests that a process of careful planning and systematic development is necessary for survival. This study qualifies and alters that assumption. Some elements were carefully planned and systematically developed but others were haphazard.

The founders of Mountain Pathways School were committed to research and passed on that commitment to the board. Throughout the school's lifetime, they researched philosophy and curriculum. They made a point early on to foster positive relationships among people in the community who would support funding for the school. They promoted continual parental education and involvement in the school, emotionally as well as financially. Esther Kelly's remark that it all boiled down to intuition and cooperation, after all of the research and education, shows their willingness to be flexible even when they came up against conflicting research or opinions.

In the fall of each of the first five years, the board attempted to determine the numbers of students and teachers needed for the following year in order to adapt goals for fundraising campaigns and building materials and/or necessary renovations. After the third year, they opened a pre-school to accommodate future students rather than use their limited resources to expand into higher grades, where numbers dwindled as students aged out or returned to public schools for middle elementary education. Growth upwards was slow but not, as expected, systematic. The founders' original plan was to expand through the 8th grade after the second or third year. Funding and numbers of students affected

their decision, and after careful reflection and much debate they tentatively experimented with upper levels, pulling back when necessary. After 17 years the school has finally opened to middle school ages. It was able to commit to hire and train a middle school teacher, for the 2004-2005 school year, because there is now a core group of students who grew up with the Montessori model.

Among other elements considered necessary for the survival of an alternative school, planning for funding, providing an opportunity for school choice, and having strong leadership were all evidenced in this study of The Mountain Pathways School. The board of directors for The Mountain Pathways School began to address these aspects early. The retreat with Robert Wiltshire in the spring of the second year helped them to begin thinking in terms of annual fund drives and other self sustaining measures used by non-profit institutions, but it was the opening and continued operation of their Thrift Shop that has allowed the school to operate independently in the past six years since it opened in the 1998-1999 school year.

The literature suggests that schools are likely to be successful if they have leaders who can motivate teachers and students while actively promoting a curriculum that is grounded in the needs and backgrounds of the students. During the first three years of the school, Ann Norwood served as director. As one of the founders of the school, her understanding of the founding group's original purpose along with her extensive background in education and educational leadership allowed her to bring the school community together. Her easy demeanor with children, teachers, and parents also provided a sense of stability and assurance that the children's personal and educational needs were being met. After her retirement from the directorship, she remained on the

board of directors to provide guidance and a sense of continuity. The transition to Montessori was still difficult but with Ann's continued guidance and a strong commitment to the curriculum by the new director, the school found its footing and began to focus on the tasks necessary to grow beyond the first years.

Successful alternative schools studied by Dunn (1998) also showed that cooperative relationships among students, parents, faculty, community and administration are elements of success. This study supports those results. The planning for the school, prior to opening and continuing to the present day, involves committees that consist of board leaders with parent and teacher members. Forums for parent questions, concerns and suggestions were begun in the second year of operation. Board meetings are always open to the entire community. Operational elements of the school have always depended heavily on parent and wider community support. This is less obvious now than in the first years of the school when volunteering was not an option for school parents. Student and teacher evaluations involve goal-setting with each child, individualized reports for parents and future teachers (or schools).

Finally, the literature identified continuity in leadership as a critical characteristic in schools that are successful. Dunn (1998) noticed a decline in a school's ability to retain their identity and resist the pull towards traditional education when new leaders were unwilling or unable to continue the work that was begun before them. The Mountain Pathways history identifies planned continuity in leadership through board recruitment practices and continued involvement in the school by its founders in the first 10 years of operation.

Ann Norwood and the original founders remained on the board for many years, and Dr. Norwood maintained frequent contact with school directors through the 1990's. Board members were recruited from parents, area community leaders, and the university. Many future board members were brought in through social contacts as volunteers. Deliberate efforts were made to introduce them to the school's vision and to acclimate them to the school community. Board positions were carefully considered and were originally offered to those people who would be able to connect emotionally to the school family, according to Esther Kelly. All of the school directors were chosen from proven leaders who had a vested interest in the school after having children in the school, or as in the case of Cheryl Smith, strong credentials and a close bond with the school's vision and philosophy.

