THE GATHERING PLACE: ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS AND RESPONSIVENESS OF AN ALTERNATIVE ADULT SECONDARY EDUCATION CENTRE

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ABSTRACT

Community education for young adult learners is both a concept and a living framework in which a democratic process of education can bring about social change. When implemented effectively, community education can be accessible to all the members of a local area and can provide an alternative approach to identifying and meeting educational, health, and social needs. Community education programs typically begin with a needs assessment to identify what the relevant programs should be. Stakeholders usually include the learners, community representatives, service providers, representatives of funding agencies, and policy makers.

This study describes and evaluates the effectiveness of a recently developed alternative adult secondary full-service education centre in the inner-city of Vancouver, British Columbia, the Gathering Place Community Centre. It is an evaluation research study using collected data from three groups of participants: adult students, the education centre staff, and the neighbourhood service providers. The results of this summative evaluation reveal the successes and limitations of the operational and program components of the Gathering Place. Now in its fifth year, the Gathering Place has achieved its original goals as set forth by the community at large. Areas for improvement are identified and recommendations noted. A model of an adult full-service community education centre for secondary completion is presented at the conclusion of the thesis. The model incorporates outcomes of this case study with aspects of full-service models from the current literature on alternative full-service secondary centres for young adult learners.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Community education programs typically address the needs of a local population and have a long history of social change (Brookfield, 1983a; Mason & Randell, 1995; Merriam & Cunningham, 1989). These programs have been a growing alternative to mainstream elementary and secondary public school systems because, as the literature makes clear, they often succeed in meeting needs of marginalized populations that the traditional school system is failing to meet (Clark, 1986; Rist, 1992; Smith, 1994). The community-based model of adult secondary completion has also begun to draw more and more attention among adult educators. This model is seen by both practitioners and theorists at the national and international level as a viable education system for young adults who have left school early.

The full-service model is being utilized by adult secondary completion programs in both Canada and the United States. Full-service community-based schools combine community education elements with "multiuse" or "interagency" service to address a multitude of educational, social, and health needs (Dryfoos, 1996). Community-based full-service adult programs usually include: programs relevant to the needs of the community, high accessibility to the consumers, a seamless provision of various services, alternative teaching strategies, high cost effectiveness, and the maximum use of local physical facilities (Guerriero, Li, Mills & Pearce, 1996a; Minzey & LeTarte, 1994).

Despite the growing recognition of the community-based full-service model in the adult education literature, there remains an ongoing debate concerning the definition of

community-based education with differing perspectives arising out of differing philosophical perspectives, differing interpretations of historical roots, and very different ideas of the proper applications of such schools today. Consequently, an evaluation of an established full-service community education centre is timely for adult education. In this thesis, I present a study which evaluates the Gathering Place in Vancouver, British Columbia, as a full-service community educational centre and I also provide a full-service model which may be of help to others as a goal to strive for.

Background Information

The history of the Downtown South community of Vancouver, British Columbia, has been defined by the people, the place, and the politics of the area. The culture of the community, the demographic profile, the political issues, and the challenges and changes affecting this small but densely populated neighbourhood need to be understood to appreciate why the creation of the Gathering Place Community Centre (GPCC) was such a landmark for Vancouver. A number of historical factors and community issues are presented to provide background and a contextual perspective of the problems faced by the Downtown South community during the years leading to the opening of the Gathering Place.

The Community Context

The physical boundaries of the Downtown South of Vancouver, as defined by the City of Vancouver, include only 33 city blocks (Butt, 1991) and comprise less than one

square mile. However, the City of Vancouver census report (1996) states that the highest growth rate for Vancouver and greatest absolute increase in population is in this small region. The number of low-income residents in the Downtown South increased dramatically from 1991 to 1996, while low cost housing and accessible services have fallen well behind the need (Beasley, 1996).

The Downtown South has historically been an entry point for Canadian-born youth and adults coming to Vancouver and British Columbia. There are few immigrants in the neighbourhood. According to Butt (1991), the population trends that have come to dominate the Downtown South include a transient homeless population, a large street youth contingent, more men than women, and a small number of aboriginal origin. MacKenzie's 1997 report to City Council, and a study by Butt (1991), summarize the socio-economic status of the community. Poverty is a significant issue. In 1991, 86% of Downtown South residents earned less than the "low income cut off point" (Butt, p. 8) for Canada. According to Butt, most of the population live in SROs (single room occupancy accomodation), have little education, possess few job skills, and are unemployed.

People in the Downtown South who find themselves displaced often fall into the category of homeless. Based on my five years of work experience in the Centre, the homeless population frequently moves from the street, to shelters, to SROs to maintain a level of housing. Meanwhile, youth safe shelters allow only a limited stay. As a result, youth have no choice but to go to the street, to illegal "squats," or to SRO living.

Youth who are supported by the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Families have options such as group homes, transition houses, semi-independent and

independent living arrangements, but these do not exist in this downtown area. Vancouver service workers are now advocating that more government supported communal living arrangements should be secured in the Downtown South. They are also advocating for safe housing for youth coping with mental health issues and active intravenous drug use. However, these supports have not been extended to the Downtown South at the time of writing. Instead, the Downtown South has been repeatedly referred to in the media as an area that suffers neglect by city officials in maintaining a supply of low-income housing for the people who make up this area (Ward, 1999). The marginalized in the Downtown South often have no connection to family or relatives and find comfort in the social network of the "family" they create on the street. As Butt (1991) concludes: "In order to sustain an adequate existence (e.g. shelter, food, health, and money) most residents must work hard to create informal networks to compensate for the lack of resources in the area" (p. 25).

Prostitution districts border the Downtown South district. For male and female prostitutes, access to drugs, clothes, food and money is typically available through an association with "johns" and "sugar daddies." Such street life quickly exposes one to disease, malnutrition, violence, poverty, and mental illness. Many contract HIV and AIDS. Abuse by street gangs, pimps, and dealers is all too common (Mass, 1993).

The lack of accessible health services in Downtown South has exacerbated the problems for the at-risk population (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1998). For example, there are 44 adult and 6 youth detox beds in the entire city of Vancouver; none of these are in the Downtown South. The lack of local pre-detox and post-detox treatment facilities in the Downtown South forces people to return to their earlier situation.

Recently, business, revitalization, and entertainment initiatives in the Downtown South have begun preserving Vancouver's heritage buildings. This has further displaced residents from their SROs (Beasley, 1996). According to Sarti (1995), city officials estimate that about 20,000 new people will be moving into condominiums in the Downtown South when the revitalization construction boom ends sometime in the next century. At present, no contingency plans are underway to house the marginalized who now live in this area.

In the 1980s, the City of Vancouver began to identify the serious lack of support services that existed in the Downtown South. In the report, Hotel Residents of the Downtown South (Butt, 1991), safe and secure housing, job training, improved access to health care, free recreation, education, a social space, and a neighbourhood drop-in with "helping" networks and resources were identified as priorities for this area. This raised the many educational and safety issues of the Downtown South to the public policy level. In the 1996 policy report, Information Report: Downtown South Planning Program Progress Report, the community development initiatives in the Downtown South area of Vancouver since 1993 were summarized, and the conclusion drawn was:

> As the population of Downtown South grows, it will be increasingly important to maintain and foster a cooperative approach to neighbourhood planning, closely involving merchants, property owners, new and existing residents, and others with a "stake" in Downtown South's future. (Beasley, p. 3)

After considerable public debate, the City of Vancouver struck an interdisciplinary team to "share information, identify gaps in service and to plan initiatives" (Preston, 1992, p. 2). It was from this milieu that the Gathering Place Community Centre was born.

The Gathering Place Community Centre

In response to the invitation to provide public input, Diane MacKenzie (1994), later to be the Centre's first director, completed more than 1000 interviews in the community between 1991 and 1993. One of the priorities she stated in her report on this community consultation process was that a centre was needed, which would include:

> Recreational and social space (including weight room, activity/aerobics room, auditorium, TV lounge, space for active and passive games, arts and crafts), low cost healthy dining (kitchen and coffee shop/serving area) plus an opportunity to participate in food preparation and sale, *Education Centre with classrooms, computer lab and common space* [italics added], Health Services including laundromat, dry-cleaning, delousing, showers, luggage storage, and therapeutic hot tubs), and a Library/Reading room. (p. 4)

MacKenzie provided an action report to City Council which stated that what was needed was "a community centre that would address the needs of the economically and socially disadvantaged residents in the Downtown South in the face of massive redevelopment" (p. 2).

The City agreed to provide 3.4 million dollars for the purchase and improvements to a selected 21,000 square foot site in the centre of Downtown South. Opened in March 1995, the Gathering Place Community Centre was more of a community-based social project rather than a community centre or school. It was begun as an experiment to try to meet the collective needs of an urban population by offering multiple services through joint community partnerships. Patrons pay one dollar per year to make use of the

facilities. About 900 people came through the doors each day in 1996 (MacKenzie, 1996), with over 4500 memberships sold per year since (Greenwell, 1998).

Patrons of the Gathering Place Community Centre have access to a medical centre, an education centre, a computer lab, an open theatre space for events and meetings, showers, a laundry facility, a games room, a fine arts department, a cafeteria, a gymnasium, meeting rooms, a television lounge, and a library. There are no residential facilities and services are for day use only. In addition to these on-site facilities, there is a network of neighbouring agencies that provide service to the Downtown South and to those at Gathering Place Education Centre, such as Street Youth Services, Options, Pacific AIDS Resource Centre, Covenant House, Ministry of Human Resources, and Family Services.

Within the larger centre is the alternative school that MacKenzie (1996) called for. The Gathering Place Education Centre (GPEC) is a Vancouver School Board facility for secondary completion housed within the Gathering Place Community Centre. It is used by school-age youth and adults; however, adults aged 18 to 40 make up the majority of the learners. Although further details of the Gathering Place Education Centre are given in chapter 3, I now provide an overview of the governance structure and stated philosophy of the Centre.

Governance and Philosophy

The intent of the educators who started the Gathering Place Education Centre in 1995 was to model themes of democracy, participation, and equality. The Gathering Place Education Centre is part of a Centre-wide cooperative approach to management.

Initiation of new projects, funding allocations, program delivery, and evaluation involves consultation with the community stakeholders. The Gathering Place Community Centre Association has an elected board of directors and subcommittees which represent programs and departments. For example, the Education Centre Committee, the Finance Committee, the Youth Committee, and the Newsletter Committee each provide the members of the Centre a place to voice their ideas and advise staff and management in decision making. Administrators, programmers, and front line staff, in turn, take recommendations into account for new policy and program initiatives.

The goal of the Gathering Place Education Centre's program is to offer alternative education--pedagogically and philosophically--to that of the traditional public school and adult basic education systems in Vancouver. The partnership agreement between the Vancouver School Board and the City of Vancouver (1995) concerning GPEC states:

> City Council has made it the responsibility of the staff of the Gathering Place to ensure that services provided, including educational services, address the expressed and implied needs of the people who call this community theirs. The answer to the question, "Whose learning centre is it?", must always be that it responds to the needs of the community for whom the centre was built. (p. 2)

My Role in the Study

I have been employed by the Vancouver School Board Community Education Services Division in the adult secondary completion program since 1991. I was appointed in 1995 by the School Board to help design and implement the Gathering Place Education Centre. After four years of managing the Education Centre full-time and creating the current programs, the Gathering Place Education Centre acknowledged the

need to evaluate its effectiveness. Staff members and volunteers have changed over the four years, revisions to policy and procedures have occurred, and resources have been lost due to funding cuts. As coordinator of the Gathering Place Education Centre, it was ultimately my decision to evaluate if the school is fulfilling its original mandate and make recommendations to the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver School Board, and the wider field of adult education for the development of similar schools. I reasoned that if the Gathering Place is effective, it might provide the basis for a model for the public and private sectors, as well as for urban or rural municipalities interested in developing partnerships for full-service community education for adult secondary completion.

The Problem

This study evaluates the effectiveness of the Gathering Place Community Centre. This evaluation is conducted as a program assessment using the original goals of the community needs assessment conducted by MacKenzie (1994) as the basic evaluation criteria. Specifically, this study evaluates the operational components, programs, and services of the GPEC with additional commentary on the effectiveness of the relationship between the GPEC and the GPCC which houses it. Finally, it addresses ways both Centres could serve their clients better.

Extensive literature exists validating the success of full-service community education models in the K-12 system in Canada and the United States (Dryfoos, 1994a; Guerriero, Li, Mills, and Pearce, 1996a; 1996b; Levy & Shepardson, 1992; Rist, 1992). The literature on similar schools has provided me with additional possibilities which,

combined with the outcomes of this study, has led to a proposed model for this population.

Purpose of the Study

This study attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of the Gathering Place Education Centre, including its effectiveness within the larger centre, the Gathering Place Community Centre. Locally, this program assessment serves as an accountability study to the funding agents. On a broader level, the purpose of this study was to examine the factors that contribute to the success of a full-service community centre in a major cosmopolitan city, the factors that may have hindered or limited its possibilities, and the possibilities for a model which may be seen as a goal for our field.

Scope and Limitations

I have utilized program evaluation as the methodology for this study. The scope of respondents involved in the survey included users of the facilities, adult students at the Gathering Place Education Centre, and members of the education staff who teach at GPEC. In addition, many of the Downtown South service providers employed by community service agencies and who are collaboratively involved in the full-service approach were included. The staff at the Gathering Place Education Centre and staff at the service agencies were surveyed using a questionnaire. Individual students were interviewed using the semi-structured interview method.

A number of limitations exist in this study. The study excludes students of immigrant or English as a Second Language background because they make up an extremely small proportion of the GPEC student population. The study addresses the Canadian experience for the Canadian-born and may not be applicable to student populations of dissimilar geographic and cultural background. The study does not include students who stayed less than 10 months. Therefore, there is no feedback from the short-term students who dropped out. In addition, the service providers' feedback is based on their clients' experiences. In this sense, the service providers' data is based on their interpretation of their clients' experiences at GPEC and GPCC.

A further limitation may arise in that I was the Education Centre coordinator at the time of the study and both students and employees may not have given me objective information. This limitation was minimized by the use of survey questionnaires which were anonymous. No respondents could be identified and they were made aware of this. Further, the rapport I have with students suggests my role at the Education Centre was a strength. I believe the students I interviewed were open and honest and that I was objective in reporting these data. In addition, I triangulated the data for increased credibility.

Despite risks of personal bias, I assumed that using myself as the evaluator could be effective. Cummings et al. (1988) maintain that "when an internal role is appropriate, the evaluator may be able to promote the appropriate use of evaluation results more effectively than an external evaluator" (p. 72). In this case, an internal evaluator was appropriate since, as Clifford and Sherman (1983) note, "The internal evaluator is an employee of an organization who holds explicit, primary responsibility for the

organization's self-evaluation" (p. 23). I chose to interview students personally, rather than involving someone else, as the students know me and I have a history of trust in this context.

The Research Process

Eleven school board staff members completed a written questionnaire within the Gathering Place Education Centre staff group. Those who participated included one former and one active administrator, four teachers, three teachers' assistants, one support staff member, and one academic advisor. Within the Downtown South service providers group, 19 questionnaires were completed. This group represented a multitude of roles. They included: street nurses, doctors, youth workers, drug and alcohol counselors, housing workers, librarian, security personnel, financial aid workers, directors of safe houses, mental health workers, community programmers, advocates, volunteer coordinators, and employees of the Ministry of Children and Families.

I conducted 16 interviews with students. Seven female and 9 male students were interviewed. Three of the 16 were First Nations. All 16 were Canadian-born and English is their first language. The age range was from 17-53 years old. Two were single parents (both women) raising their children while attending school. Earlier school grade levels ranged from literacy through to Grade 12. Two of the students interviewed had graduated earlier from the program, one with a secondary school graduation diploma, one with a GED diploma.

The selection criteria for the students interviewed included the following: English had to have been their native language, the student must have been Canadian-born, the

student must have attended a Canadian educational institution as a child and youth, and must have left before finishing Grade 12. The student must also have attended Gathering Place Education Centre for at least ten months with the goal of Grade 12 graduation or acquiring a GED diploma. The student must have shown positive progress through the time they were at the Gathering Place Education Centre.

An analysis was conducted using the MacKenzie Report (1994) as a base to identify where the Gathering Place may have fallen short of the founding vision and a triangulation of the summative qualitative data collected was conducted to identify and connect the factors which had been effective and non-effective.

Assumptions

This study assumes that the educational program at GPEC is influential on learners in terms of their academic and personal growth, and that participants are able to assess and evaluate this growth qualitatively. I assumed that staff groups would inform me of their feedback in written form, but I also made an assumption that some people would not be interested in participating. Thus, I distributed 30 questionnaires to get a response from 19. I assumed that feedback from staff was honest and reliable by asking that no one identify themselves in the questionnaires.

Inherent within the survey questions was the assumption that the life experiences of the students were often problematic. Rather than assuming the educational system failed the students, I tried to understand and report whether it was the student's school experience or the student's personal situation that contributed to their drop out from the public school system. Similarly, when inquiring about the full-service Centre's impact on

students' lives, I tried to distinguish between the Centre's impact and their own actions to change their life situation. I assumed I was able to interpret the data sufficiently to make this determination.

