

## Secondary Alternative Education

### The Cherryfield Experience

#### Background

With the advent of current technologies we are facing as educators the possibility of computers offering information in a fashion more effective and possibly more desirable than our current system. In lieu of budget cuts, self-help may replace institutional help. The current educational system struggles in trying to accommodate the uniqueness in abilities, skills, interests and experiences of the individual student, leaving talent untapped.

As we teach knowledge and skills we choose to have students learn we diminish their own drives and increase their dependence. We seem unable to address the processes of thinking, creating, and acting, to stimulate inquiry and participation.

The process of learning seems in sharp contrast with teaching a body of language. The students and faculty at Cherryfield are creating meaningful "learning for life" situations.

#### Process

We start with the simple premise .. "learning is a student's job and prerogative now and throughout his/her life." What students need to learn initially is how to make educational decisions and how to follow educational programs. Students start with an easy task and progress to tasks of increasing complexity and duration until they eventually become capable of designing and carrying out major portions of their own learning program.

The process is dependent on time, freedom, and a trusting personal relationship between student and teacher. Students need to be able to identify and clarify their own intentions and then visualize and create a program to achieve their goals. As the students enact their plans and challenges they will soon confront the need to manage individual activities in an organized fashion.

The goal of the teacher is to open up routes of achievement in order to create a pattern of competence and success for each student. We attempt to familiarize the students with ways to learn that will be available to them throughout life.

The students may choose to learn by consulting an expert, establishing a pattern of practice, studying on their own, setting up an experiment, arranging OJT experiences, observing and reflecting, teaching others, or designing a challenging project. Students thus acquire skills in systematic planning, enacting plans, overcoming difficulties and accumulating successes. Failure can become an opportunity to learn from and a guide for future decisions. As students progress they become

clearer about intentions, more confident and determined, and more open to change.

The organization of the above is as follows.

The students have a working journal in which they may record what they are learning, explore talents and interests, examine struggles, describe visions of what they want to accomplish, tell stories of their experiences and outline ideas. From this journal, plans for activities can develop which initially may be no more than a stated intention and procedure. After a plan of action is created the next step is to identify and secure necessary resources for getting the activity started. (Catalogue of resources, people, equipment, sites etc, is currently being developed) There are many ways to demonstrate achievement besides test scores and term papers. These include testimonials, certificates, photographic records, displays of products, performances, observation by others, and case histories.

The mechanics of process take place in the following order.

1. Goal setting
2. Strategic planning
3. Self-management
4. Self-evaluation
5. Review

#### Summary

Increased involvement in the decision making process has had a visible impact on student commitment and performance. Students can learn to think, act and contribute enabling them to take charge not only of their learning but also their lives.