As the story of The Mountain Pathways School unfolded, the path taken by the founders of the school to provide a school of choice in the mountains of North Carolina took them through heated debates and joyful encounters. Much of the success of the school in the first years appears to have hinged more on the school community's unique makeup than on a common curricular philosophy. There were anchors that stabilized the way the founders worked together prior to their first formal planning session. Their work together in the Jungian study group had established ways of communicating with one another about theory and philosophy. Their ties to church and the university and public school community helped them network and preempted barriers that another group would have had to discover and then overcome. The founders were also very fortunate to have one of their group who was financially able to support their purchase of a building and setting that "people fell in love with" (Ann Norwood, 2004). In later years, their

commitment to educating themselves as well as the children allowed the board to recognize when they needed to migrate from an informal to a formalized curriculum that would further solidify the school community. Through it all, the unifying element was a mission, as Esther Kelly stated it:

00:55:44 To educate children and to help them fulfill their purposes in life, help them find a way to love themselves and to fulfill their purpose in life. I think that was our common connection; before people wrote mission statements and all that stuff, we had that connection. I think that's why it was a success, why we continued to be blessed, even through the growing pains. (Esther Kelly, 2004)

This study has identified a human element as key to the survival of this school which is not mentioned in other literature on alternative schools. The Mountain Pathways School did indeed share many of the characteristics purported to be common to successful alternative schools, but it was the leadership and connectedness of a uniquely qualified group whose shared values and backgrounds combined with ongoing support from the community that had more to do with their continuing success than having a clear mission and identifiable philosophy. According to Barnard (1938), these are all characteristics of an established organization: that if two or more people are communicating and working together cooperatively toward a common goal, you have an organization. The founders had, therefore, an existing organization which saved them months if not years of time in founding the school and is undoubtedly instrumental in sustaining it.

The founders of the Mountain Pathways School remain the best of friends to this day, keeping in contact through occasional letters and phone calls. Ann Norwood moved to Florida shortly after she retired from the school directorship, but kept in close contact with future directors and the board as an advisor until two or three years ago. She entered private practice as a family counselor. The Hatches left the school just before the board elected to become a Montessori school and are still living and working in the Boone area; their daughter, who was an infant when the school was founded, is now in college. Al and Carol Rapp and Peck Garner continue to be close friends. Carol provided supplementary schooling to the Garners' youngest son after school for several years. Suzanne Clark (Garner) now lives in Ashe County where she is in private practice. Tom Kelly's job made it necessary for them to move out of the area after the first year but, like the rest of the founders, they have kept in contact and remember the experience as one of the pivotal points in their lives.

During this study, I have compiled data based on over 17 hours of interviews with founders, board members and parents who were involved in the founding years of the Mountain Pathways School. In addition, historical documents were collected from several of the interviewees that verified much of the information collected orally and provided more information about the founding years of the school than could be remembered. The oral histories and the documentation were used in combination to answer the research questions and tell the story of The Mountain Pathways School. It is a characteristic of oral history that memories belong to the specific experiences of each person interviewed and can therefore not be assumed to be an objective account. This study has attempted to provide an accurate account of the events and experiences of the founding years by

triangulating the sources, comparing each person's memories to the documentation and by recounting the histories of those interviewed. All respondents were asked the same questions (Appendix A) except for the founders, for whom I prepared additional questions. Most of the questions were open-ended and interviewees were encouraged to expand on the questions as they interpreted them. Again, remembering that each person's experience is unique, their personal interpretation of the questions provided the study with events and details I would have been unaware of, or could have misinterpreted using the documentation alone, had I been more directive in my approach to questioning. The contents of those interviews cover more areas about the school and the community than was possible to review in the scope of this study and should be quite valuable in further explorations of the unique history of The Mountain Pathways School. I plan to donate the interviews and documents to the Appalachian Collection at the Belk Library at Appalachian State University. Copies of the documents will also be donated to The Mountain Pathways School to supplement their on-site history and to replace documents destroyed in a flood which occurred in 2003.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study covered only the first five years of the school's operation and only briefly addressed comments about the school's early Montessori experiences and their decision not to accept charter status after having it granted by the state. Several interviews went into some detail about the transition to Montessori and the resulting changes in the school's operation and would provide a foundation for further studies into the evolution of the school's success. Training and support for the teachers is an area that is rich with information for those interested in Montessori curriculum or how it was

implemented at the Mountain Pathways School. It would be of great interest to students of systems and organizations to study the way in which the school regrouped after losing most of its board and some parents after the most divisive debate in the school's history when they were engaged in the charter issue. The 17 year history of the school, from its beginnings to the present should hold many unexplored paths for future study. As the name, Mountain Pathways, was meant to imply, there are many paths to knowledge.