Definitions of Key Terms

Several key terms are used throughout this thesis. Following are the terms which are frequently used.

Adult secondary completion refers to publicly funded adult programs from literacy through to GED (General Educational Development test), or the Grade 12 diploma. Both are operated by district school boards in British Columbia.

Advocacy worker refers to a counselor or service worker who assists and supports individuals who are dealing with issues such as conflicts with social services, violations of the Human Rights Act, harassment, mental health, government legislation, or the law.

Community education in this thesis refers to schools that are developed with, by, and for the people living in a designated community. As defined by DeLargy (1989), "Community education is a process that identifies the community's educational needs, assesses available community resources, and uses these resources to develop appropriate programs and activities to meet the identified needs" (p. 290).

Full-service schools refers to centres which strive for a seamless approach to education, recreation, library, health, and social services through integrated community programs. Programs are typically planned cooperatively and operated by service providers. Joint funding, a team approach to service, a reduction in traditional service

gaps, and maximum use of shared physical space and resources are common characteristics of full-service schools.

Gathering Place Community Centre (GPCC) refers to the physical structure of the community centre, its programs, and its services. The GPCC is funded by the City of Vancouver Community Services Division and the Ministry of Social Services.

Gathering Place Education Centre (GPEC) refers to the physical site and programs and services of the Vancouver School Board's facilities housed within the Gathering Place Community Centre.

K-12 refers to the kindergarten to Grade 12 public school programs for school-aged children and youth.

Life skills education refers to learning objectives and curricula focusing on behaviour and social skill development. This may include topics such as relationship skills, communication skills, hygiene, manners, and budgeting money and time.

Service provider refers to any adjunct professional or staff member who is a worker at an agency outside of the Gathering Place Education Centre which plays a role in the Centre's full-service approach.

Transformative learning is a term used to describe the philosophical and psychological aspects of examining and testing assumptions. Mezirow (1991) popularized the term in adult education and states that "transformative learning results in new or transformed meaning schemes....To the extent that adult education strives to foster reflective learning, its goal becomes one of either confirmation or transformation of ways of interpreting experience" (p. 6).

Vancouver School Board (VSB) is the public school board responsible for the operational costs and management of the Gathering Place Education Centre.

Plan of Presentation

Following the introductory chapter, chapter 2 provides a review of selected literature about community education models and factors relevant to a full-service approach to adult education. Exemplary full-service K-12 and adult schools are also identified and illustrated. Chapter 3 presents the case study from the three groups surveyed and the results of the triangulation which identified the Gathering Place programs' strengths and limitations. Chapter 4 provides a discussion of the study's results. Recommendations are suggested for improvements in the Gathering Place Community Centre and the Gathering Place Education Centre. Conclusions are drawn about full-service schools in general and successful features identified by this study are enhanced with findings presented in the literature to offer a conceptual model of a full-service adult community centre.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter identifies and discusses selected adult learning concepts, and aspects of community education relevant to alternative full-service adult schools. I include a discussion of dropouts in British Columbia and give exemplary models of the full-service approach found in North America. I also discuss types of evaluation methods for adult educational programs.

Selected Adult Learning Concepts

One of the most widely accepted methods for facilitating learning in adult education is the approach of andragogy, which was popularized by Malcolm Knowles in the 1970s and 1980s. This approach has proven to be central to many of the teaching-learning theories and methods in the field of adult education.

Andragogy and Self-Directed Learning

Andragogy is a term used by Knowles (1970) to describe "the art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 38). It is also defined as "the instructional process for adults differentiated from pedagogy, which is for children" (Peterson, 1988, p. 149). Cranton (1992) suggests that the andragogical approach to teaching is based on the notion that "one of the primary differences between education for adults and education for children is that children are 'forming' and adults are 'reforming'" (p. 145). For McKenzie (1977), andragogy is a philosophical construct that has come to prescribe elements of good

practice in the field. Similarly, Day and Baskett (1982) claim that andragogy is "an educational ideology rooted in an inquiry-based learning and teaching paradigm" (p. 150). Mezirow (1981), McKenzie, and Cranton concur that andragogy is viewed by professionals as a set of practice methodologies that can enhance the teaching of adults.

There is, however, a debate as to whether andragogy is a verifiable theory of adult learning. Brookfield (1986) and McKenzie (1977) take a philosophical position and approach the question phenomenologically. They believe that adults can define what they need to learn on their own and are naturally "learning oriented" (Brookfield, p. 99). Cross (1981) makes reference to Carlson's work on andragogy in which Carlson says that andragogy is a political activity in the sense that the age which society establishes as adulthood is the reasonable age when most members of society shift from engagement in pedagogy (the education of children) to andragogy (the education of adults). Cross maintains that andragogy identifies important characteristics of adult learners and, as a proposed theory, says it has gained widespread attention. Yet, she adds that the field "has not been especially successful...in stimulating research to test the assumptions" (p. 228). Elias (1979) supports Cross saying that empirical evidence is needed to validate andragogy as a scientific educational theory.

More recently, authors have stressed the importance of andragogical practices in the facilitation of self-directed learning. Self-directed learning is considered the way in which most adults choose to learn, according to Merriam and Brockett (1997). According to Candy (1991) and Pratt (1993), the role of the student in self-directed learning is central to the andragogical process. Pratt says, "Self-direction has become a keystone in the arching methodology of andragogy; the needs and experience of the learner take

precedence over the expertise of the instructor" (p. 17). Similarly, Caffarella (1993) describes self-directed learning as when "the learner chooses to assume the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out and evaluating those learning experiences" (p. 28). Thus, andragogy has contributed to a deeper discussion of how adults learn and the very nature of adult learning.

By contrast, Hartree (1984) criticizes adult educators for assuming adults are self-directed from the start of adulthood. Elias (1979) points out that elements of andragogy exist in children's learning. Cranton (1992) agrees, saying that self-directedness is not a characteristic of adult learners alone, but a goal of adult education which the educator must facilitate: "Self-directed learning is a process which involves reliance on others and/or information from the environment, including directly or indirectly, other people" (p. 55). Similarly, Brookfield (1985) asserts that educators cannot simply serve students like customers in a department store, but have a responsibility to give them the resources they need to become self-directed.

Boud and Griffin (1987), Cranton (1992), and Merriam and Brockett (1997) all maintain that self-directed learning is a cooperative approach where there is a balance between the expressed needs of the learner and the educator's view of what needs to be represented in an educational program. Brookfield (1986) notes that andragogy and self-directed learning comprise "a transactional encounter in which learner desires and educator priorities will inevitably interact and influence each other" (pp. 97-98). Pratt (1993) would agree with Brookfield in so far as Pratt concludes that self-directed learning underlies and is the vital relationship that exists between learner and facilitator.

Despite his critics and issues that are still under discussion, Knowles (1980) stands by the theory of andragogy and has argued that adults possess a growing reservoir of life experiences that affect how they learn. Knowles has maintained that life experience can contribute to curriculum and learning exercises and that learners should be part of the course-decision process. Peterson (1988) notes that the rich background of adult life experiences can play a vital role in the type and extent of learning that is achieved, noting that adults are more motivated by internal incentives than by extrinsic rewards. Candy (1991), and Merriam and Brockett (1997), support Peterson's views and suggest that, by engaging the learner in self-directed activities, the learner can gain a greater sense of control and increased self-esteem.

Adult Basic Education and Re-Entry Adults

There are numerous terms used to define the widely known sub-field of adult basic education. Terms common to North America include: adult basic education (ABE) which refers to instructional programs for adults whose basic skills (reading, writing, and computation) are assessed below the ninth grade level (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Functional or basic literacy refers to adult literacy education for those whose skills are below the ninth grade (de Castell, Luke & Egan, 1986). ABLE (Adult Basic and Literacy Education) is sometimes used to describe all levels from literacy through to the GED or the senior level of ABE (Quigley, 1997). For those adults whose skills are above the ninth grade level, but who have not graduated from secondary school, the term adult secondary education (ASE) is often used (Martin & Fisher, 1989). ASE incorporates the GED, a high school equivalency exam such as a set of curriculum based tests; secondary

school graduation credits; a Grade 12 diploma, and even credits for job readiness and career development (Merriam & Brockett, 1997).

From literacy through to Grade 12 completion, re-entry programs such as ABE give early school leavers a chance to continue their education regardless of their prior academic level. As an adult re-entry program housed at various centres and schools in Canada, ABE is neither age specific, nor grade specific, and incorporates alternative educational methodology, programs, and evaluation from that of the traditional public school system. The methodologies and teaching strategies used with adults in these programs can allow for creative, adult student-centered approaches to education (Quigley, 1997).

The flexibility, diversity, and practicality of such programs have made adult basic education attractive to those adults who want to return to school. As early as 1988, Karp discussed how self-paced courses, personalized and democratic schools, student-centred course selection, and extended support by staff can be effective components of a successful adult secondary completion program. Price-Waterhouse (1990) in their article, "Qualitative Research on School Leavers," found that the most successful alternative schools were those with options for meeting the needs of adults returning to school. These options include co-op or work supported opportunities, self-paced programs, ongoing intake, one-to-one tutoring, a non-patronizing environment, on-site child care, and support services for issues such as housing and school fees. Similarly, Campbell-Murphy and Cool (1994) interviewed over 400 youth and adults who had dropped out of the mainstream school system across Canada. They also found that most of the young adult student successes came from community, family-like schools; student-centred and

self-directed learning; self-paced flexible program schedules; practical skill based curricula; and accessibility to one-on-one counseling and community services.

Empowerment of Marginalized People Through Community Education

There is much debate over whether adult education should be for individual development or for social change (Galbraith & Sisco, 1992). This is also a central argument in literacy and adult basic education. If literacy and adult basic education are for individual development and growth, then the school of humanist authors in adult education becomes important. Authors such as Cranton (1994) and Mezirow (1991) argue for transformative learning, asserting that empowerment and autonomy are desirable outcomes for adult learning and that transformative learning can meet this end (Cranton). Transformative learning involves critical reflection, the evaluation of beliefs and values, and challenging personal assumptions (Mezirow). Clark (1993) supports the stance that transformational learning "produces more far-reaching changes in the learners than does learning in general...transformational learning *shapes* people; they are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize" (p. 47).

For Mezirow (1990, 1991), the goal is not only for individual change, but also for social change, including the removal of oppressive conditions in society. Critical self-reflection, for Mezirow (1991), is a strong theme in the empowerment of learners. He reasons that:

> The emancipation in emancipatory learning is emancipation from libidinal, linguistic, epistemic, institutional, or environmental forces that limit our options and our rational control over our lives but have been taken for granted or seen as beyond human control. (p. 87)

Lindeman (1989) and Smith (1994) would agree with Mezirow. They claim that two general purposes of adult education remain central to the field: self-improvement and social change. As Lindeman puts it, "Changing individuals in continuing adjustment to changing social function--this is the bilateral though unified purpose of adult learning" (p. 104).

By contrast, a number of ABLE programs in North America gravitate towards the liberatory and community-based approaches (Quigley, 1997). Merriam and Brockett (1997), and Brookfield (1986) argue that these are programs that challenge the norms of institutionalized learning and allow the population of learners in a community to participate "in institutional terms, [as] a highly political act" (Brookfield, p. 87). Fingeret (1984) asserts that the only way literacy education will truly advance as a field is to have policy makers and educators "collaborate across program boundaries, and to transcend disciplinary or organizational loyalties" (p. 44). Hunter and Harman (1979) support Fingeret's stance saying:

> A major shift in national policy is needed to serve the educational needs of disadvantaged adults ...[which calls for] new, pluralistic, community-based initiatives ... [that would be] action oriented ... [and would] increase the skills of community members to interact with and change the mainstream culture and its institutions. (pp. 104 -106)

However, as Heaney (1983) points out, "A fatal contradiction is embedded in any attempt to undertake liberatory education within the confines of established educational bureaucracies" (p. 62). The nature of these public bureaucracies is typically conservative and mainstream. Adult educators are aware of this inherent political conflict, yet Brookfield (1985) argues the gains of liberatory learning far outweigh the losses.

This view that literacy and ABE should be for social change and should have a political dimension embraces Freire's (1974) lifelong work in his commitment to helping oppressed populations. Freire, one of the founders of critical literacy, believed that the role of the adult educator is to facilitate critical consciousness. Once learners become conscious of the forces that control their lives, Freire believed they become empowered, and "empowerment leads to action" (Beder, 1989, p. 47). The ideological division between ABE and literacy for individual change, or for social consciousness, continues in the field (Fingeret, 1984; Quigley, 1997).

Community Education

The term community education has received much attention over the last several decades. Typical sites in which community education is carried out are numerous: community schools, neighbourhood houses, folk schools, community centres, community colleges, and store front community agencies are but a few examples.

Community education models and their mandates typically embrace consistent principles. The individual, the community, and society are viewed as one (Berridge, 1973; Buehring, 1958; Weaver, 1969). Community education is an approach or construct rather than a skill set or educational methodology, and a democratic process is inherent in the programs offered (Merriam & Cunningham, 1989; Minzey & LeTarte, 1972). A community needs assessment is the driving force behind most community school programs (Clark, 1986; DeLargy, 1989). Schools are normally decentralized and local demographics define where the school is and whom it services (DeLargy, 1989; Smith, 1994).

The Relationship Among Individuals, the Community, and Society

One basic concept in community-based education is that the problems of society are the problems of the educational institution. By addressing individual needs, those of the community will be addressed too. Weaver (1969) defines this aspect of community education as follows:

> Community education is a theoretical construct--a way of viewing education in the community, a systematic way of looking at people and their problems....It is based upon the premise that education can be made relevant to people's needs and that the people affected by education should be involved in decisions about the program. It assumes that education should have an impact on the society it serves. (p. 19)

Clark (1986), and Mee and Wiltshire (1978) provide analyses of the concept of need within the context of culture, education and community. While examining the needs-meeting ideology inherent in community education, they conclude that an important task of the community educator is in defining areas of need or helping others to define their own needs. Clark maintains that the primary focus and aim of community education "is the bringing about of changes in the community by means of which the needs of individuals may more effectively be met" (p. 202). Clark adds that programs must avoid a "normative" (p. 194) definition of need by professionals including the notion that value-laden programs will not enable learning.

Buehring (1958) and Berridge (1973) state that the school has a responsibility not only to an individual but also to the whole of society. According to Buehring, "Public schools are the most effective instruments for bringing together a community's tremendous human and material resources, for the public school is the only agency

left...that can reach a true representation of all the people of its community" (p. 252). Similarly, Selman (1991) asserts that the community school "serves as a stimulus and an organizing centre for the community at large, assisting with community betterment planning and projects" (p. 121). Developing this point, Brookfield (1983b) describes three operational concepts in community adult education in terms of value systems, judgements, and hidden assumptions. "Adult education *for* the community" (p. 156) describes programs and services delivered to a community in response to a community needs assessment. "Adult education *in* the community" (p. 156), Brookfield says, describes adult educators working with community activities, or within programs, where services are executed and directed by the learners. "Adult education *of* the community" (p. 157) refers to educators deciding for the learners that the development of certain skills would be useful for them. In the latter case, the community is dependent on the educator and assumes that educators have the power to move learners from inadequacy to normalcy.

Another aspect of community education is that its core foundation is in democratic processes. Weaver's (1972) study of community educators in the United States acknowledges that a democratic process between learners and staff is a commonly accepted and distinctive feature of community education. Minzey and LeTarte (1972), and Merriam and Cunningham (1989) concur that a democratic process is the ultimate goal of community education. Mason and Randell (1995) agree, emphasizing community education as "indeed a democratic process which enables local people to participate closely in decision-making processes that affect their lives" (p. 30). Similarly, Guerriero

et al. (1996c) include a process that is inherently democratic in their definition of community education:

> An education *process* [italics added] that concerns itself with everything that affects the well being of all citizens within a given community. This definition extends the role of the school from the traditional concepts of teaching ... to identifying needs, problems, wants and resources of the community, and then acting as a catalyst in the development of facilities, programs, and leadership towards improving the entire community. (p. 17)

Minzey and LeTarte, and Merriam and Brockett (1997) assert that community education has its foundations in human relations rather than in disciplines of teaching styles, techniques or tools. Likewise, Berridge (1973) claims that the needs of the people involved are the root of any action cycle.

Smith (1994) suggests using the term "local education" instead of community education because this puts a "proper emphasis on place...[and] brings out the significance of local knowledge" (p. 21). Brookfield (1983b) also defines community education in terms of locale, asserting that:

> The neighbourhood notion of community is still the one most appropriate to adult education....programs must, therefore, bear some relations to the interests, concerns, and felt needs of participating individuals. (p. 155)

As Smith argues, local education enables decentralization, accessibility and maximum use of physical and fiscal resources. Smith is committed to this aspect and is joined by DeLargy (1989). Both claim that "decentralization as a part of the community education process is essential" (p. 289). Therefore, the term, local education, paints a picture of the people, their needs, the community context, the resources, the program, and the overall mission and whether it is utilized or not. The emphasis of local place and local

knowledge is therefore underscored by these researchers. Bell and Newby (1971) support this simple yet effective viewpoint. They say that "calling this area 'local education' helps concentrate attention on the interaction of individuals and institution in specific localities" (p. 49). The emphasis on geography and democracy underlines the questions, "where and for whom is the community school for adults built?" and, "who should be involved in its governance?"