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Appendix A- Interview Questions

1. What was/is the nature of your involvement with the Mountain Pathways School? (i.e. parent, student, Teacher, directory, board member, etc.)
2. When did you first hear about the Mountain Pathways School? How did you hear about it?
3. What was your initial impression of the nature of the school (philosophy, mission, curriculum)?
 - a. Before you visited
 - b. After your first encounters
4. During your association with the school, what kinds of growth or change occurred, if any?
 - a. Were there any administrative or staff changes (director, board, teachers) that you noticed?
 - b. Were there changes in the curriculum or classroom practices?
5. What attracts (attracted) you to the Mountain Pathways School?
6. For parents – If your children no longer attend, why? (aged-out, moved, change in needs?)
7. Why do you think the school has succeeded?

Additional Questions for Founders

1. When and why did you first begin to think about opening your own school?
2. Was there a basic underlying philosophy or theoretical perspective that you built the school around?

3. What steps were involved in opening a school in less than a year? How did the group do it?

Appendix B- List of Articles

Partial List of Research, from the collection of Dr. Peck Garner

Schrum, J. (circa 1986). Schools sparing the rod? Paddling students is a last resort.

Watauga Democrat. Rivers Printing Co., Inc. Boone, North Carolina

Chase, N. (1987). Watauga couple experiment with teaching son at home. *Watauga*

Democrat. Rivers Printing Co., Inc. Boone, North Carolina

Eberle, N. (1987). Does home schooling pass the test? *Woman's Day*. 32-40. April 14, 1987.

Marshal, J. & Phelan, J. (1986). Management is a team sport: Managing a nonprofit organization in the eighties. *RAIN*. Fall/Winter, 13-17. Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland

McClury, S. (1986). Liabilities and responsibilities of nonprofit boards: What every nonprofit board member should know. *RAIN*. Fall/Winter, 19-20. Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

No author listed, journal name unavailable (stapled to RAIN articles):

1. Earth to board are we all clear?
2. Evaluating your board of directors.
3. Expanding your board of directors.
4. So, you want your board to raise money.
5. 29 ways for board members to raise \$500
6. Advisory boards: No miracle solution

Levy, M. R. & Hatch, E. J. (circa 1987). A holistic classroom model for humanistic education.

Miller, J. (1988). Why the holistic curriculum? *Holistic Education Review*. Summer. 9-20.

Foster, C. R. (1979). The school's influence and responsibility for the socialization of the young child. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*. Vol. 13, No. 1.

Kantrowitz, B. & Wingert, P. (1989). How kids learn. *Newsweek*. April 17. 50-57.

Sweeney, M. (1988). Alternative education and "alternative" schools: Why dropout schools aren't alternative. *Holistic Education Review*. Summer. 22-25.

Appendix C- Founders

From Mountain Pathways 1991-1992 Parent Handbook

Dr. Ann Norwood

Dr. Norwood earned her Doctorate in Social Education from Boston University in 1972 and Masters Degree at Boston College and Boston University. She is certified as a School Psychologist from Appalachian State University. Her teaching and counseling experience is extensive and includes 17 years in the public schools of New England, as well as work with college students, handicapped and special students and parent training workshops. she has maintained a private counseling practice for several years focusing on children, adolescents and parents. Dr, Norwood is a recipient of the American Psychological Association Award for Distinguished Teaching. She served as the Director of the school for the first three years of its operation.

Dr. Eric Hatch

Dr. Hatch earned his Doctorate in Education from Pennsylvania State University in 1973. He is currently a professor of Psychology at Appalachian State University and directs the graduate program in School Psychology. He has also been on the graduate faculties of Duquesne University and Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Hatch is both a licensed practicing psychologist and a state certified school psychologist. He also holds clinical memberships in the American Association of Marital and Family Therapists and is a member of the National Register in Psychology. His professional career began as junior high school teacher and he has helped train hundreds of school teachers and school psychologists. He has been consultant to over 20 public school systems in North Carolina

and specializes in parent education and affective skills in the classroom. The Hatches are the parents of three children.

Dr. Carole Hatch

Dr. Hatch earned her Ph.D. from Pennsylvania State University in 1983 in the area of Human Development and Family Studies. She is a licensed practicing psychologist, a clinical member of the American Association of Marital and Family Therapists, and is an adjunct professor in the Psychology Department at Appalachian State University. Dr. Hatch has done extensive work in parent consultation in both private practice and with public schools. She has worked with various special populations as well as with the academically gifted. As a developmental psychologist, she has extensive training and knowledge regarding the interaction of school curriculum with the emotional and developmental needs of children.

Dr. J. F. "Peck" Garner

Dr. Garner received his M.D. from the University of South Alabama in 1976. He is a practicing dermatologist and partner in the Boone Dermatology Clinic. Dr. Garner has been an active parent in the school, sharing his personal interests in astronomy, short wave radio and Native American culture with the children. He and his wife Suzanne were the driving force behind the founding of Mountain Pathways School. Their motivation arose out of love for their children and concern that they receive a high quality education in a caring, loving environment.

Suzanne Garner

Suzanne Garner graduated cum laude from the University of Tennessee in 1977 with a B. A. in Psychology. She is currently pursuing a graduate degree in health psychology [changed from school psychology by this date] at Appalachian State University. She is a member of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, the Association for Transpersonal Psychology and the North Carolina Psychological Association. She and Dr. Garner have four young children.

Carol A. Rapp

Mrs. Rapp is a master teacher with over 25 years of teaching experience. With a strong belief in hands-on, experiential learning and a great respect for the individuality of children, she was the first teacher hired to teach at Mountain Pathways. With a BS in Education from Kent State University, she is certified to teach kindergarten through ninth grade. she has worked at the Patterson School, Kinderhaus, Nova Experimental Elementary School in Florida, and 2 elementary schools in Ohio, among others. She founded Watauga County La Leche League, served as host family for foreign students and volunteered in Girl Scouts and many other community activities. Mrs. Rapp participates extensively in continuing education opportunities for teachers. Her recent coursework includes: Computers in Education, Middle School Curriculum Development, Newspapers in Education, NASA Workshop in Design and Problem Solving, Glaxo Elementary Mathematics Institute, Language Arts and Literacy Symposium, Glaxo Science and Math Leadership Institute, K-3 Hands-On Science, Soil and Water Conservation Workshop and Project Wild. Mrs. Rapp has taught at Mountain Pathways

each year since it's founding. Her teacher resources and student materials provided the basis of the educational resources the school has accumulated.

Tom Kelly

As the concerned parents of three children, the Kellys provided important guidance in small business operations and community contacts in the founding stages of the school.

Tom has a BA teaching degree in Junior High Social Studies. He is a member of the Professional Golf Association with the three-year master apprenticeship required by the PGA. He was the financial advisor for the founding group.

Esther Kelly

Esther Kelly has a BS degree in Elementary Education (k-9) with special certification in remedial reading. She assisted in areas of curriculum study for the school and shared her knowledge of small business operations.

Appendix D- March 31-April 1, 1989 Retreat Minutes

MOUNTAIN PATHWAYS SCHOOL
PLANNING RETREAT
March 31-April 1, 1989

The following is a compilation of notes taken at the retreat by facilitators and by Kathy Crutchfield. These notes will be mailed to the consultant Robert Wiltshire for use in his report and recommendations to the school. A copy will also be mailed to each board member for his/her files.

Present at the retreat on Friday evening were: Brian and Kathy Crutchfield, Suzanne and Peck Garner, Carole and Eric Hatch, Ann Norwood, Eric Reichard, Allen Sharp, Debbie and Richard Stevens, Rob and Holly Willis, Patty Green, and Robert Wiltshire.