Historical Perspectives of Community Education

Historically, there have been a number of community education movements that have risen out of political and economic oppression. Some of these movements have created schools and adult education centres that serve to exemplify the concept of community education and social change in English-speaking Canada. According to Keane and Stubblefield (1989), dating back to the Elizabethan period, the English government took pride in developing its education system for social stability, defense, religious beliefs, skill training, and elitism associated with the educated class. Private and public endowments brought this tradition to North America during the colonial period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thereafter, European settlers sought to establish a new society and a new life. According to Welton (1987), Canadian society during the late 1800s failed to recognize the needs of the working class, and discrimination between the classes widened.

Welton (1987) has given a historical analysis of the liberatory movements of working class education in Canada from 1828 to 1973. Many of these community education efforts and processes are still used today to empower groups for positive social

change. For example, the Antigonish movement, which took place in Nova Scotia in the 1920s and 1930s, was a result of the efforts of miners, farmers and fishermen who formed coalitions around adult education, business and labour relations (Welton, 1987). The Antigonish Movement progressed rapidly and workers banded to form strong unions and start their own co-ops: "By 1939, 19,600 people in the Maritimes were enrolled in 2,265 study clubs and 342 credit unions were in existence" (Brookfield, 1983a, pp. 108-109).

Another Canadian story of community education was the "lighted school house" movement of the 1920s and 30s (Selman, 1991, 1995). Farmers in Ontario and the Prairies adopted a "labourer-teacher" model. The Manitoba Federation of Agriculture and Cooperation organized local study groups which reached a peak in the 1940s "when 435 study groups were taking part, involving 4287 participants" (Selman, 1991, p. 112). The "folk school movement" in both Manitoba and Ontario in the 1940s and 50s was born out of the rural farmers' study groups and was "inspired by the internationally renowned Danish folk high schools" (p. 113). From the 1930s to the 1950s, grain farmers in Saskatchewan and Alberta developed unions to improve working conditions, education and equality, including the grain farmers' first grain marketing cooperative (Welton, 1987).

Additional examples of community education in North America include the Reading Camp Association established in 1901 which later became Frontier College, the Canadian Workers Educational Association, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, the British Columbia Women's Institutes, and the Southern

School for Women Workers. Each of these organizations adhered to the principles of community education, democracy, and social change.

According to Keane and Stubblefield (1989), the main thrust of the majority of North American community education movements during the early 1900s was political, creating social mobilization in response to economic and political upheaval. Willis (1991) observes that community education "was not as concerned with the growth of the individual's knowledge and skills, as with generating a participatory communal culture and establishing appropriate social structures to put the theory into practice" (p. 79). The pioneers of these programs provided grassroots workers with skills and leadership to assist them in making positive change in their lives (Lovett, 1975). Brookfield (1983a) agrees that the paradigm shift initiated by individuals such as these was the first stage of adult community action in North America:

> The history of adult education contains many examples of attempts by animateurs and educators to foster the development of self-help study groups existing outside formal educational institutions. These groups were established for avowedly educational purposes and with clearly defined educational aims....Although development and action may be conceptually distinct from education, nonetheless, there is an educative component in most developmental and activist initiatives. (p. 8)

Underlying Philosophical Orientations of Community Education

Community adult education is pluralistic in nature, has grown out of a progressive education philosophy, and lends itself to humanistic and critical philosophical approaches to adult education practices. Elias and Merriam (1980, 1995) are proponents of progressivism in adult education and cite the works of Dewey, Roussea, Pestalozzi, and

Darwin as examples of a philosophy which, they say, was the early driving force for community education progressivism. According to Elias and Merriam (1980), the focus of these early philosophers was the individual's growth in the context of society. Thus progressivism was an early philosophical basis for community education in the U.S. and Canada:

> The highest ideal of the progressive movement was education for democracy, defined by Dewey, as people engaged in joint activity to solve their common problems. Thus, the goals of education as the early progressivists made them were both individual and social. In liberating the learner, a potential was released for the improvement of society and culture. (Elias & Merriam, p. 47)

Furthermore, Elias and Merriam conclude that "progressivism's influence can be seen in a number of programs currently in operation in adult education; the community education movement is one of these" (p. 69).

The humanistic philosophy, by contrast, typically involves the learners' ideas, feelings, needs, and actions where personal development is the major purpose of education. Maslow's well-known hierarchy of needs and Roger's commitment to individual growth are basic themes underlying the humanistic approach in adult education (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). Knowles (1980) describes andragogy as "the release of human potential over the control of human behaviour" (p. 67) and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, andragogy has been a powerful teaching approach in the humanist school of adult education.

Elias and Merriam (1995) contend that "humanism took hold of the learner-centeredness of the progressive approach to dull education, and radicalism carried to further lengths the social change impulse of progressivism" (p. 69). As Elias and

Merriam explain, the use of more radical approaches has been adopted and incorporated by community-based educators committed to helping individuals make personal and political change. Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich, two proponents of radical education movements, supported the more radical stance discussed by Elias and Merriam. Elias and Merriam point to Freire and Illich both of whom acted "in the political sense of utilizing education to bring about social, political and economic changes in society" (p. 139). Freire (1974) insisted that community education could not help the community meet its needs without political action beyond the classroom. The philosophical orientations of progressivism and radicalism, as termed by Elias and Merriam have been the underlying approach to process and programs of community education.

Similarities and Distinctions of Community Education and Community Development

The efforts of the pioneers of the early 1900s to establish community education in Canada combined both education and political action. Their efforts were typically intended to be emancipatory in terms of helping people respond to the political, social, and economic hardship of the times (Evans & Boyte, 1986). However, as the economy grew in North America in the 1960s and 1970s, the community education movement moved out of the mainstream and came to be viewed as an alternative form for educating adults (Selman, 1995). Today, it is a basic premise of the field that community education is practiced outside of the adult education mainstream. As Merriam and Brockett (1997) have made this argument in very clear terms:

> The least visible of the adult educators are those who work outside of the mainstream. They are not typically found in formal institutions....They go by a number of names including community-based educators, popular educators, community activists, nonformal educators, social activists and radicals. (p. 247)

As Clark (1986) says, "Community education is seen as being directed towards the needs of meeting groups labeled 'disadvantaged'" (p. 187). Traditional public school education programs have the reputation of casting off students who don't "fit in." By contrast, community education programs are typically designed to offer an alternative to the marginalized, including those who leave school early. Mason and Randell (1995) support community-based education as meeting the needs, values, and attitudes of those groups of people outside the mainstream, and argue that community education can strengthen the relationship of education and social change. The issue, as they make clear, is that alternative systems often appear to be a threat to the status quo. Thus, the reputation of community education programs often suffer, as does its funding base.

Community education has a role in integrating community development and social change mandates into educational programs. According to Clarke, Kilmurray, and Lovett (1982), "The rediscovery of poverty and educational inequality...emphasized that education still had a role to play in compensating for the failure of the formal educational system and contributing to the struggle for social and political justice" (p. 28). As a result, policy makers, educational administrators, and practitioners today are implementing and revising many of the foundational efforts demonstrated by community education schools.

School Drop-out in British Columbia

A Canada-wide survey conducted in 1993 of 184,000 school leavers and 711,000 graduates found the high school noncompletion rate to be one in five (Devereaux, 1993). This figure (20%) closely matches recent studies in British Columbia which report a school attrition rate of 21% (Wood, 1998). Sixty-nine percent of the leavers interviewed were from high-risk backgrounds. It is interesting to note that "a high-risk background, however, did not inevitably mean early departure. A third of [school] graduates, in fact, were classified as high-risk" (Devereaux, p. 23).

Bell, Clague, and Lercher (1991) interviewed 220 administrators, teachers, parents, school service workers, and students to learn why students leave school in British Columbia. Their findings included family and community dysfunction, institutional weaknesses, immigration/integration difficulties, and systemic factors. Strategies they offered to address the drop-out problems included fundamental shifts required in pedagogical styles, changes in institutional policies and procedures, and program changes to integrate and include school, family, community, and the business sector.

Concurrently, there is a rise of alternate school programs in the K-12 system in British Columbia. As of the summer of 1999, within the Vancouver School Board K-12 system alone, there are 42 alternative schools in the secondary panel (Vancouver School Board Ready Reference, 1998). Many of these schools have waiting lists up to one year in length for admission. These schools offer specialized programs to address learning styles and special needs, addressing both rehabilitation and enrichment. These examples

reflect the students' and parents' disenchantment with the mainstream, the need for options, and the need for reforming classroom-based learning as it exists. Gagne (1996) argues that alternate schools meet the needs of marginalized youth, as conventional high school initiatives are not working. As he says, "Personal and social change are equally important to earning academic credit, one without the other is worth little" (p. 322). In addition, according to Levin and Young (1994): "Alternative schools within the public school system have a relatively long history of breaking down divisions between school and community," (p. 221). Adding to these findings, Neumann (1999) states that "alternative education programs have evolved in response to the social, emotional, and academic needs of adolescents identified as 'at risk' of dropping out or having dropped out of the regular school system" (p. 1). She identifies three main goals for alternative education programs: social/emotional development, career development, and intellectual development. However, although alternate programs have gained recognition and been formalized by the British Columbia Ministry of Education in the K-12 system, "alternative education students represent approximately one percent of the secondary school population" (p. 1).

Mirroring the demand for alternative education in the provincial school system is the number of young adults that attend adult secondary completion centres. Within the Vancouver School Board alone, the total number of secondary school leavers attending the adult education system is greater than the total number of students attending all 42 K-12 alternate secondary schools (personal communication, Director, Vancouver School Board Community Education Services, October 29, 1998).

The recent trends in British Columbia of an ongoing 20% dropout rate from schools, a growing demand for more young adult alternate programs, and an increase in the number of young adult students attending adult and college preparation programs to complete high school speak to the need for more educational options for young adults in British Columbia. The next two sections of the discussion examine some of the successful educational alternatives for young adults in North America.

Full-Service Alternative Schools

Today, community education still focuses on the historic goals of political and economic change, although programs and their delivery have been adapted and modified from the early experimental schools. Full-service schools today still combine community education elements with multiuse or inter-agency service to address a multitude of educational, social, and health needs. According to Dryfoos (1994a) and Guerriero et al. (1996b), full-service schools may be the most effective arrangement for achieving school, family, and societal goals. Guerriero et al. discuss the full-service model as the school and community working in a mutually agreeable partnership:

> It [the full-service school] provides and makes available a set of integrated services...and combines this with the pursuit of community empowerment and education through the development and participation of community members. Full-service schools are centres of learning and community. They are responsive, inclusive, and effective in meeting the complex and diverse learning needs of students...in addressing the challenges and realities of the community they serve. They are the hubs of a network of community organizations, agencies, and activities, which use integrated approaches to foster the development and well being of the entire community. (p. 65)

A vital aspect of launching full-service arrangements is to first conduct extensive local needs assessments prior to program development. Dryfoos (1994a), Lovett (1975), and Guerriero et al. (1996b) all maintain that once the demands of the community are identified, stakeholders can influence decision-makers and educate the media about the importance of integrating services in the school. Beyond the common starting point of a needs assessment, there are as many models of inter-agency collaborative delivery across North America as there are projects. Nevertheless, the common goal is to provide "improved accessibility and delivery of services [to a target group], but with distinctly different characteristics depending on the needs of the particular community in which school-linked service models have been implemented" (Guerriero et al., 1996a, p. 2).

Projects often differ depending on who the lead agency is. For example, if educational institutions are the originators or principal partners, the schools are usually called community schools. If the lead agency is a ministry of a municipal government, the lead agency may be a community centre, a local social service, or a health facility. Unfortunately, in terms of organizational structure, "no research studies have been identified that compare the effectiveness of school-based programs according to type of lead agency" (Dryfoos, 1994a, p. 145).

Barnett and Wilson (1994) identify the following key features of community-based full-service schools and add that these features are also their major strengths. First, full-service schools are accessible, both geographically (locally-based) and psychologically (non-threatening). They are user-centres (consumer-driven), affording participants a strong sense of ownership of their own learning. The management structure is decentralized. Programs of such schools are flexible, meaning consumers may enter

and leave programs as they need. As Barnett and Wilson note, the provisions of adult education in these schools rarely adhere to the demands of compulsory education. The approach is open, nondidactic, and informal. A range of delivery modes is applied to suit a range of learner needs.

Recent North American Models

The growing trend towards adult secondary community schools in the United States suggests that adult secondary completion programs should become a more integral part of Canada's public school system. Four exemplary models of the full-service community education approach that exist in the United States serve to illustrate the movement towards the full-service community education approach. All four centres are administered as K-12 schools serving children, youth, and their families. Two of the four centres have extended their K-12 programs to include adult secondary completion. All four schools are located in low-income neighbourhoods, which have high ethnic and economic diversity.

Intermediate School No. 218, New York City. Opened in 1992, Intermediate School No. 218 in New York City is a comprehensive example of school-based programming within a community centre. The original proposal for this school was initiated through a citywide volunteer agency which first gathered community resources to form it. The local Children's Aid Society, a non-profit social service agency, took the lead responsibility in "demonstrating its [organizing] capabilities and establishing credibility in the neighbourhood prior to opening the school" (Dryfoos, 1994a, p. 107). The Children's Aid Society developed a partnership with the New York City School

system and various private foundations provided funding (Dryfoos, 1996). The school facility now accommodates approximately 1200 Hispanic students and the school is locally called Salome Urena Middle Academics (SUMA), after a Latino poet. The teachers and resource teams provide a seamless program where community-based education programs are structured with health and social services on site. The services are available up to 15 hours per day, 6 days a week, 12 months of the year.

The family resource centre offers immigration and citizenship services. The school houses social workers, social assistance programs, services for employment, crisis intervention, drug prevention, adoption and foster services, and adult health education, as well as ESL, and life skills courses. The medical centre located at the centre includes dental and medical services, pediatric nurses, mental health workers, social workers, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a foster care worker, outreach workers, health care practitioners, and various interns (Dryfoos, 1994a, 1994b).

The school programs are administered jointly among the Children's Aid Society, the New York City School Board, the Fordham University School of Social Work and School of Education, and the school-based support team which is comprised of health and social services. Volunteers, parents, and community advisory groups are all part of the community connection. Within the school, advisory groups of students' parents meet weekly with staff to discuss school, family problems, career plans, and programs (Dryfoos, 1994b).

Hanshaw Middle School, Modesto, California. The urban centre of Modesto California is located in a poor, predominantly Hispanic community. In the late 1980s, it became a priority of the Modesto School District to "formalize arrangements with local

agencies for provision of services on school campuses" (Dryfoos, 1994a, p. 108). In 1990, a door-to-door needs assessment was carried out by Hanshaw Middle School administration to identify the need for accessible low-cost education and services required to meet the developmental educational, social, and health needs of both the children and youth in the area. In 1991, the California government passed the Healthy Start Support Services for Children Act "to establish innovative, comprehensive, school-based or school-linked health, social and academic support services throughout the state" (Dryfoos, p. 112). In 1991, Modesto City Schools was awarded a Healthy Start operational grant of 1.2 million dollars over a three-year period to fulfill its commitment to meeting social and health needs of a high-risk population.

The steering committee that initiated, designed, and continues to assist in the operation of this school, consists of many levels of advisory groups including representatives from directors of participating agencies, school board personnel, school staff, parents, students, and community members (Modesto City Schools, 1992). Opened in 1991 with a 13 million dollar campus, Hanshaw Middle School now accommodates about 1000 students and is organized into seven student houses, or communities. According to *Atlantic Magazine* (1991), Hanshaw is "something entirely new and different; a new building, a new kind of teacher, a new educational concept, a new way of thinking" (p. 14).

The physical site emulates a campus-style complex with an outdoor amphitheatre, fine arts studios, laboratories, auto shop, home economics facilities, gymnasium, multipurpose auditoria, band room, library, youth and recreation centres (Dryfoos, 1994a). Aspects of the program which have been found to be the most effective include

the mentoring program whereby college students at the California State University act as mentors for the Hanshaw students. Local businesses, including a radio network, a winery, an electrical company, a local newspaper, a department store, and various retail outlets have all successfully integrated entrepreneurialism and consumer education with the Hanshaw school program. Team teaching is practiced with each student learning on a one-to-one basis with teachers.

School Board funds, Healthy Start grants, and donations from the Stuart Foundation--a private foundation--enable onsite resources to be implemented for families. Such resources include mental health workers, medical and dental facilities, substance abuse prevention and treatment workers, parenting education, and youth development services. This model illustrates how public and private partners can work collaboratively in schools (Dryfoos, 1994b).

Flint Community Schools, Flint, Michigan. One of North America's most famous examples, Flint Community Schools were established by a number of community groups in Flint, Michigan, in response to the depression of the 1930s. The Mott Foundation, a private consortium, in conjunction with community groups such as the Flint Auto Workers, the Federal Work Relief Association, and the Flint School Board provided the funding for a new model school and its extended services (Flint Community Schools, 1997). The Flint Community Schools are actually a number of schools located within a ten block radius of each other and, as Buehring (1958) puts it: "Within it can be found most of the problems and resources of society" (p. 251).