Brian Crutchfield was the main facilitator on Friday. He led off with some general comments as to the process of planning.

Planning - a guide to implementing, evaluating and revising.

1. Seeing the "forest" - forecasting community needs.
2. Where do we fit into these needs - Mission Statement
3. Where are we going?

Mission Statement very important to guide the school into the future . . . to avoid too strong a link between personalities and the school identity . . . to serve as a beacon to staff and a clear statement to outsiders . . . preserve decision making power with the board. . . balance between hearing and responding to others, yet maintaining vision and ideals and standards.

Issues facing the school were brainstormed by those present with limited discussion on any one topic. Issues were separated into general areas which may be delegated to subcommittees for later specific actions. These areas and issues were as follows:

1. Staff
 - staff development
 - new staff recruitment
 - personnel policies and issues
 - administrative support staff
 - teacher evaluation
2. Program
 - Curriculum / program / activities
 - Physical education / recreation
 - evaluation / confirmation of goal reaching / (CRT)
 - celebrations
 - degree of parental involvement
 - university relationship

- public school relationship
- development of library
- resource materials
- integration of special areas
- accreditation
- health / sex / AIDS
- transitioning to public schools (students returning)

3. Finances

- Tuition
- Funding
- Target Audience
- Financial management
- scholarships / sliding scale
- fundraising
- materials / field trips fees
- after-school care
- food fees?
- transportation fees??

4. Student Body

- Student selection / admissions
- composition of students
- handicapped / MR issues
- racial balance
- legal obligations to serve certain populations?

5. Facilities

- Building / facilities
- building use policy
- school size (future)
- site
- liability / safety

Saturday morning

Ann began with a "State of the School" talk. She has received very positive feedback from private schools as well as public school officials about the quality and amount of progress we have made in so short a time.

We have already accomplished much of what needs to be done to qualify for accreditation - we just need to write it up and document it. We also need to "get our financial house in order".

We have succeeded in separating our identity from Anderly academy. Our transfers so far have done very well.. People have been impressed by who we have turned down. We have succeeded in conveying the idea that we are not a "clinic school".

New parents/students - new people coming every day . . . we have replaced our enrollment for next fall. People are now approaching us with a positive viewpoint, not fleeing from a negative. The strength of the community that has grown up around the school is very good and will continue to gain energy and grow.

Robert Wiltshire then began his process of working with us.

Mountain Pathways, as a private, independent, elementary day school has counterparts all over the U.S. This is an important resource for us to tap into and learn from the experience of others.

The mission of private schools has changed somewhat from the early 1900's from a strong emphasis on academics to prepare for admission to the "right" college to a blend of atmosphere and academics and a more wholistic approach to the child.

We identified that there seem to be three year cycles for Mountain Pathways. First was the start-up, visionary cycle beginning with the "kitchen table group". This cycle has been on the fast track and a lot of those plans are coming to fruition now. This includes Ann's initial commitment as interim director and guiding force.

The next cycle is a building phase and solidifying of financial base.

What we want from Robert -

- realistic look at budget needs and how fundraising can meet operating and capital needs (including tuition deficit and start-up debt repayment)
- concrete future plan
- teacher's salary issues
- timelines for plans with alternatives and budgets
- fundraising strategy for school in our area
- estimated results of fund raising

Through long discussions of fantasy visions of the school, the group arrived at two cycles of growth the school faces.

- I. 1-3 years , K-6, 40-50 students
maximizing this site
paving front lot
leasing playground space
adding modular unit to accommodate special activities
space and classroom space for older students
4 teachers
- II. 3-10 years, K-8, 80 students
different site - 5 to 10 acres
planning and evaluating for possible addition of high school
garden space, 2 playing fields, indoor gym and auditorium
LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

MONEY FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS FROM THESE SOURCES:

- endowment
- annual fund
- special events
- other generated income

Most operating funds from tuition. The balance of needed funds usually comes from the annual fund campaign.

Constituency for Annual Fund Giving

1. Parents
2. Alumni
3. Grandparents - extended family
4. Friends and neighbors
5. Local businesses

Robert diagrammed the pyramid of the fund. Top ten gifts need to be half of what you need.