The Flint Community Schools vision began with the view that:

> Educators had to develop a new shared view of learning, teaching, schooling, community life, and district operations so that mutually supportive relationships could take shape. A collaborative, learner-centered approach was needed to meet the demands for more ambitious learning. (Flint Community Schools Leadership Council, 1997, p. 4)

Today, Flint Community Schools is the biggest publicly funded community-based facility in the world where literacy to Grade 12 is available to all ages. It is an internationally known alternative school that serves 35,000 adult learners annually (Buehring, 1958). It has adjunct services from dental and medical support to toy banks. Over 5,000 learners enroll each year at the Mott Adult High School location for literacy, upgrading, secondary completion, business, and computer education (Flint Community Schools, 1996).

The list of programs available to Flint Community members is by far the most comprehensive to be found in the literature. Recreation and enrichment programs include all traditional team sports; individual sports such as golf, baton and karate; women's clubs; personal interest groups such as effective parenting; and senior volunteer programs. Child care is also provided on-site (Flint Community Schools, 1996).

Children, youth, and adults are encouraged to participate on community advisory councils within the Flint District. These councils represent schools, churches, business, and social service agencies. They advise the superintendent and school district on school-related issues. Up to 1,500 parents and community members are involved annually (Flint Community Schools, 1996). Over 100 formal and informal business partnerships exist

between Flint Community Schools and local owners, operators, and institutions. A few examples of the associated services include Child and Adolescent Services, a "Partners Program" that matches students with guest artists, a Human Relations Commission which helps with tenant/landlord disputes, and Junior Achievement where business people teach students economics (Flint Community Schools, 1996). These connections to local businesses, health, recreation, and service agencies affirm the vast support network evident in this community education project. As the Flint Community Schools literature (1996) explains:

> It is a pervasive attempt to provide comprehensive education to the entire community. This process renders an opportunity for citizens, schools, agencies, businesses, organizations, and foundations to become partners in addressing community and educational concerns. And translates into a caring committed, collaborative effort from all resources. The basic tenet of the Flint Community Schools supports learning, that is both an in-school and out-of-school experience making it critical to engage multiple partners to focus on learning as a life long process. (p. 1)

The Flint Community Schools Leadership Council (1997), comprised of a team of school staff and advisors, maintains that a collaborative learner-centered approach, combined with team teaching and a coalition of support services is the best way to provide inclusive education for every learner.

Flint Community Schools was a pioneer in the community school movement in the early 1900s. Today, support still comes to the school through private funding. Over the last century, "in the midst of dramatic change, the district continued to function as if little had changed" (Flint Community Schools, 1997, p. 9). As Selman (1991) concludes,

the modern community school movement in North America "takes its lead from the work of the Mott Foundation, based in Flint, Michigan" (p. 121).

Belmont Learning Complex, Los Angeles, California. The Belmont Learning Complex is within the Los Angeles Unified School District and is not yet operational. However, the proposal for its development is sufficiently comprehensive to make it worth discussing. The inner-city area where it will be located is called Temple-Beaudry. Due to over-population, lack of resources, and a lack of community services in the area, students have been bussed daily, 90 minutes each way, to attend schools in other school districts in the San Fernando Valley. This situation has contributed to a high dropout rate. The initial planning for a comprehensive local school started in 1993. The momentum of the Community School Task force to develop this proposal gained approval from the Los Angeles Unified School District in August 1994 (Program Director of Belmont Learning Complex, personal communication, March 31, 1998).

The State of California and the Board of Education, together with private and public joint venture partnerships, will pay for the academic components, including the administration of business partnerships, technology centres, career development, and academic programs. The mixed-use facilities will include a four-acre housing complex for seniors and low income residents, health, recreation, and social service facilities (Program Director of Belmont Learning Complex, personal communication, March 31, 1998).

Scheduled to open in year 2000, the Belmont Learning Complex promises to be a tightly woven, centralized system of academic programs, business partnerships (including government, industry, commerce, and community agencies), recreation, and social

service programs operating year round. It is proposed that the 35 acres site will house approximately 45,000 students in five houses, with Grade 6 through 12 being offered. Two of the five houses will be for adult education, providing GED preparation and testing, adult secondary completion, and career preparation to some 1,800 adults annually. A multidisciplinary approach with team teaching strategies will be used. As the Los Angeles Unified School District Planning and Development Office Brochure (1998) states: "Each academy house supports educational reform by providing a distinctive curricular career path where students receive a basic core of instruction as well as the chance to explore personal interests and develop job skill" (p. 2).

Some of the impressive components of this proposed full-service school include: a multi-faceted recreation site with racket sports, an aquatic centre, a triple gym and eight lane running track, sports fields and a lighted grandstand, a communications and entertainment academy, a theatre, a cafeteria, a technology and media centre, a retail component including a major supermarket, shops, housing, and a multitude of community services (Los Angeles Unified School District Planning and Development Office brochure, 1998; Program Director of Belmont Learning Complex, personal communication, March 31, 1998).

These four models are presented as some of the exemplary community-based alternate programs in North America. However, to evaluate new and established models, it is necessary to be familiar with evaluation methodology, as discussed next.

Evaluation of Educational Programs

Numerous researchers agree with Grotelueschen (1980) that educational evaluation practices differ according to the purpose, scope, and methodology used. Stake (1981) notes that the consensus is that evaluations are undertaken to determine the extent to which objectives are accomplished. Following is a brief review of how such evaluations may be undertaken.

Purposes and Types of Evaluation

The literature on evaluation confirms that most practitioners believe that a value, or qualitative component, is central to the purpose of the evaluation. For example, Grotelueschen (1980) and Scriven (1973) agree that evaluation determines worth or merit. For education, Stake (1976) describes evaluation as "finding out the merits and shortcomings of a program" (p. 32). Caffarella (1994) agrees noting that "the heart of program evaluation is judging the value or worth of an educational program" (p. 120). Mayne and Hudson (1992) say that evaluation is useful for improving programs and providing accountability. Cronbach (1983) views evaluation as a process of collecting information for decision making, while Patton (1986) emphasizes the use of evaluation results by stakeholders. As Patton states:

> Program evaluation is the systemic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs for use by specific people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions....This broad definition focuses on gathering data that are meant to be, and actually are, used for program improvement and decision making. (p. 14)

Posovac and Carey (1989) have built on Patton's insistence that evaluation should be useable. They regard evaluation as a tool which can help identify "whether the human service actually does help people in need without undesirable side effects" (p. 3).

According to Grotelueschen (1980), if an evaluation is to be well conducted, a decision to use a particular type of evaluation process should incorporate key factors such as the purpose of the evaluation; the appropriate philosophy to be used with the purpose; the methodology, framework, quality; and the usefulness of the study to the user population. Knox (1985) adds that the "focus, scope, approach, and design depend on the purpose, audience and the resources" (p. 67). Caffarella (1994) discusses program evaluation within the adult education literature in terms of the process, the goals, and the usefulness of feedback for program planners, participants, instructors, administrators, community groups, and other stakeholders.

Caffarella (1994) defines program evaluation as "a process used to determine whether the design and delivery of a program were effective and whether the proposed outcomes were met" (p. 119). Furthermore, Caffarella asserts that program evaluation serves many purposes, specifically the process

> helps keep staff focused on the goals and objectives of the program, provides information for decision making on all aspects of the program, identifies improvements in the design and delivery of the learning events, increases application of the learning by participants, allows for program accountability, provides data on the major accomplishments of the program, and identifies ways of improving future programs. (p. 120).

Whether program evaluation is used for collecting data for decision making, for program improvement, for planning future programs, or for assessing the design of an existing program, it is clear that it is necessary to clarify the purpose and the focus of the program

evaluation at the outset. According to Caffarella (1994), one or more techniques can be used for collecting data "depending on the purpose, the evaluation approach, and the type of information needed" (p. 133). Following is a brief discussion of differing approaches to evaluation.

Formative and Summative Approaches to Evaluation

Two central concepts in evaluation are formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation "is intended to increase the effectiveness of on-going educational programs and activity. Evaluation information is collected and used to correct and improve on-going activity" (Sergiovanni, 1979, p. 372). Patton (1990) agrees, saying that formative evaluations look at the object of study within a specific context to improve effectiveness within that setting. According to Caffarella (1994), summative evaluation "focuses on the results or outcomes of a program" (p. 120) and serves to assess its effectiveness and responsiveness.

A decision to conduct either a formative or summative evaluation must be based on certain criteria. Deshler (1984) has identified two major factors for this consideration: the purpose of the evaluation and the stage of program development. According to Scriven (1973), formative evaluations are used for improving or changing a program while it is in progress, whereby summative evaluation is generally used for validation and accountability outcomes, and is product-oriented. Peterson (1988) supports Scriven's distinction saying that formative evaluation is used to determine how well an educational plan or activity is being conducted: "[formative evaluation] is an ongoing process that is started early and carried through to the end of the project" (p. 281). Peterson uses the

term "impact evaluation" to describe the summative evaluation process that is used "to determine the extent to which the program or instructional objectives were achieved" (pp. 281-282). Summative evaluations are often used at the conclusion of an educational program to justify or assess a program's outcomes (Knox, 1986; Posovac & Carey, 1989). Wlodkowski (1999) supports the summative product approach for adult education and views evaluation as a means to measure how much change and growth has occurred as a result of an educational experience. Once a program has been implemented, or completed, "summative evaluation is used to determine the extent to which the goals were met" (Kaufman & Thomas, 1980, p. 111). Thus, timing and purpose are essential considerations when designing an educational evaluation.

Data Collecting Methodology

Much has been written on data collection methodologies. To collect qualitative data in either a summative or formative evaluation, interviews and surveys can be particularly appropriate for community-based program evaluations (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), as seen in the following discussion.

Interviews and Questionnaires

Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggest that "interviewing itself should be thought of as an almost indispensable tool in the tactics of the naturalistic inquirer" (p. 155). One-to-one interviews can be used with preselected individuals for in-depth or brief discussions. Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993) suggest that the conditions must be right for an interview and add that interviews exist on two levels: the level of content and the level of

relationship. They note that these two aspects influence each other. McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (1996) suggests that interviews are useful if the research is evaluating an outcome. Guba and Lincoln (1985), and McNiff et al. (1996) say that oral questioning offers more direct access to the thoughts, feelings, attitudes and opinions of the participants, and that "interviews have a distinct advantage over a questionnaire because you get richer feedback as a result of being able to probe further" (McNiff et al., p. 101).

Interviewing may be categorized in two ways: structured (or focused) and unstructured (or exploratory) (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). As Guba and Lincoln explain: "Structured interviews are likely to be used in situations in which representative samples of persons are asked identical questions about something that interests the investigator. All respondents are taken to be of equal importance" (p. 164). On the other hand, the unstructured interview allows the respondent to elaborate on questions in an undirected manner.

According to Guerriero et al. (1996b), questionnaires are useful for soliciting written responses and feedback from a targeted group on a specific set of common questions. They are typically inexpensive, can be self-administered, and are often logistically easier to manage than interviews (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Questions should be well designed to minimize interpretation, should use the local language, and should have an inviting format to interest and keep participants. Altrichter et al. (1993) insist that "the usefulness of a questionnaire depends principally on the quality of the questions as follow-up questions are possible only in a limited way, if at all" (p. 11). Personal contact at some point, such as a follow-up telephone call, can also be helpful in the questionnaire return process. Limitations include the fact that there can be an inaccurate interpretation

of questions, there is rarely an opportunity for immediate clarification of answers, the literacy rate of participants may be a barrier, return rates can be low and, since responses vary, data can be more difficult to tabulate than one might initially expect (Altrichter et al.).

Analysis and Reporting Data

Altrichter et al. (1993) claim that analysis of data "should result in a deeper understanding of the situation, and a 'new' practical theory that can extend existing understanding. Through analysis, data, and experiences are restructured and practical theories elaborated" (p. 121). Miles and Huberman (1984) summarize the essential elements of the analytic process. These include reading data, selecting data, presenting data, interpreting data, and drawing conclusions.

Miles and Huberman (1984) assert that reviewing data and making data summaries immediately after it is collected can provide a better understanding in relating data to the research question later. They emphasize that selected data should be presented in an easy to read form such as a diagram, outline, or table, limited to one page. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) say, "One important method of getting conceptual leverage on data is organizing them into categories (coding them)" (p. 117). Coding is often the best way to create order out of a large sampling of data. According to Altrichter et al. (1993): "Categories (features) need to be chosen which are relevant to the research question and at the same time partially express the contents of the data" (p. 124). In addition, by grouping observations into classes that share properties, unimportant or irrelevant aspects of the data can be eliminated (Durso & Mellgren, 1989).

Two popular ways of coding data are the deductive and the inductive methods. Altrichter et al. (1993) describe these as follows:

> According to the deductive method, categories are chosen from the researcher's theoretical knowledge and the data are then searched for relevant passages: in this case the development of categories is independent of the data. According to the inductive method, categories are chosen during and after scrutinizing the data: in this case the categories are 'derived' from the data. (p. 124)

Once categories are established and data are assigned to each, conclusions can be drawn from the common themes. A triangulation process of bringing different data sets together can be useful with qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Triangulation consists of combining different methods of data collection "whereby data on a particular situation are collected from three perspective 'corners'" (Altrichter et al., p. 115). Triangulation is an important method for contrasting and comparing different accounts of the same situation. As an evaluative tool, triangulation facilitates the identification of commonalities among differing perspectives. As a result, "Where the different perspectives agree with one another, the interpretation is considered more credible" (Altrichter et al., p. 117).

This brief discussion of methods of data collection, and the earlier discussion of community-based alternatives in North America, is now followed by a discussion of the summative evaluation project I conducted at the Gathering Place.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

This chapter presents the results of a summative evaluation of the recently developed, full-service community education centre for adults, the Gathering Place Education Centre in Vancouver, British Columbia. The discussion begins with an overview of the Centre's operational programs and processes then turns to the design and implementation of the evaluation study. Results of the evaluation are presented in the final two sections of this chapter.

Overview of the Centre's Educational Programs and Processes

To understand the context of the evaluation, it is important that key elements of the Education Centre be discussed. The following section covers staffing and organizational structure, types of programs offered, processes used in the offerings, changes in programming over the years, and demographics of the participants involved in the study.

Description and Types of Programs Offered

As briefly noted in chapter 1, the Gathering Place Community Centre is a large community-based complex offering health, recreation, social, and educational programs for youth and adults. As all programs are free, membership to the centre is one dollar per year to help cover administrative costs and materials. The Gathering Place Education

Centre occupies about half of the main floor of the larger Gathering Place facility. It consists of a large open drop-in centre for self-paced programs, two classrooms, a computer lab, a small kitchen, a small work area for students and staff, and an office. The computer room consists of nine IBM Pentium computers, Internet access, and state of the art software. The Education Centre is open Monday to Thursday 10am - 8pm, and on Fridays from 10am - 5:30pm, 12 months a year. The Education Centre is for learners of all ages and educational levels. The British Columbia Ministry of Education requires that adult students be 19 years or over; however, the Education Centre has waived this age requirement to accommodate school-aged youth. Youth as young as 16 and adults as old as 70 attend. However, the majority are adults between the ages of 18 and 40.

The Gathering Place Education Centre offers programs ranging from literacy through to GED preparation and Grade 12 diploma courses. Programs are self-paced and students come in on a continuous intake basis. One large room accommodates all of the students enrolled in any self-paced program. The self-paced ABE curriculum includes modules for literacy, reading and writing improvement, math skill development, literature appreciation, preparation for entrance exams to trade programs, integrated community research projects, computer skill development, and GED preparation. Over 40 secondary school credits are offered as part of the GPEC self-paced program through a partnership with the Greater Vancouver Distance Education Centre, which allows students to attain a traditional Grade 12 diploma. Gathering Place students are given free tuition at other Vancouver School Board adult education centres for additional courses as they may need them.

The Education Centre offers only three structured courses. These include Language Arts and the Community, which is designed for independent youth. This course combines language arts from literacy through to Grade 10 with life skills and current cultural and political events. It involves group work, peer teaching, field trips, and communication skill development. Additionally, two levels of computer courses are offered: Level 1, Introduction to Computers, and Level 2, Word Processing and Desktop Publishing. These three structured classes run for nine weeks on a quarter system with enrollment intake in September, November, February, and April. All other courses are unstructured and students enter on a continuous intake basis.

Staffing and Organizational Structures

The Gathering Place Community Centre is a joint project between the City of Vancouver Department of Social Planning, the Ministry of Social Services, and the Vancouver School Board. As discussed briefly in chapter 1, the Gathering Place Community Centre Association, which oversees the entire complex, has an elected board of directors and subcommittees which represent programs and departments. The purpose of the GPCC Association is to advise the Gathering Place Director on the formulation and implementation of all aspects of management policy including budgets, staffing, program development, use of the building, and relationships of the facility to the community (Greenwell, 1998). The Centre's operational budget is over one million dollars per year (Greenwell). As MacKenzie (1996) states:

> The City of Vancouver contracts with the Ministry of Social Services for the Health Centre--showers, laundry, delousing, donated clothing, and hygiene products--about eighty thousand dollars annually, and with the Vancouver School Board to run the Education Centre--about three hundred thousand dollars annually. (p. 7)

Excluding the director, approximately 30 staff are employed by the City of Vancouver's Community Services Division in the larger Gathering Place Community Centre. Staff roles are varied and include such positions as Security Department Head, Volunteer Coordinator, Kitchen Department Head, Health Centre Department Head, Recreation Coordinator, and Youth Programmer.

Turning to the Gathering Place Education Centre, approximately 12 people comprise the Vancouver School Board educational staff. The roles here include one off-site administrator, one academic advisor, an office clerk, two instructors-in-charge who are also department coordinators, three course instructors, and from three to five teaching assistants, depending on the semester. The entire GPEC staff either makes up or has direct input to the staff committee--an advisory committee which makes recommendations to the Vancouver School Board management, as per the collective agreement. An Education Committee, made up of students and community members who have taken an interest in voicing the needs of the school, reports to the Gathering Place Education Centre staff committee as well as the Gathering Place Association Board of Directors.

Volunteerism is a large component of the operation of the Gathering Place Community Centre. According to MacKenzie (1996), this creates a cost saving to the City: "This [volunteerism] is the most valuable asset the Gathering Place owns, actually

measured in dollars and cents terms" (p. 10). In 1998, the GPCC had 150 active volunteers registered and 50 employed staff. In any year, the ratio of volunteers to staff is approximately three to one (Gathering Place Volunteer Coordinator, personal communication, October 29, 1998).

There are approximately 12 volunteers involved in the Education Centre in any given semester. Only those tutors with previous experience and training are encouraged to work in the Centre, as the Education Centre has no funding for a formal volunteer training program. Each volunteer is oriented to the Centre's programs under the supervision of an instructor and each is given ongoing informal feedback. Volunteers offer their assistance in specific content areas such as literacy, reading comprehension, writing, senior level math and science, and literature/arts. In addition, the computer room is run solely by volunteers. The volunteers provide extensive one-to-one support and are integral to the academic self-paced drop-in program.

Processes Used in the Course Offerings

Self-directed learning is at the core of the Gathering Place Education Centre drop-in program. Intake interviews are used to identify students' strengths, interests, fears, and goals. Students are encouraged to work with staff to design their own learning plans, choose their own resources, and complete research projects of meaning to them. The self-paced drop-in program which GPEC offers provides a cooperative learning environment where students work together regardless of grade level or curriculum focus. Peer tutoring occurs informally and contributes to the cooperative nature of the centre while teaching staff and volunteers in both the drop-in centre and the computer lab provide one-to-one

support and small group instruction. Team teaching allows many learning styles to be accommodated. Student-centered teaching approaches include one-to-one tutoring, mentoring, peer teaching, and small group sessions. This results in more personal attention, individualized instruction, and the customization of teaching styles to learners' needs. Personal successes are encouraged and rewarded through the Student Recognition Board, the Gathering Place newsletter, and the district bulletin. Learning centre rules are discussed and established by the Educational Committee, made up of learners and staff. Students consult with staff regularly for ongoing assessment, evaluation of skills, and educational advising.

Because adult education in the Vancouver School Board does not have funding for a special needs resource staff, assessment, instruction, and evaluation of special needs are not available to students. Instead, identification of special needs and implementation of learning strategies is implemented through informal consultation between staff and students.

Changes in Programming over the Years

The Education Centre's programs have changed and evolved since its inception in 1995. The volunteer program was not well staffed when it began in 1995. To oversee the computer lab, the City of Vancouver Community Services Division hired a proctor to tutor learners. Today, the computer room is staffed by approximately 10 volunteers and supervised by the staff of the Education Centre.

Secondary school credits as required by the British Columbia Ministry of Education were offered as structured courses from 1995 to 1996. However, in the early

years, the courses did not attain the minimum number of students, as set by the collective agreement. The staff came to learn that the GPEC student population was not one that could commit to structured courses. In 1996, the Gathering Place Education Centre formed a partnership with the Greater Vancouver Distance Education Centre and began offering over 40 secondary credit courses from Grade 9 to Grade 12. For the secondary completion students, this was a change to a self-directed, self-paced approach and it made a significant difference in the student retention rate.

From 1996-1998, the Centre offered a structured class for youth called the Integrated Academic Program (IAP). This program focused on skill development in the core Grade 10 subjects, mathematics, science, English and social studies. Again, the class numbers could not meet the requirements of the collective agreement and the course was cancelled in 1998. Language Arts and the Community is the current version of this course. Extensive incentives for participation are included in this course such as free tickets to cultural shows and arts events, bus passes, and hot lunches. It is now in progress and is struggling to maintain the Vancouver School Board class minimum.

Demographics of Educational Participants

As seen in chapter 1, most of the residents of the Downtown South are there because of a life crisis or the need to escape from their home environment or their past. As Butt (1991) explains, many have a history of drug or alcohol addiction, abuse, mental illness, unemployment, crime, and/or street involved lifestyles. This marginalized population lives with issues as poverty, illness, malnutrition, lack of housing, low self-esteem, and hopelessness. Such poverty and the homelessness carry associated problems

of poor physical, mental, and emotional health, which can lead people to desperate measures for food, clothing, warmth, and belonging. To survive they often turn to drugs, alcohol, dealing, and prostitution. As Mass found in a 1993 study of the Downtown South:

> Panhandling, crime, drug dealing and sex trade work are means of survival. Often youth move through these modes of survival as they become more entrenched. The "at-risk" behaviour associated with these activities also become progressively more serious. Graduation to serious crime, substance abuse, pimping, violence and HIV/AIDS risk is common. (p. 4)

This is the population served by the Gathering Place Education Centre. As mentioned earlier, the students are typically Canadian-born; English speaking; and mainly adults from age 18 to 40, who were raised and educated in the mainstream educational system. Most want to get out of the cycle of street life and improve their situation through an alternative, informal, safe learning environment to upgrade or complete their Grade 12 (MacKenzie, 1994).

Designing the Evaluation

The following section describes the design of this study and the instruments used. It also includes my role in the methodology and procedures.

Initial Organizational Decisions

As the coordinator of the Education Centre, I initially consulted with the staff committee about carrying out an evaluation study to examine the merits and

shortcomings of the Centre as compared with the founding needs assessment completed in 1993 by the then Director of the Gathering Place Community Centre. The staff committee and the Director supported the idea as the Gathering Place had not budgeted for a formal program evaluation but felt one was needed.

I received written permission to carry out the study from both the director of the GPCC and the director of the Vancouver School Board (Community Education Services Division). I was permitted to name the Gathering Place Community Centre and the Gathering Place Education Centre in this thesis. I also received written permission to use the name of the City of Vancouver in this study. However, people's names are fictitious throughout with the exception of the first director who has given me written permission to use her name.

Methodology and Procedures

In consultation with my St. Francis Xavier University program advisor, I decided that feedback from groups who know the program well and who are directly involved in the full-service school could provide valuable qualitative data. Three groups were selected, including: (a) the staff employed by the Vancouver School Board who administer, instruct, and support the school program; (b) the staff employed by community service agencies who are collaboratively involved in the Downtown South Network of service providers, and (c) the students attending the Education Centre. In consultation with the Education Centre staff committee and my advisor, I decided that the evaluation would take place over a six-month period, allowing time to design and

implement the instruments, and to conduct the collection of data. Based on overall numbers, I decided that 10-15 participants would be needed for each group.

Design of the Instruments

A semi-structured interview format was selected for the student population, and a mail out semi-structured questionnaire was used for the two staff groups. I had the freedom to design the evaluation instruments and to consult freely with a variety of individuals and agencies for ideas, opinions, and support. The questions for both the interview and the questionnaire were decided on with input from Centre colleagues and my advisor. They included an opening series of questions with prompting cues designed to encourage respondents to elaborate on each question. The interview questions and questionnaire underwent four drafts through pilot tests in consultation with the GPEC staff and my advisor. The specific questions were adapted slightly for each feedback group.

Each set of questions began with a background information section specific to the group being surveyed. The students' demographics were collected, including: gender, age, academic level, housing, income assistance, number of schools attended in K-12 system, and reasons for coming to the Gathering Place. For the service providers, the opening questions focused on the type of service they provided, the target population they interacted with, and their comments on the GPEC. Background questions for the Education Centre staff included items such as role in the school, number of years teaching, and experience in community education settings.

After demographics, the second set of questions for all three groups included questions specific to GPEC. These questions were very similar among groups and

followed the same sequence. The language differed among the three sets of questions in order to accommodate respondents' experience, roles, and mandates.

Interviews were used with the learners since the information could be emotionally charged and questionnaires were deemed to be inadequate in this case. I decided that I would interview the student group. As a trusted Gathering Place Education Centre employee with student rapport, I knew I could access feedback more deeply and accurately if I interviewed the individuals myself rather than handing out a survey questionnaire, bringing in a stranger, or involving one of the other teachers. As noted under the limitations section of the thesis, the fact that I was the interviewer was not a major problem as bias was reduced by having a prepared set of questions. By contrast, the staff received semi-structured questionnaires which were returned unsigned.

Baseline Data from Prior Needs Assessment

In 1991, Diane MacKenzie was appointed the Director of the Gathering Place Community Centre. As noted earlier, between 1991 and 1993, she completed more than 1000, hour-long interviews. A storefront drop-in office was set up in what is now the GPCC library, and the community was invited to share their ideas and needs regarding what programs and services should be implemented. This research effort comprised the early needs assessment stage which was critical in ultimately identifying the essential components in the establishment of the GPCC. MacKenzie (1994) compiled the data and wrote a report to the Council of City of Vancouver summarizing this community consultation process which included community members, community groups, and service providers. As a set of goals, the following items were identified:

> Recreational and social space (including weight room, activity/aerobics room, auditorium, TV lounge, space for active and passive games, arts and crafts), low cost healthy dining (kitchen and coffee shop/serving area) plus an opportunity to participate in food preparation and sale, an Education Centre with classrooms, computer lab and common space, Health Services including Laundromat, dry-cleaning, delousing, showers, luggage storage, and therapeutic hot tubs). and a Library/Reading room. (p. 4)

The City of Vancouver agreed to provide 3.4 million dollars for the purchase and improvements to a selected 21,000 square foot site in the centre of the Downtown South. Opened in March 1995, the Gathering Place Community Centre was more of a community-based social project rather than a community centre or a school.

My evaluation study was conducted against the original base-line criteria provided by the community needs assessment. I added specific issues to investigate, including the effectiveness of the operational components, the programs, and the services of the GPEC. I sought commentary on the effectiveness of similar components of the GPCC, along with an evaluation of the working relationship between the GPCC and the GPEC.

Conducting the Evaluation Study

The implementation of the evaluation involved distributing the survey questionnaires to the two staff groups and selecting participants from the student population for interviews. The selection of the student sample is discussed later. For both staff groups, a cover letter accompanied a survey which included a brief description of my study, a completion date for the survey, and a release of information form allowing

me to use the data in my final report. For the Education Centre staff group, I distributed 16 survey questionnaires into employees' mailboxes, 12 to current employees, and 4 to former employees. In addition, I spoke to each person to remind them of the study and encourage them to participate. Within this group, 11 out of 16 staff members completed a questionnaire (69%). Those who participated included: one former administrator, one active administrator, four teachers, three teachers' assistants, one support staff, and one academic advisor. The range of their employment period with Gathering Place Education Centre was from seven months to three and a half years. The average number of years of experience for which a staff member had worked in other alternative educational settings ranged from ten months to ten years.

To reach the Downtown South community workers, I made a comprehensive list of the service providers most frequently connected to the GPEC. The locations of the agencies varied from being within the same building or street to a close proximity within the immediate neighbourhood. I made personal contact with each person to describe my study and to inform them of its significance. After the initial contact, I distributed about half of the questionnaires into mailboxes and about half personally, depending on the availability of the worker. A total of 30 questionnaires were distributed.

Nineteen out of the 30 questionnaires were completed and returned (63%). The staff roles represent a multitude of mandates and included one street nurse, one drug and alcohol counselor, one housing worker, one librarian, one director of security, one security personnel, one financial aid worker, one family worker, one employment counselor, two directors of safe houses, one mental health worker, one outreach worker, one community programmer, two volunteer coordinators, one street youth worker, and

two employees of the Ministry of Children and Families. The target population of the Downtown South community is well known to these individuals. The data revealed that between 5-15 clients are referred to one of these community service agencies by the Education Centre school per month. The service providers group completed the questionnaires based on the feedback they have received from their clients over their term of employment.

Selection of Student Evaluation Group

For selection of the Gathering Place Education Centre students, I first consulted with teaching staff and then made a list of individuals who met the study's criteria. As described in chapter 1, the criteria included the requirements that English must be their native language. The student must be Canadian-born (not a new immigrant). The student must have attended a Canadian educational institution as a child and youth, and left before finishing Grade 12. The student must have attended GPEC for at least ten months to show continuity and have enough time to judge the effectiveness of the program. The student must have enrolled in the Education Centre with the goal of secondary education or GED completion. The student must have shown positive progress based on their intake levels and their educational goals.

Students' names were randomly selected from a formulated list of students meeting the criteria. A total of 16 were selected. I approached these students, explained the project, asked them to participate, and explained why I needed their feedback. Each gave permission to participate. Only one student declined the opportunity to participate. I conducted 16 interviews with 7 women and 9 men. Three of the 16 respondents are of

First Nations descent, all 16 are Canadian-born with English as their first language. The age range was from 17-53 years old. Two of the 16 are parents (both women) who were raising their children while attending school. Grade levels spanned literacy through Grade 12 and, at the time of writing this report, 2 of the 16 had just graduated in the previous semester, one with a GED and one with a Grade 12 diploma.

Demographics of the Student Evaluation Group

At the time of the interviews, 12 of the 16 students interviewed were receiving income assistance, although the other 4 had been at some point in the past. All students were living or had at some time lived in the Downtown South community. Six out of the 16 had moved out of the Downtown South area to other locations, yet were still attending the GPEC as their home school. Nine of 16 were living in neighbourhood SROs. Five of 16 were living in shared accommodations in or out of the neighbourhood, and 2 were living in subsidized housing projects. Twelve out of 16 had lived on the streets intermittently in their lives. All of the students interviewed left the Canadian mainstream system between Grades 5 and 11, when they were between the ages of 8 and 18. The most recently that a student had left school was one year previous; the longest time away from school was 38 years. Four out of the 16 were identified in the mainstream K-12 system as special needs and had been part of a special needs classroom for some period.

Interview Structure and Interactions

I set up interviews at least a week in advance. The interviews took place either in a school classroom or outside of the school in a café or restaurant. Each session lasted from one and a half to two hours. I first explained to the students why I was carrying out this study and that their feedback would be invaluable to making the Education Centre better. Each student signed a "release of information form" and agreed to have their comments used anonymously in a report. I guaranteed confidentiality and made sure the students understood my intentions.

I led each interviewee through the interview protocol and I hand recorded notes as we spoke. Some students asked for clarification on questions. Answers regarding background information were quite factual. Questions about the student's scholastic background and reasons for leaving and returning to school were lengthy. Students spontaneously shared their personal life stories, illustrating their comfort with the questions and me.

At times students needed prompting to explain a point more fully for the Gathering Place Education Centre specific questions. My prompting often facilitated more comments on questions about programs or services. Students often provided specific examples of how programs or services are effective or are in need of improvement.

Data Analysis

Immediately after receiving a mail-back questionnaire or conducting an interview, I selected and highlighted pertinent information. Highlighted "background information" was used to describe each group of respondents. Analysis of the data included triangulation of the feedback collected from each of the three groups. For each Gathering Place specific question, I made a summary chart. Across the top of the summary chart were three columns with the following labels: teaching staff, service providers, and students. In the three columns I wrote in point form the differing groups' comments, attitudes, feelings, and opinions so that each respondent was represented. I included quotes verbatim that illustrated a point well. Because there was often some overlap of comments in each column, I check marked the comments as they were repeated, and added quotations by the respondents where appropriate. Next, I cross-referenced the themes that were common among the columns (groups) and synthesized the information into two categories for each research question: merits and shortcomings. I separated the summary charts into two sections: operational findings and specific programs.

The findings are now presented and discussed in some depth because they hold such significance for adult educators working in, or considering the development of, alternate schools for adults. This, together with the exemplary schools discussed in chapter 2, leads to the presentation of a model in the last chapter of the thesis.

Findings

From the triangulation of data, several common themes emerged. The following summarizes the findings regarding the overall operation of the Education Centre.

Reasons for Students Using the Educational Centre

The major reasons given as to why the students left the K-12 school system were dislike with the mainstream system and personal problems at home. Many said they were afraid of school and "didn't get enough help, didn't fit in with their peer group, felt isolated and alone." One student, identified as special needs in the K-12 system, said that he was not learning and began "acting out." He was treated as a behavioural problem and kicked out. Some students said that once they failed, "what was the point of school?" Some students became involved with the law and were sent to detention centres or jail. Others wanted to leave their homes because their personal lives and families were so "messed up." Some expressed not wanting to leave school, but they had to leave home "to survive." Many ended up on the streets doing "heavy drugs," prostituting, dealing drugs, or living the street life.