Peer solicitation. People give to people with causes. It has to be a personal appeal. Knock on doors. Face to face.

Articulate your cause (our brochure is good). Make sure your people are trained to articulate your cause before you send them out to raise money.

Pledge card that talks about in-kind as well as cash contributions. (Pledge card in newsletter.)

Need chairperson for annual fund. Divisions: board member, parent, friend, business leader

Cause needs to be concretely related to program.

"We need to raise \$25,000. This will enable us to lease additional outdoor playground space. This will enable us to provide scholarships for some children. This will fund special arts activities."

Boards have to give. Each leader's personal donation has to come first. Send representatives to givers on their level of capacity.

The annual fund drive usually takes place in fall when high feelings about the start of school prevail. Make it clear to everyone that annual fund drives are an accepted, established part of private school funding all over the country. The chairman needs to be in place before end of this school year. Divisions need to be in place before

school opens. Initial contacts made before Thanksgiving.
Wind up before Christmas.

Thank yous should go out within 48 hours of receipt of gift.
The more personal a Thank you can be the more effective it is.

FOUR MAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER ABOUT ANNUAL FUND

1. HAVE TO HAVE IT
2. Get organized early
3. Go after big gifts first
4. Know your constituency.

Summary of grants applied for as "shots in the dark"

Janirve	\$25,000	capital
James Hanes	10,000	capital
John & Anna Hanes	10,000	capital
Babcock	2,000	general support
Reynolds	10,000	general support
Akzona	5,000	general support and capital

Need follow through on grants. Personal contact with decision makers. Debbie will follow up on some Janirve contacts.

Special edition of newsletter recognizing donors. Ways of doing this - listing gifts, donors in alphabetical order
Be sure to have donor approval.

Asking for money is not begging. It is presenting an investment opportunity you believe in. Where your help can make a real difference. You are putting your cause on the line to be supported or refused - not your "self".

Robert will be available for further specific information on fundraising training, techniques, planning.

THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE WORKSHOP GROUP TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

The school should go ahead with expansion - addition of modular building, paving of parking lot/playground, leasing of additional playground space on adjoining land and seeking other means of controlling dampness of our land.

We should pursue an annual fund campaign.

The workshop adjourned in order for a board meeting to be called.

Appendix E- Board of Director's Report of Goals and Objectives

Suzanne

Last March the Board of Directors of Mountain Pathways held participated in a weekend long workshop. The retreat was led by Robert Wiltshire, a consultant to private schools and non-profit organizations. We envisioned our goals for the future of the school and began to develop strategies to achieve these goals.

Small private schools traditionally have a high rate of failure within a few years. Today's conversations are just one step we are taking to build a long and sound future for Mountain Pathways.

The founders shared a special vision of education for children. Countless hours work and sleepless nights have led us to where we are today. Suzanne and Peck Garner, Eric and Carole Hatch and Ann Norwood have made their dream a reality and we have all benefitted by it.

The Board of Directors has begun to clarify goals and objectives to secure the fiscal and management side of running the school. Ann will lead an upcoming forum for discussion of educational philosophy and curriculum.

ADDITIONAL SPACE FOR SCHOOL

Rapid growth of school in first three years

- 1st year 10 students
- 2nd year 26 students
- 3rd year 39 students

Healthy trend, however to reach a level of income which meets expenses while keeping tuition relatively low, we need to increase enrollment.

The current facility is almost at maximum use now. We have been able to remodel it in useful ways to meet our changing needs.

A building committee has been working on investigating adding classroom/multi-use space. Major considerations are:

- * We own this site. It is relatively convenient, beautifully situated in a nice environmental area. To sell this site, buy more land and totally relocate to a new campus would involve MAJOR funds which simply don't appear to be available to us at this stage.
- * The building committee has therefore decided that for the foreseeable future the best option is to expand on our current site.
- * There is a limit on our septic system at this site of 60 people.
- * We would like to build a building approximately 1,0000 square feet, which could accommodate an additional 20 students. To be economically feasible, a new building would have to be built without incurring further de
- * Due to restrictions on building in the floodway and in the floodplain, the only area on our present site where we could place an additional building is in the front parking lot. Any new building would have to be elevated at least 4 feet.
- * We currently lease an adjoining 4 acres for playground space on a yearly basis. If the new building is built on the parking lot, there is a possibility that we could obtain a long term lease on at least some of the property to make parking lot improvements there. This parking lot would be of the type we now have, probably not paved, since that is very expensive.
- * The possibility of relocating the parking lot impacts upon the decision of an additional driveway. The new driveway will need to wait upon the decision of the building committee.
- * Buying the adjoining land to put a new building there is probably not feasible for several reasons: (1) the owner has placed a rather high price upon the land (2) the Health Department has stated that it is highly unlikely that septic tank permits would be issued for any of that property (3) we would still face flooding issues and restrictions upon building permits.

- * The lowest cost alternative for additional space appears to be a modular structure. Ann and the building committee have visited several modular classroom which were very nice. They are much nicer than a "house trailer". There are companies which specialize in constructing modular buildings for classroom use and are approved and licensed by the state.
- * We are obtaining estimates from Sunshine Structures and SpaceMasters on modular units. These estimates have been in the range of \$20,000 - \$35,000. Variables are still being discussed and options explored so that we do not have a definite written estimate from either of them yet.
- * Duke School for Children in Durham has a modular classroom which will be available for sale in June. It is very nice and they have been quite satisfied with it. We may be able to obtain it at a very reasonable price and have it relocated to our site. We are continuing to explore this possibility.
- * The building committee is now also ready to talk with local contractors concerning bids for local construction of the building.
- * The building committee has consulted with officials at ASU, the Tennessee Valley Authority and The East Tennessee Community Design Center regarding innovatively designed buildings and possible funding for such buildings. Energy efficiency and alternative technologies are being considered in the plans as an embodiment of school philosophies.
- * The building committee actively seeks any advice, comments, assistance or funds which any of you may have to offer!

MAJOR FINANCIAL GOALS FOR MOUNTAIN PATHWAYS

- * Provide a modest salary for the Director
- * Increase teacher salaries. Our current teacher salaries are \$11,000 per year. The starting salary in Watauga County for a teacher with no experience and a bachelor's degree is \$19,000. 3 of our four teachers have master's degrees and all are experienced. Salaries at other private schools we have visited usually start at \$15,000.
- * Addition of Classroom space
- * Meeting annual deficit
- * Begin re-payment of start-up loan
- * Develop long term plan for Annual Fundraising Campaign and annual fundraising events

EXPANDING ENROLLMENT

The Board of Directors feels that we need to expand enrollment (once we have the facilities to accommodate more students!). There are several reasons for this:

- * A larger tuition base presents more net income after expenses. While keeping tuition at a low enough rate to still be affordable to a large segment of the community
- * We feel there is still a significant population of children who would benefit from the atmosphere MPS has to offer

The main decision we face in expansion is where to focus our attention and resources: (1) expand at the lower grade levels, or (2) add higher grades, or (3) focus on the lower levels and expand at the upper level as we have sufficient demand for it.

Some implications of these choices are:

Expand at lower levels, primarily kindergarten and first grade

- Seems to be more community interest in a strong kindergarten program
- Parents may bring their child here for kindergarten only, then grow to like the school and stay with MPS as their primary school.
- If a broad base of students is built from the lower grades, they are more likely to stay on with MPS and build upper grade programs with each succeeding year
- If students start and stay with the MPS philosophy and programs, our educational objectives will have a higher impact on these children and present a more valid look at what we're trying to do
- Financially, in terms of materials, equipment, space etc. it is easier to furnish a classroom and find instructors for these age levels
- Other private schools have given the advice to build a program from the bottom up focusing on the lower, primary grades first.

Addition of 7th and 8th Grades

- Requests have been received from current students and the community for these grades
- However, these populations seem relatively small
- Pre-adolescents present special challenges academically, socially and emotionally. Can our limited budget and staff adequately address these needs?
- Many parents whose children start with MPS want them to remain here for as long as possible. As our younger program grows, we will have a "built-in" population for these upper grades who have "grown up in the Mountain Pathways tradition".
- 7th and 8th grade programs require more funding than lower grades. Sports programs, science equipment, more complicated and specialized materials and curriculums. Teachers in these age groups tend to specialize, so finding qualified staff who share our ideals, yet could competently handle all aspects of these age groups could be hard to recruit. Additional fees might be charged to provide special part-time instructors/tutors for these areas.