Students' reasons for returning to school included boredom, being forced by the Ministry of Social Services to upgrade their education, needing to gain job skills or retrain, wanting to meet people, wanting to learn to read, wanting to become computer literate, needing to cope with a mental illness, or needing to get out of a street-involved lifestyle. The need to gain skills and the need for the right type of school were the two most common themes. "No one wants to hire me without any education or skills," several

said. "I always knew I could do school, I just needed to find the right place," was another common response.

All students interviewed expressed their discontent in not having completed their schooling. As one student put it: "I always felt like a failure not having my education." They all felt that formal education does afford choices, freedom from dependence on social assistance, and increased self-esteem. Most said that coming back to school was a function of being psychologically prepared to do so. As one student expressed it: "My street life was coming to an end, timing was right." Even though some students had tried to return to educational programs previously, they said they were not ready at that time.

Concerning Teaching Methodologies

All three groups of respondents made positive comments on the teaching approaches in the drop-in centre. Based on the student interviews and the returned questionnaires from the two staff groups, it was found that all groups agreed that student-centered approaches such as mentoring, one-to-one tutoring, peer tutoring, and small group learning were successful. Also, individualized instruction and customization of teaching styles to learners' needs were seen as highly positive. All groups of respondents asserted that these approaches are excellent for students needing extra attention and feedback. In addition, they liked the fact that there is no segregation of special needs students from others.

Similarly, the three groups of respondents said that the team teaching approach makes a big difference to people who have rejected or left a more formal educational program. One staff member reported on one questionnaire: "It is more holistic, offering

learners a choice of teaching styles and expertise." Students said they realized that teachers are not omniscient and that not one teacher has all the answers. The student group unanimously agreed that the teachers are not authoritative, yet "laid back and cool." One said, "There is low pressure, yet still lots of direction and options."

From the data collected from the student interviews and the staff questionnaires, it was evident that team teaching and student-centred learning forced the students to make choices and promoted independence. Students commented on having to discern for themselves what they believed to be useful and valuable. One student said, "I can choose who I want to go to about what, everyone has something different to offer." Data revealed that the teachers as a team provided more academic and nonacademic support for the students than one teacher could have provided alone. Another common theme focused on the effectiveness of the intake procedure and the regular feedback sessions which provided ongoing skill assessment, educational advising, and individualized planning.

Students, along with both staff groups, commented on the educational philosophy of the Education Centre. They noted that rules are few but firm, non-obtrusive, and arrived at in consultation with the students' education committee. Students repeatedly noted that teachers are professional yet "go the extra mile," "are real," "accept all students alike," and "treat students with respect and understanding."

Data collected from the student interviews revealed that the Centre became a support system or "functional family" where the students built up positive corrective relationships with the teaching staff and their peers. The student group saw the teaching staff as more caring, committed, and compassionate than those at other schools they had

attended. "The teachers make it a priority to address the whole person," one student said. Another commented: "What kept me here was the support system, I stayed in [this] school because of the teachers."

The questions also addressed ways in which the teaching methodologies and approaches are ineffective. The students interviewed and the Education Centre staff who completed questionnaires agreed that, initially, team teaching can be confusing and unorganized for vulnerable or low-functioning students. It is often difficult for these learners to adjust. One student said: "Sometimes there are too many cooks in the soup." Staff agreed that team teaching is very effective except when communication breaks down between members. Then students suffer. The community service providers group found it difficult to comment on this aspect because they had not received specifics about ineffective teaching methodologies from their clients.

The majority of the feedback from the student interviews and the questionnaires from both staff groups stated the need for more volunteers in the Education Centre and in the GPCC. All three groups stated that volunteers gave students additional support, especially where more one-to-one tutoring was needed. One student who had benefited from a partnership with a volunteer tutor said: "It has been one of the highlights of my learning experiences."

Importance of Full-Service Features

A recurrent theme focusing on the full-service approach emerged from the student interviews and the questionnaires completed by the two staff groups. All respondents expressed satisfaction with the inclusive services, the foodbank, the medical agencies, the

efforts of the service workers, and the health and recreation facilities. A number of students commented that there was "always so much to do." All three groups of respondents commented on the inherent benefits that a community-based program affords people.

According to all three groups, the working relationship between the Gathering Place Education Centre and the wider centre, the Gathering Place Community Centre, is effective. As one student put it: "All the people in the community are networking wonders, and inter-service referral is common." Additional students' comments included: "I get advocacy here, legal advice, and my laundry done." "I get my food here, my messages and mail, I send faxes and have a shower." "I have a place to get my haircut for free and get my income tax forms filled out." "I use the library for the newspapers and the Internet." "I get help on my resume, and free access to computers." Given the living conditions of most of these students, these are vital daily supports.

On a social level, all three groups of respondents commented that GPCC acted as a meeting ground, a hub. The students noted how peer groups changed as a result of coming back to school. A sense of belonging and a healthy support network was established and connections with professional staff increased personal well being. As one student said: "I have no pager or phone, I need contact and I will get it at the Gathering Place." Another said: "I have my support here, I trust the staff, I now know how to deal with conflict in my life." One commented that "the structure of coming here every day has helped lift my depression," and another stated: "I have met lots of friends and I have a place to go at Christmas."

The student interviews indicated that students use the facilities on an as needed basis. Every student interviewed made use of at least one other service department besides the school. From the questionnaires completed by the service workers, one worker commented: "One stop shopping provides a connection, a community, and a cohesive network of support where people are engaged in many experiences and services." The data provided by the returned questionnaires of the two staff groups showed agreement that Gathering Place is unique and, because of its inclusion of secondary completion in a full-service centre, they said it is the best community centre of its kind in Canada.

Areas where the full-service features detract from overall effectiveness were also highlighted in this study. First, the student interviews and the questionnaires from both staff groups mentioned that the existence of many services at one site made exit from school too easy. That is, the services and the Gathering Place Community Centre itself can act as distractions from a commitment to education. Second, some students did not know about all the services offered by the Centre. They had not explored the programs involving the arts, recreation, or health, and did not know the extent of the support services. All of the community service workers and education staff agreed that funding cuts had affected accessibility to essential services, and the loss of programs hurts the overall functioning of the full-service approach.

Safety and Security of Facilities

The majority of students interviewed and questionnaires completed by the staff respondents mentioned the presence of security on site which gave them a feeling of

safety and protection, both physically and emotionally. A number of the Education Centre staff said that the Gathering Place Education Centre was the safest place they had ever worked, and that security was one of the Centre's strongest points. Many said the security department of the Gathering Place promotes a drug free, alcohol free, and hassle free policy. All three groups identified the physical site of the Gathering Place as a positive aspect of the centre. The students and the respondents of the questionnaire also agreed the central location in the neighbourhood is essential and effective. They said it provides accessibility for the residents in terms of proximity to their homes and understanding of their lifestyles. They said that the small size of the school, compared to other schools, contributes to more intimate community awareness. It is clear from the feedback collected that there is a social climate in the Centre that is emotionally safe and comfortable. As one staff put it: "It is a calm, safe, relaxed oasis and full of diversity of character." A few social workers claimed that it is "a living room for students providing ownership and routine to an otherwise chaotic life."

A disturbing theme that emerged was that the Centre was not always as safe as it could be. This theme was based on the observation that the GPCC sometimes facilitates a street-involved lifestyle. One student commented: "The patrons in the Centre can be a very influential peer group, drawing people into street life." A minority of the students and community workers were concerned that the GPCC can act as an enabler for ex-addicts and people in recovery. Accessibility is dangerous in this sense and vulnerable people may not feel safe. The data from the service providers and students identified women and youth as being most at-risk. As they said, the Centre may not be safe for people without strong boundaries. Specifically, a minority of students and community

workers noted the predatory behaviours of some patrons in the building saying they have seen drug dealings for heroine, pimping, and recruiting for prostitution. The majority of the service workers' responses asserted that the Centre's intention is not to bring people to the street, rather to take them away and provide safety from it. There were no safety concerns raised by the education centre staff surveyed.

The first floor houses the Education Centre, the library, and the theatre. All other services are located on the second floor. The data showed that there is a difference between the type of patrons accessing services on each floor. A number of the students said that they felt safe in the downstairs area but not upstairs, and stated that they prefer the Education Centre to anywhere else in the building. One student commented: "The nature of the people in the downstairs is different--they are more motivated and serious about their lives."

All of the respondents agreed, however, that the security staff is well trained, very cognizant of risk issues, and works in a preventative manner to keep problems such as predatory behaviours at a minimum.

Suggested Changes

Following are the most significant suggested changes. These are addressed again in chapter 4 under the recommendations section.

Hours of Operation

The Gathering Place Community Centre is open Monday to Saturday inclusive from 10am to 8pm, and is closed Sundays. The Education Center is open Monday to

Thursday 10am to 8pm, Fridays 10am to 5:30pm. The library is open Monday to Friday 10am to 6pm. Both the Education Centre and the library are closed Saturdays and Sundays. The Education Centre is open throughout Christmas holidays, March break, and summers. These hours were noted as being helpful, as they provide far more access than most K-12 schools in British Columbia. However, all three groups of respondents asked for more accessibility. As one student put it: "This is a resource place for all my needs, I would come everyday if it was open." Most felt that both the Gathering Place Community Centre and the Gathering Place Education Centre should be open all weekend, and several asked for some departments, such as the health centre, pool room, television lounge and fitness room, to be open 24 hours a day. All three groups also commented on the need for a bigger physical space, especially in the Education Centre. All three groups also commented that the Education Centre and library should not have been built across from the theatre because of the noise level from its programs and events.

Youth Centre

Data collected from the students interviewed and the completed questionnaires from the two staff groups revealed that a "youth specific lounge" should be designated, and more youth specific programs should be implemented. Intending to serve the 16-25 year old age population, youth specific programs would give youth a feeling of ownership and belonging. The comments said that youth specific programs like the successful *Slice Magazine*, published for and by street youth in Vancouver, the Youth

Food Bank, the United Youth Movement, and the youth out trips do exist at the GPCC, yet more youth-specific programs should be established.

Women's Centre

From the analysis of data, I found that this sample of students and staff want a space for women and more on-site support services for young families at the GPCC. It was suggested that a space be created for women and support groups and that peer counseling should be implemented. Currently, the parenting group is the only family activity in the centre.

Child Care Services

All three groups of respondents agreed that child care facilities are needed within the Gathering Place Community Centre. Local and accessible day-care would allow parents to frequent other GPCC services, including the Education Centre. Some students said that they left school due to the lack of day-care. To offset day care costs, a few staff suggested that day-care facilities could include practicum placements for Early Childhood Education Programs. They added that a day-care would have to be well protected from the rest of the building.

Career Centre Needed

The data collected from all three groups of respondents identified the need for a career center on site. The students and the two staff groups said that the computer room is

an excellent resource for resume writing and job search, yet there is no place to meet with counselors, to set up work placements, to prepare for interviews, or to obtain career support. The respondents suggested that a career centre could incorporate co-op placements, job training and job readiness workshops, job banks, and credit granting programs. All three groups would also like to see the Education Centre offer career exploration workshops, relevant job readiness modules, and co-operative work placements for secondary school credit.

Usefulness of Specific Programs

The program areas that are presently in place were examined and evaluated. The following summaries include both the positive and negatives aspects of the specific programs offered within the Gathering Place Community Center and the Education Centre.

Outreach and Advocacy

Questionnaires completed by the two staff groups included numerous comments on the need for more advocacy workers on site. Currently, one on-site advocate is scheduled to be at the GPCC once a week. The respondents noted that clients want a person present at the time of the crisis, not later. Several respondents suggested that a full-time support worker or crisis counselor be employed during each day and evening shift.

The two staff groups also agreed there could be more active outreach whereby staff or volunteers advertise the Centre. More community outreach may engage those

youth and adults not using the services. Furthermore, there is agreement between the education center staff and the community service worker feedback that the GPCC is very effective in terms of service provision and programs, but it has far to go in terms of community action and social change. The two staff groups here identified a significant need that was not brought forth in MacKenzie's 1994 report. To build a stronger political voice the commitment needs to come from the patrons themselves, they said. This point is addressed again in chapter 4.

Life Skills Courses, Literacy and Drop-In Programs

Respondents from all three groups identified a need for life skills courses. These types of programs are offered throughout the various social service agencies associated with Gathering Place. For example, anger management, parenting, and conflict management are funded by Family Services and delivered through community agencies. The respondents would also like to see similar courses integrated with the secondary school curriculum.

The Education Centre staff and service workers said they would like to see the literacy program in the Education Centre more fully developed. They noted that the Education Centre is losing literacy students due to the lack of trained volunteer tutors. The staff team is too small to commit one teacher to one student. As noted earlier, at present, the teaching staff provides informal training to volunteers when time permits.

The students interviewed and the two staff groups commented on the effectiveness of the drop-in centre as a resource room for all of the curriculum areas. They liked the multilevel exchange it allows between peers and the fluidity, and they

appreciated the levels of choice and integration of academic modules. In addition, the respondents noted the advantages of continuous intake, intake interviews, educational assessment procedures, non-mandatory attendance, self-paced scheduling, and the alternative teaching philosophy.

The data confirmed that the self-paced drop-in system provides a supportive experience for returning students. The unstructured format is ideal for people who lack the ability to commit and for those who resist authority. Two respondents said that "structure would just not work for this population" and that the drop-in "is a needed alternative to mainstream options." That attendance is not mandatory was recognized as a positive component encouraging responsibility and self-discipline.

Both the students interviewed and the staff groups said that a flexible curriculum is the key to the program's success and said this built self-direction and autonomy in the learning process. One new mother said: "Starting with Grade 11 Family Management got me interested in school again because I was allowed to study what I wanted." The students said they felt empowered by the fact that they could choose their learning plan without being pressured.

The data also made clear that completion of Grade 12 credits through the Distance Education School's liaison allows for portability and independent study. This means students can work at their own pace and get support from the school as needed. Study participants said this works for students that have external commitments, street involved lifestyles, or who are in transition. The students and the staff respondents agreed that implementation of Distance Education credits is an effective way to offer many courses in such a small school.

The data show that the Gathering Place Education Centre provides essential support for re-entry to school. As one student put it: "This was a perfect starting point for me, without Gathering Place as a six month transition period I think I would have been lost and dropped out."

However, while being effective for some, the lack of structure or "looseness" of the drop-in program evidently makes it easy for other students to ignore their studies and drop out. A theme identified from the data illustrates that the ABE modules within the drop-in program need to be more structured. In order to achieve greater structure in the ABE program, members in all three groups felt that follow up and tracking by teachers needs to be strengthened, and there needs to be more emphasis on the individualized educational plans. Evaluative tools such as end of unit assignments or tests, and entry/exit criteria are important components that are not being implemented and documented by all staff. Standard criteria for completion of each module would help with student retention, it was postulated. Some respondents noted that the team approach makes consistency and standardizing more difficult; however, staff could take more responsibility in record keeping, tracking curriculum units, and noting students' progress. The GPEC staff added that they would like to structure the ABE modules in the drop-in program more formally, and follow up and track the individual educational plans more closely.

The data collected from the students interviewed and from the questionnaires completed by the Education Centre staff showed agreement that the Distance Education Centre's credit courses' (Grades 11 and 12) hand-in activities and tests provide the structured evaluation that is missing for some of the ABE modules. Clearly, the drop-in system works for some, but not all.

All of the respondents agreed that the former integrated academic program for ABE students had been an excellent complement to the unstructured nature of the drop-in centre. Unfortunately, this program was cancelled in 1998 due to lack of enrollment. From the feedback collected about this now defunct program, it was apparent that all three groups found the program to be very effective academically; however, they said it lacked an integrated curriculum with the outside community, meaning research projects or liaisons with political groups, cultural events, and interest clubs. These observations speak to the need for structure in programs as well as flexibility in scheduling. They also point to the need for an integration of academic and community resources in curricula.

Finally, all three groups of respondents commented that the library services are excellent. They commented on the extensive selection of tapes, novels, magazines, resource material and current titles, as well as nonfiction and fiction titles. The respondents said that the areas needing improvement were the literacy reading sections, in both the library and the Education Centre, and they asked for a video library and video viewing room.

Tangible Skills Base

Data from the student interviews and the staff questionnaires identified the students' development of practical skills as a success. For some students it was developing literacy. Comments included: "The school taught me how to read, this change has effected my life daily, now I have options." "I learned computer skills essential to today's world." For some it was self-confidence, job skills and opportunity. One student said, "I now have confidence, hope and skills." Another commented, "The skills I've

learned in school have given me more opportunity for education elsewhere." The data suggest that gaining concrete skills to further one's education or employment was part of a transformative process, as seen next.

Personal Transformations

As part of the evaluation, I asked questions of a personal nature to the students with the view of learning more about their history and stories. Specifically, they were asked questions such as: "What has been the single most important event in your journey that allowed you to finally make a change and commit to your schooling?" and "Did you have a life changing experience that influenced your decision?" I also asked, "Have your personal successes and changes since coming to the Gathering Place Education Centre been a result of the Gathering Place's programs and services? If so, how?" The intent was to discern the extent to which the creation and operation of a full-service community centre is an influential factor in students' personal transformation and commitment to education. From the students' responses to these questions, it is apparent that the students' psychological readiness to change combined with the Gathering Place's services and programs enabling change to occur were both essential elements in their personal rehabilitation and recovery.

Rehabilitation and Recovery

From the data it was found that 12 out of the 16 students interviewed had been alcohol or drug addicted at some point in their lives. Many of them commented on the

need to get out of a cycle of self-abuse. Some of their comments were: "I hit rock-bottom, there was nowhere to go but up." "I had to claim personal bankruptcy due to my addiction, it was time to retrain and rehabilitate." "I was on income assistance and I wanted to gain an education." "I wanted some stability in my life after getting out of jail." Whether the life experience involved an addiction or not, these sentiments identify the need for change as a means to an improved life.

The majority of the students talked about "timing" and that a clean and sober lifestyle precipitates change. Two students commented on having a child as a life-changing experience. They said that having a child precipitated change in that they were forced to examine relationships, goals, and lifestyle. A healthy community and support network became important, and Gathering Place provided that support, they said. Data from this study suggest that people are best able to utilize services to their full advantage if they want to change, or if they are looking for new peer groups, community support, and healthier life experiences. "Gathering Place is best for the ones who are ready," said one student. "It was the end of my street life and I was burnt out from a life of poverty, stealing, hooking and drugging," said another.

The majority of the students found the GPCC at a time of transition, for others it served a preventative function: "I'm young [17], I was heading in the wrong direction and I didn't want to go there. School has been good for me." It seems, based on these data, that the Gathering Place was able to assist and enhance the decision to make a lifestyle change. The Gathering Place acted as an enabler for some and a safe haven for others but, in all cases, Gathering Place played a vital part in these students' struggle for a better life.

Development of Life Skills, Self-Esteem and a Supportive Community

The students interviewed and the staff groups surveyed agreed that the Gathering Place Education Centre was instrumental in the psychological growth of the adult learners. They noted that they had witnessed remarkable personal growth. As one worker put it: "One can observe the students' successes by their attitudes, self-esteem, self-acceptance and self-care." One student said: "The process of learning did something to make me change, I have changed my lifestyle and my peer group." Another stated: "It prevented me from heading down the wrong path, and now I am aware of who I am and what I can do."

All of the respondents commented on the stability provided by the Gathering Place Community Centre's programs and services. Respondents said that the GPCC is an accepting and compassionate place where unconditional support and accessibility form a safety net for those in crisis and transition. This study shows both the GPEC and the GPCC give people an anchor to hold on to, providing routine in lives of chaos. As one student described it: "It is a perfect starting point and a safe place for transition."

From the students interviewed and the two staff groups surveyed there were overwhelming expressions in regards to the commitment and concern by staff working in the Education Centre. The data identified that there is a close support network among the staff, the community centre, and collaborative agencies. This, in turn, reinforces a holistic approach to community education.

Summary

All groups agreed that community education inherently facilitates transformational change. The students expressed it in these terms: "Without Gathering Place, I would be lost. I went to four other learning centers and dropped out. Gathering Place allowed me to succeed as I did." "I wouldn't be where I am today without the Gathering Place." Consistent in the data was the finding that when students commit to their education and take advantage of the support services offered, there is a ripple effect and their lives improve on many levels. Similarly, the Gathering Place experience has been equally significant for teaching staff. As one Education Centre staff member said: "There is no other school like it that I have worked in or seen." "The students, school and staff have had a huge impact on me and I am changed as a teacher." "The students are truly the reason why we are here." One comment by a Ministry of Education, Skills, and Training worker said it best: "There would be a gap in service almost impossible to fill without the Gathering Place for excellence of service."

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter discusses three areas: (a) the most significant suggestions made to the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver School Board stakeholders as a result of the evaluation for improvements to the Gathering Place Community Centre and the Gathering Place Education Centre, including comments on barriers to improvements; (b) a summary outlining the most effective aspects of the Gathering Place's full-service programs and services as identified in this study; and (c) a model based upon the most effective aspects of the two Centres together with the recommendations and the most successful aspects of the models found in the literature. In closing, the implications of this model for adult secondary completion are presented for the field of adult education, as are recommendations for practice.

Successes and Suggestions

A number of successes can be highlighted from this study. As well, a number of recommendations were suggested to the two main governing bodies, the City of Vancouver for the Gathering Place Community Centre, and the Vancouver School Board for the Gathering Place Education Centre.

Comparing Today's GPCC and GPEC with the Baseline Criteria

MacKenzie (1994) set out five criteria in her vision of a successful community centre. As discussed in chapter 1, the MacKenzie report itemized the five high priority needs for a full-service centre as determined through a lengthy consultation process with the community. These five priorities included: (a) recreational and social space; (b) low cost healthy dining (plus an opportunity to participate in food preparation and sales; (c) an education centre with classrooms, a computer lab, and a common space; (d) health services including a laundromat, dry-cleaning, delousing, showers, luggage storage, and therapeutic hot tubs; and (e) a library/reading room.

This program assessment shows that the Gathering Place Community Centre and the Gathering Place Education Centre have met the original criteria over the course of the last four years. The recreation and social space consists of a television lounge, billiard room, games room, meeting room, fitness room, gymnasium, and theatre. Numerous programs and classes in fine arts, fitness, and recreation are offered, as well as special out-trips such as snowboarding and camping. In addition, the GPCC organizes events such as volunteer recognition dinners, Christmas dinner, street/block parties and memorials. The volunteer-run cafeteria, which includes students, provides affordable healthy dining plus a food preparation training program for interested volunteers in the community. The Education Centre offers programs from literacy through to Grade 12, has two classrooms, a drop-in centre, and a computer lab. In addition, the Education Centre draws volunteers from the community to provide extra one-to-one tutoring. The health centre has laundry facilities, free clothes, hygiene services such as delousing,

haircuts, and showers, sewing facilities, luggage storage and therapeutic hot tubs. The library/reading room has over 17,000 books, and an estimated 3,000 video tapes, audio tapes, magazines, and newspapers.

Operational Suggestions

While the facilities and programs at the Gathering Place do meet all five criteria set out by MacKenzie in her original proposal, there are a few components that were not envisioned by the community members during the time of the MacKenzie report, but were repeatedly raised in this program evaluation. The suggestion raised most often was for greater access; specifically, the study found that all three groups of respondents wanted more accessibility to both the GPCC and the GPEC. As recommended to the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver School Board, there was a clear demand for extended hours, Sunday openings and, for some departments, such as the health centre, billiard room, television lounge and fitness room, to run 24 hours a day. In addition, it was important for all three groups of respondents to have a larger space for activities. The study specifically identified the need for a bigger physical space, especially in the Education Centre. Adequate space and access were very important issues for the exemplary models seen earlier as well.

On the program level, the evaluation identified the need for a youth centre, a daycare facility, a women's centre, and more on-site support services for families utilizing the Gathering Place Community Centre. The evaluation data also suggested that workers be on site every hour that the GPCC is open. These appear to be the additional supports required to create a more complete community education centre. The evaluation

also identified the need for more support workers onsite for welfare advocacy, social advocacy, and political empowerment. More staff, as requested, would facilitate transitions, independence, and relocation of students during this transformative period.

The majority of the community served by the Gathering Place today is dependent on income assistance. Study participants also asked for an on-site employment/career centre where patrons can go to get help in job training, job readiness, and employment counseling. As seen in chapter 2, both Flint Community Schools and Belmont Learning Complex include a career centre and work experience programs as an integral part of their program offerings. Such a service would be useful in any fully comprehensive model, as discussed later.

The Importance and Problems of Locale

Due to its locale and clientele, the Gathering Place Community Centre sometimes facilitates street involvement, especially for women and youth and those in recovery. The data supported the necessity for the Gathering Place security attendants and staff to be aware of predatory behaviours. As with the examples seen in chapter 2, it is vital for such schools to be located in the area to be served; however, this brings its own set of risks. For example, Barnett and Wilson (1994) identify four key features of community-based full-service schools that are also their major strengths; two of these features are accessibility and geographical locale. Brookfield (1983a) states: "The neighbourhood notion of community is still the one most appropriate to adult education" (p. 155). Smith (1994) would agree, stating that local education puts the "proper emphasis on place"

(p. 21) for more accessibility and maximum use. Although the neighbourhood locale is important, this study shows that full security must be provided on-site.

At the same time, it is clear that outreach marketing is a necessity within the community to be served, if such centres are to fulfill their mission. Many patrons and service providers were not aware of the extent of the Gathering Place's services and programs. Improvement in outreach, public awareness, and more community-wide dialogue are recommended for both the Gathering Place Community Centre and the Gathering Place Education Centre. All of these operational and security suggestions were made to the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver School Board.

Suggestions for Academic and Service Programs

This program assessment shows that alternative schools cannot disregard programming structure in their academic and service programs even as they strive to be flexible and accessible. One major area of improvement brought forth by this study was the need for a more standardized structure of learning objectives in the self-paced ABE program. The flexibility of the modules works for self-motivated students, yet the Education Centre is potentially losing some students who need a more formalized program with structured entry and exit criteria. The need for concrete evaluation criteria and tools such as exercises, assignments, and tests that mark completion of modules was noted. Cranton (1992) calls this type of evaluation, criterion-referenced, "as individuals are being compared to a criteria (set by themselves or other)" (p. 201). Peterson (1988) and Cranton agree that the purpose of evaluation for adult learners most importantly is "to determine the extent to which learners have achieved objectives" (Cranton,

p. 202). Data revealed that the intake assessment and placement tools are accurate, but the ABE program's lack of structure takes away from its potential for some learners. The credit courses offered in liaison with the Distance Education Centre, as seen in chapter 3, have an evaluation structure inherent in their assignments and tests, and this may prove to be the academic model for the Gathering Place Education Centre in the future.

In addition, the value of a well-trained volunteer component cannot be overemphasized for schools such as this. As I explained to the Vancouver School Board, the literacy program in the Education Centre needs to include more trained volunteer tutors. The Education Centre is losing literacy students due to the lack of tutor training and supervision. While the teaching staff provides informal training to volunteers, the literacy program could benefit greatly from a supervised volunteer tutor training program. My findings agree with Fingeret's (1984) assertion that "development efforts are needed in areas such as reading, competency-based education, and volunteerism [across] literacy programs" (p. 45). The need for volunteer enhancement in adult alternative schools such as the Gathering Place Education Centre is vital to meet individual needs and give continuous support.

With regard to curriculum, participants in the study said they would like the programs to reflect the Centre's commitment to community education and social change better. My findings are consistent with those of Cranton (1994), Lindeman (1989), and Mezirow (1990, 1991) who agree that adult learning must integrate outcomes of personal development and social change together. The examples seen earlier, such as Hanshaw Middle School and the Flint Community Schools, provide such an integrated learning component. At the GPEC, the ABE and credit course curricula could include more

community-based projects linking relevant assignments to current cultural and political issues. As pointed out in the recommendations to the Vancouver School Board, the approved course syllabi are predetermined in accordance with Ministry of Education guidelines. For Gathering Place, as with many such schools in North America, the community content of curricula will need to be negotiated with departments and Ministries of Education to include community education and more social change content. This was also a recommendation made on to the Vancouver School Board.

Barriers to Improvement

The barriers to changing and improving alternative full-service schools are many. From this study, the community service workers and Education Centre staff consistently noted that provincial and local funding cuts have affected accessibility to some services, such as the Street Youth Services and Options programs. The City of Vancouver's Social Planning Department, the Vancouver School Board, the Ministry of Social Services, and the Ministry of Children and Families all have had to restructure their staffing and programs in response to reduced annual budgets. Dryfoos (1994a) and Rist (1992) claim that restructuring is one alternative used to maintain vital programs and services, although there are other options for saving programs. Both agree that loss of programs hurts the overall functioning of the full-service approach, as pointed out to the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver School Board in this study. This resources issue will surely prove to be an on-going issue for alternative schools across North America as we enter the 21st century.

Class minimums for adult education programs are defined by the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association's collective agreement and contain restrictions that are often impractical for an inner-city transient population. All adult programs in the Vancouver adult education system require the class minimum to be 15 students. One alternative raised in these recommendations was the fact that certain K-12 schools have been designated by the Vancouver School Board as "inner city" or "community schools." They receive extra funding for special programs to serve the unique needs of urban youth. The Gathering Place Education Centre should be able to apply to the Ministry of Children and Families as an inner city or community school, particularly since approximately 40-50% of the student body is school-aged. Another alternative may be to apply for funding outside of the school board, to foundations, churches, and the corporate sector. However, trying to find sources both for adult and school-aged students from new sources puts greater stress on the administration of such schools.

Lack of Political Voice and Community Involvement

Beyond the specific suggestions for more access and additions to services, there was agreement between the groups of respondents that the Gathering Place Community Centre as a community development project has far to go in terms of creating a political will and political voice in the community. This, again, was not a consideration or requirement in the 1994 MacKenzie study. However, it was made clear from the two staff groups surveyed, particularly, that the Centre needs to work towards initiating local events, developing its own political voice, and directing and executing projects in the

community to lobby for social change. Clark (1986) maintains that once individuals are able to meet their personal needs, they are more likely to take on an advocacy role in the community. Lindeman (1989) supports Clark's stance by stating:

> Adult education will become an agency of progress if its short-time goal of self-improvement can be made compatible with a long- time, experimental but resolute policy of changing social order. Changing individuals in continuing adjustment to changing social function--this is the bilateral though unified purpose of adult learning. (p. 104)

To exemplify Lindeman's theory, Flint Community Schools (1997) incorporates a commitment to advocacy and social change into its educational programs. This political component of community education was modeled by the founders of Flint Community Schools in the 1930s and has not altered since.

Merits of the Gathering Place Community Centre

From the results of the evaluation, a number of aspects of the Gathering Place Community Centre were identified as being particularly effective components of the programs and services. First, the Gathering Place's infrastructure clearly reflects a positive response to what the Downtown South community needs and wants. If the recommendations for more access and enhanced services, such as a women's centre and a career centre, are met, the GPCC would more truly meet this goal. Clark (1986) and DeLargy (1989), seen in chapter 2, present the concept of need and responses to it within the context of culture, education and community. They contend that the most successful projects evaluate the needs of individuals within community contexts, and build programs

to meet those needs within the community. Weaver's (1969) examination of democratic processes and collaboration asserts that community education "is based upon the premise that education can be made relevant to people's needs and that the people affected by education should be involved in decisions about the program" (p. 19). As seen in chapter 2, Mason and Randell (1995) add to this view by emphasizing community education as a "democratic process which enables local people to participate closely in decision-making processes that affect their lives" (p. 30).

Intermediate School No. 218 and Flint Community Schools are exemplary in their collaborative learner-centred approach combining teachers, advisors, learners' parents and community representatives in program decisions (Dryfoos, 1994a; Flint Community Schools Leadership Council, 1997). The Gathering Place functions democratically through its processes of consultation with the Gathering Place Association's Board of Directors and its subcommittees, which serve to inform and advise administration of the community's changing needs.

MacKenzie (1994) envisioned a centre that would be closely integrated with the community and which would give a full range of services. Her vision went beyond internal processes and infrastructure. The range of GPCC facilities and services within the community meets this criterion. The data seen in chapter 3 pointed to the full-service approach as a major strength of the centre. In addition, multiplicity of on-site, user-friendly, free and accessible services enable people to meet their personal, health, and social needs. Many clearly see the Gathering Place Community Centre as a hub of support that replaces families or friends. The network set up among the Gathering Place

departments and the community agencies gives people in crisis and transition a safe, trusting place to get help.

Dryfoos (1994a, 1996) and Guerriero et al. (1996b) maintain that once the needs of the community are identified, stakeholders can work to influence decision-makers and educate the public about the importance of integrating additional services in a school. Dryfoos (1994b), Guerriero et al. (1996a), and Rist (1992) further maintain that agencies within a full-service school network can meet the needs of their clients better by providing a comprehensive, holistic continuum of services through an integrated approach with the community. The comments in chapter 3 show that the Gathering Place Community Centre succeeded in making this possible in the areas of health, recreation, and education.

From the evaluation, the volunteer program in the Community Centre and in the Education Centre was noted as a third major strength, since the volunteers provide patrons with numerous opportunities. Volunteerism is an integral part of the full-service approach and it facilitates rehabilitation, job preparation, mentoring, increased socialization and self-esteem. In this area, the recommendation to the Vancouver School Board was to enhance this aspect of the Education Centre. As seen in chapter 2, Flint Community Schools (1997) and Hanshaw Middle School (Modesto City Schools, 1992) emphasize volunteerism as an essential component to full-service and underlines the numerous benefits of integrating this type of program into community education.