We need your input on these options. We also need ideas on how to focus on recruiting students and advertising to reach families who might be interested in Mountain Pathways. We need you as ambassadors!

FINANCES

Mountain Pathways School has operated at a deficit for the first two years. This deficit has been covered by loans and contributions from Ann and other private contributors.

Last year, the cost to educate each child at Mountain Pathways was approximately \$2,800. Tuition charged last year was \$1700. This left a per child deficit of \$1,100. This is the usual situation with private schools. We hope to decrease this gap this year by having added students without significantly raising costs. Mr. and Mrs. Paul Brooks donated funds for the remodeling of the school to accommodate the additional children, making this possible.

A Finance Committee was formed last year to begin work to raise funds, place the school on a sound business basis and develop a long-term business plan. Richard & Debbie Stevens and Rob & Holly Willis are co-chairs of this committee. These families have not only given very generously of their personal financial resources, but have solicited funds from outside sources and worked with Brian and Kathy Crutchfield on grants from foundations. With Eric Hatch a telephone solicitation took place last summer among last years' parents to cover summer operating expenses. The Finance Committee is currently in the midst of a direct mail fundraising campaign and are planning fundraising events in the community in the coming months.

AUTHOR RESUME

Education

Ed.D. Educational Leadership Appalachian State University. Dec. 2004.

Coursework EdS program in Leadership in Higher Education

Appalachian State University

MA Educational Media Production

Appalachian State University

Boone, North Carolina

BA Communication Arts, Theatre

Professional Experience

Lees-McRae College - Assistant Professor, Division of Education

Appalachian State University Webmaster 2000-2005

Appalachian State University - Adjunct Instructor 1995 - 2005

Course resume:

- Computer and Media Applications in Elementary Education
- Introduction to Reading Theory and Instruction
- Integrating Media and Technology into Teaching
- Literacy, Technology and Instruction
- Teachers Learners and Schools
- Instructional Technology
- Creative use of the Internet and Web Page design for Teachers
- Guest Presentation Educational Leadership: Qualitative Research methods (presentation on microgenetic methodology and its uses in qualitative research)
- Guest Lecturer, Curriculum and Instruction: Issues, Trends and Problems in Curriculum

Technology and Telecommunications Coordinator: Fifth Dimension Clearinghouse 1997-2001

Theatre Arts Educator Catawba County Schools 1988-1991

Teaching Assistant spring, 1987 Appalachian State University Department of Theatre

Free lance Artisan, Charlotte, NC - primarily for G. Michael's, inc.(scene painting, large scale foam sculpture, commercial set construction, trade show and corporate model construction, light welding and electronics

Publications/Presentations (Listed as Simmons prior to 2002)

Effects of Participation in Technologically Rich Activity Systems on the Acquisition of Literacy. Seminar Presentation at the National Reading Research Center Conference on Literacy & Technology for the 21st Century Symposium, Atlanta, 1996.

Understanding Learning and Development in the Fifth Dimension: Model Systems and Microgenetic Methodology. Blanton, Simmons, Wilson, Paper presented the American Educational Research Association Conference, Chicago, 1997.

The Fifth Dimension Clearing House. Blanton, Greene, Simmons. Paper presented at the International Society for Research in Cultural Activity Theory Conference, Geneva 1998.

Microgenetic Analysis of Learning in the Fifth Dimension. Blanton, Simmons. Unpublished

The Fifth Dimension Clearinghouse: One Strategy For Diffusing, Implementing, and sustaining core principles. Green, Simmons, Blanton. Paper presented at the annual conference for the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education, San Antonio, 1999.

The Fifth Dimension: Application of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, Inquiry-Based Learning, Computers, and Telecommunications to Change Prospective Teachers' Preconceptions. Blanton, Warner, Simmons. Journal of Educational Computing Research, Vol. 24 (4) 2001.