In the K-12 system, volunteers are predominately parents motivated by their children's needs. As seen in chapter 2, Intermediate School No. 218 (Dryfoos, 1994b) and Flint Community Schools (1996) take the stance that parental involvement in schools

is a significant component to achieving changes in governance and curriculum if districts are to meet the demands of all socio-economic levels in their schools. The potential for parental involvement in school-community collaboration is great in K-12 programs but limited in an adult school. Instead, volunteers from the community willingly fill this gap. The volunteers are not parents of children in the neighbourhood. They are community members interested in rehabilitation, skill development, and socialization for themselves and others. Selected and trained well, volunteers can provide many of the low-cost resources alternative schools need, and much of the personal support adult learners need. As Freedman (1993) points out:

> Voluntary movements are as important for what they express symbolically as for what they actually address programmatically....volunteer movements not only augment direct assistance to the disadvantaged but serve as catalysts for more encompassing reforms. (pp. 139-140)

Fingeret (1984) was referred to in chapter 2 as she advocates for capacity-building in ABE. Fingeret (1984) also identifies the value of implementing volunteers into community education programs, noting that volunteerism can enhance community-related curricula by bringing ideas and experiences into the school. As seen in the exemplary North American models in chapter 2, volunteers can provide invaluable instruction for students and act as advisors for administration.

This study also revealed that a self-paced drop-in program is an extremely effective way to serve a marginalized inner-city student population who left the mainstream education system early. This point reflects the value of self-directed learning as a fundamental approach for alternate schools. This argument for self-directed learning in adult education is supported by adult education theorists such as Boud and Griffin

(1987), Cranton (1992), Knowles (1980), and Merriam and Brockett (1997). As discussed earlier, self-directed learning can involve a cooperative approach connecting the expressed needs of the learner and the educator's view of what needs to be represented in an educational program. Self-directed learning is informal and can facilitate the individualization of teaching styles, one-to-one instruction, flexible curricula, and customized educational planning (Brookfield, 1983a). According to Karp (1988), and Campbell-Murphy and Cool (1994), self-directed courses are actually more desirable for returning students who may have had negative school experiences, personal crises, and unstable lifestyles.

The need for on-going support for adult learners is a constant theme in the literacy and adult basic education literature (Fingeret, 1984; Quigley, 1997). One of the greatest successes named in the study was the stability and support this school provides for returning students. The Gathering Place Education Centre was seen as a safe place, a bridge for success, and a support network for those without a family. Campbell-Murphy and Cool (1994) agree that the family atmosphere provided by a successful community education facility is key to student success.

In this report, team teaching was also noted to be particularly effective. This point is supported by Karp (1988) whose research supports the fact that caring, committed teachers, a democratic school structure, and staff networks can assist in articulating a more holistic and practical view of the world into the classroom. Barnett and Wilson (1994) were also seen in chapter 2 saying that adult centres should be consumer-driven and should afford participants a strong sense of ownership over their learning. They add that the overall approach must be open, nondidactic, and informal. Although this

evaluation illustrates that the Gathering Place Education Centre excels in this area, the recommendation to the Vancouver School Board on this point was that a greater degree of structure is needed in the ABE program. Thus, there seems to be a need for a balance between access, flexibility, and pedagogical structure in such schools.

Finally, the theme of students' personal transformation which echoed throughout the evaluation was seen as another merit of the Gathering Place Education Centre's program. Clark (1993), Cranton (1994), and Smith (1994) all note that transformational learning can and should be a part of successful adult learning where empowerment and autonomy are desired outcomes. Students described the effect their education had on their emotional and mental growth, from a place of disempowerment to one of global awareness and greater empowerment.

Lindeman (1989) and Mezirow (1990, 1991) agree that two fundamental purposes of adult education are needed in the field: self-empowerment and social change. Mezirow's commitment to transformation and Freire's (1974) work on emancipatory education combine to argue that alternate schools have a dual role: individual transformation as well as social transformation. These arguments say that adult educators should work for the removal of oppressive conditions and the reshaping of one's values and views to one of critical consciousness and action. This mission resides in the philosophical orientation of the Gathering Place, as well as in its educational services and programs. However, the need for a stronger community voice was one of the concerns addressed in the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver School Board recommendations.

A Model Full-Service Community Centre for Adult Secondary Completion

The following model incorporates the successful components of the Gathering Place Community Centre and the Gathering Place Education Centre as identified by the study, those aspects that were viewed as necessary improvements, and relevant components of models found in the literature. The components have been synthesized into a model for the design of a full-service community centre for adult secondary completion (see Figure 1). I suggest that this ideal model could be modified to fit the context of virtually any adult community education program and could serve as a goal to strive for.

As seen in Figure 1, a local needs assessment or community consultation process was the first step for the Gathering Place Community Centre and for all of the examples in the literature. Such an assessment recognizes the priorities, needs, and wants of the community. I propose that a needs assessment process should be ongoing by utilizing formative evaluations. Further, as with the Gathering Place and those examples seen in chapter 2, it is essential that a centre be locally managed with a decentralized structure and be accessible, both geographically and psychologically, in the sense that it must be user-friendly. Joint funding should allow for service on weekends and year round. Programs should be integrated with existing agencies to prevent overlap and to fill funding gaps. Joint partnerships should provide funding and resources from more than one source. Programs should be inclusive, consumer driven, non-paternalistic and should respond to the culture and needs of the community. Services should be offered in a broad community collaboration to support and promote the team approach which should be the essence of the model centre.

Figure 1 shows that three social-educational components need to work closely together to establish the range of services and programs necessary in a holistic full-service centre. These are: the community, the associated social services, and the alternate

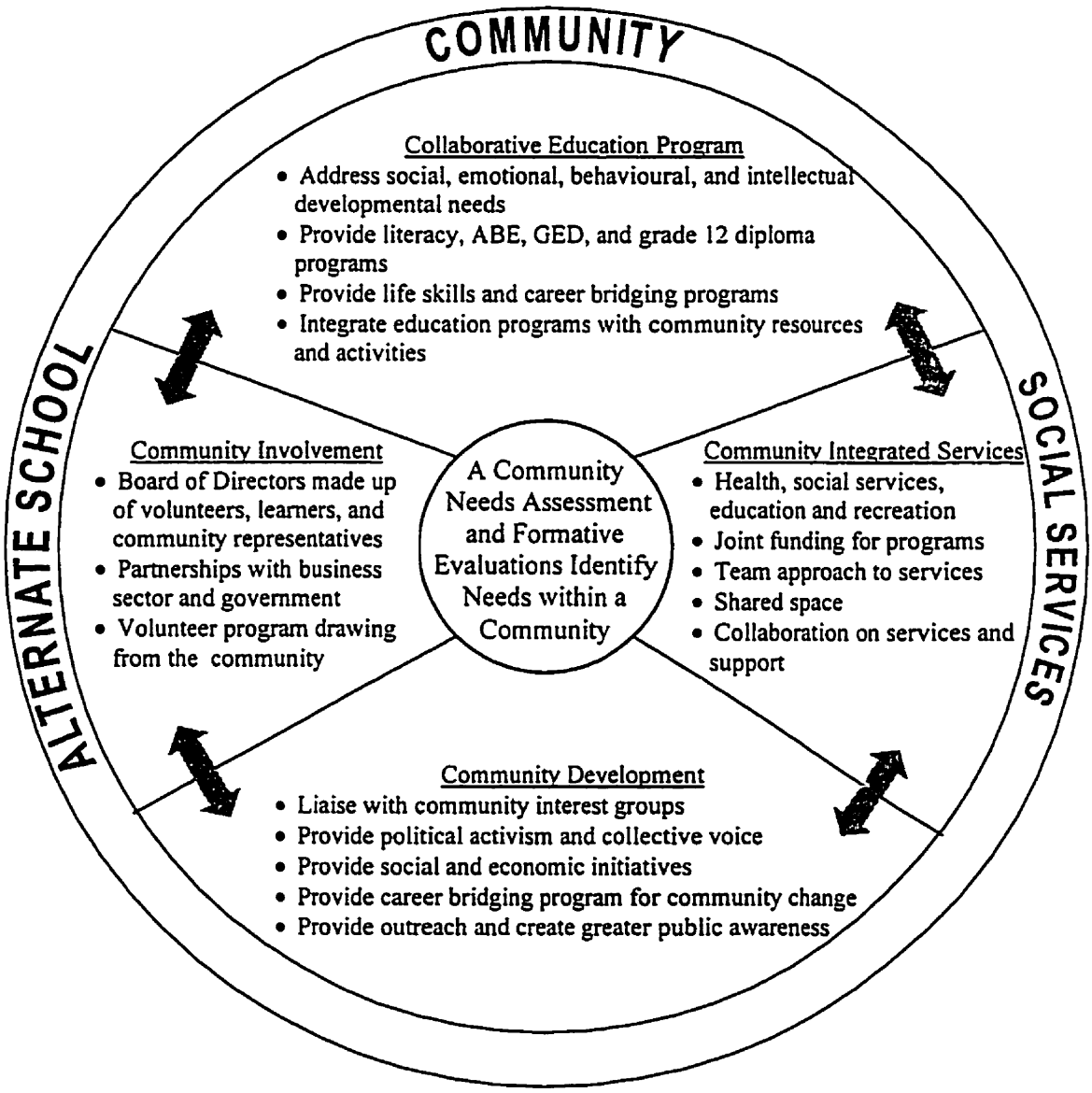

Figure 1. Full-service school elements: A community education model for adult secondary completion (adapted from Guerriero et al., 1996c).

school itself. Working in a collaborative manner, four areas of linkage among these three could be developed to create a successful community-based adult education centre: the collaborative education program, community-integrated services, community involvement, and community development. The educational program elements should include a literacy program with a volunteer training program, an ABE program with integrated community-based curricula, computer development courses, GED preparation, a Grade 12 diploma program, life skills courses, and a work experience or career bridging program that is credit granting. This collaborative education program should use community elements to augment the educational objectives. It should strive to address social, emotional, behavioural, and intellectual developmental needs of learners.

Community integrated services include the health, social services, arts, cultural, and recreational programs linked to the community centre and neighbourhood providers in the network. In this model, shared space, joint funding, a team approach to community collaboration, and shared responsibility would be vital aspects of the integrated services. Community involvement should include the advice and council of the Board of Directors, participation in service by volunteers, and external partnerships with associations, nonprofit organizations, government and the business sector.

As seen in chapter 3 and recommended to the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver School Board, community development should include political and social activism. In this model, such activism would involve liaison with interest groups, social and economic initiatives, career bridging for community change, and community outreach for public awareness. It would also mean advocacy for social change where a

voice would be given to all participants in this model and the envisaged centre would work for greater equity and justice for the community.

Levin and Young (1994) suggest that community centres that already have health and recreation facilities in place may be the preferred lead agency when setting up a full-service centre. Whether building upon existing facilities or building from the ground up, a sound needs assessment and attention to these components and program areas could realize the best use of facilities and funding.

Implications for Adult Education and Public Schools

According to Buehring (1958), "The problems of society are the problems of the public school....for the public school is the only agency left that can reach a true representation of all the people of its community" (p. 252). The study seen here, and the potential of alternate schools in general, argue that public school facilities could be much more widely used to help adults complete their education. Community-based schools could "accommodate the trend toward offering services in decentralized locations--a trend related to the growth in the number of programs for adults" (DeLargy, 1989, p. 300). The literature on models in North America would seem to support Kliminski's (1983) claim that by bringing an education service to people, rather than forcing people to go to the service, use of the service will increase. Educators at the Flint Community Schools clearly believe that "any school district can make at least a beginning, that no community can afford not to look into the community school approach to today's school, community, national and world problems" (Buehring, p. 255).

Whether K-12 schools are used more fully or more alternate centres are created, as Levin and Young (1994) note, most educators and administrators

> share a desire to reduce the separation between school and community and between "school knowledge" and "real knowledge." To this end, the school's clientele may be expanded from the traditional school-aged cohort to include all ages, from prenatal and early childhood to adults, with the traditional school year replaced by a year round program. (p. 221)

Levin and Young discuss the potential of community education noting that stakeholders must draw "attention to the significance of community expectations and community 'social capital' in the production of effective schools" (p. 209). Mason and Randell (1995) support community-based adult education as meeting the needs, values and attitudes of those groups of people outside the mainstream, and maintain that community-based education strengthens the concept of education and social change.

This study, together with the current literature, points to a need for more working liaisons between the K-12 system and adult centres, governments, and the community. As the successes and merits of programs become more public, and educational communities see alternative education as a right rather than a privilege, I believe community education for all ages can become a serious alternative in Canada (Mason & Randell, 1992).

My Reflection on the Study and on My Own Professional Growth

It is useful to reflect on the methodology used in this study. First, I found that the use of interviews and questionnaires for data collection was effective. The interview process did make an in-depth exploration of the issues possible with the students, and I did find the results of the mail out questionnaires to be comprehensive in content. The

questionnaires were anonymous and this proved to be a significant decision, since the responses to the questionnaires included candid critical feedback. Second, in this case, being an internal evaluator was definitely an advantage. As a result of my direct experience in the Centre, I was able to design a relevant list of questions concerning the Centre's governance, the programs, and the full-service approach within the community context. In particular, given this student population, to attempt to conduct an effective interview without trust of the interviewees could have created a barrier for an external evaluator. Third, timing was an important issue in program evaluation here. As I learned, time is needed for programs to develop and to be tested by the users. This study was conducted after four years of operation. In this case, enough time had elapsed for the staff to be familiar with the programs and comfortable in their jobs. In retrospect, the breadth of this program evaluation was too large. This study could have been divided and concentrated into two more manageable program evaluations: one for the Gathering Place Community Centre and one for the Gathering Place Education Centre.

In terms of my own professional development, I gained a great deal of knowledge and experience in program evaluation. In reviewing the results and recommendations of this particular program assessment, I realized the importance of evaluation as a vital component of program design, implementation, and management. Having a personal investment in the Gathering Place Education Centre, I learned that evaluation, as part of an action cycle, is imperative if services are to continue to meet the needs of the people for whom they were created.

A school's philosophy and operation can only be complete if accountability is included. Undertaking such a program evaluation and utilizing its results provides accountability to those students, stakeholders, and community groups who look to the Gathering Place as a model for democratic process. My professional credibility can only be maintained if I act on the recommendations to improve the quality of the Centre. Finally, as an educator, I recognize that centres such as the Gathering Place Education Centre do not satisfy every student. Limitations do exist. However, this project affirmed my commitment to community education for adults, solidified and enhanced my practice as an alternate educator, and confirmed my belief that, given the opportunity, people can make changes in their lives.

Recommendations for Practice

Full-service community schools are gaining popularity in the K-12 system as their reputation for effectiveness spreads across the United States and Canada. This successful concept should also be available to school-aged students who seek an alternative to the mainstream system, as well as for young adults and adults who wish to return to school for secondary completion. Full-service community education programs for adult literacy, ABE, GED, and secondary completion programs can be made available by partnering public school boards with other government and nongovernment projects.

A needs assessment should be implemented by stakeholders when deciding on new programs and services so that the needs of the community are addressed. Full-service community education programs should link educational services with health

services, social services, cultural, political, and recreation activities and be implemented in such a way as to maximize the use of physical space and funding, and facilitate the seamless approach to providing a multitude of services. Once the programs are established, ongoing formative evaluations can identify changing needs within the community.

Community education programs for adults should integrate community elements into the literacy and ABE curricula, should offer structured modules in the curriculum, as well as self-paced options. Ongoing feedback and evaluation, and self-paced credits for high school courses should be central to such programs. Life skills and career bridging programs should also be integrated into the curriculum. If teaching methodologies include one-to-one tutoring, peer tutoring, and a team teaching approach, this study and the supporting literature suggest that learners will do well. In addition, student-centred choices for curricula, and a referral base or support system for advocacy, counselling, and social needs are essential components. Trained volunteers have a vital role to play and integration into the academic program is essential. Opportunities for self-evaluation and critical reflection are important and are recommended to be part of a successful full-service model. Students should also have the opportunity to participate in the governance of the education program through a democratic decision-making process. Centres have both an opportunity and a responsibility to advocate for social change and it is proposed that this be part of the mission of a model community-based centre for adults.

Conclusion: A Place of Hope

This program evaluation validated our Centre's successes and gave us directions for improvement. Most importantly, however, this study shows that Gathering Place helps people meet their health, social, recreational, and educational needs. The Centre is putting students and patrons in touch with the community resources that can help solve their problems. We are playing an exciting role in realizing student and community empowerment. This study has told us that Gathering Place educators, service staff, and volunteers are making an enormous difference to the people of the Downtown South. If one were to visit Vancouver, they would find that the Downtown South is no longer a place of desperation and helplessness. This neighbourhood is fostering hope and a renewed sense of ownership with opportunities for social change.

Although community education has been a source of much debate in adult education and still resides outside of the mainstream literature, it is receiving more recognition as current research reveals that such programs as ours are effectively meeting the needs of local communities. As Thomas (1984) puts it:

> By the year 2000, community education will be the basis for creating community coherence and common purposes. Community education will create what [is needed]...most: a community of character, a coherence of values, a unity of purpose--if not perfect, at least in the making. (p. 6).

This model for a full-service community education centre for adult secondary completion can help school administrators and local groups compare results of their own needs assessment with those aspects identified by this study and the current literature. The model presented can also serve as a blueprint for those educators involved in

building and designing better community education centres for that segment of Canadian society that has a right to an education and a better quality of life.

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