

New Morning — an alternative

BY SHERRY KAMAN

The New Morning School of Plymouth is a combination of something old and something new.

In its 30-by-50 foot room in Epiphany Lutheran Church, this kindergarten through sixth grade institution has much about it reminiscent of the one-room school house.

But in teaching concepts, it uses new ideas, particularly concerning self-direction and individual instruction.

A recent statement made by Gladys Ryder, retired member of the Livonia Historical Commission, about the one-room school house in which she once taught, could very well apply to the New Morning School.

The children helped each other, was Mrs. Ryder's observation about the eight grades she taught simultaneously. They looked after each other and learned from each other.

At New Morning, 12-year-old Mark Landbeck often finds time to spend a few minutes reading a book to eight-year-old Brian Ray. And when Karen Sand runs in to tell her teacher that Mark Unsworth had a minor injury in an outdoor activity, the youngster then took the boy in hand and took off to read him a comforting book.

Concerning this shared kind of learning, Mrs. Sheila DeJohn of Northville, parent of a New Morning student, noted that a child can suggest the formation of a group interested in snakes and amphibians.

"Children from five to 12 can join," she said. "It is really beneficial because older ones can teach younger ones about things they are too young to be able to read about."

MRS. ELAINE YAGIELA, a founder of the school and one of its two teachers, pointed out there is a family feeling at New Morning.

"The kids really do care about each other," she said. "The parents are involved and become close, and they care for other children as well as their own. They often bring in materials or articles for the other students."

But the main thrust of the school, which has just completed its third year, is its attitude toward the 21 children who arrive every day from local and distant points, including Livonia, Westland, Plymouth, Farmington, Northville, Detroit and Ypsilanti. It is this attitude that places New Morning in the category of an alternative school.

A look around the school one afternoon during what the two certified teachers called "quiet time" revealed numerous activities. Karen Sand of Detroit and Jenny Ruokolaenen of Farmington were getting ready to post informational signs along a nature walk.

Prepared by the girls in a variety of designs, the signs presented all kinds of revealing biological information. To wit: "Trilliums grow about a foot long. They have three green leaves and three petals which are very colorful. Colors pink to pure white. When they do they grow purple berries."

"It was their idea to have a nature walk," said Mrs. Yagiela. "The students get an idea and really do follow through."

There was no sign of an adversary relationship between the students and their two teachers, Mrs. Yagiela and Mrs. Rita Heinen.

"I LIKE the freedom and responsibility in this school," commented Mrs. Sandy Landbeck of Farmington Hills. "I like the fact that the children get to know their teachers as people, not just as authority figures."

She also responded that parents are involved in all facets of the school. "We help with curriculum planning," she said. "We have contact with the school and see what's going on. There is a sense of commitment we get here that we don't get in public school."

Like cooperative pre-school, parents are expected to take a part in the school activities, as fund raisers, officers, teacher aides, or just plain shoppers and tidypers.

With one of them on hand everyday, plus an aide from Schoolcraft and two teachers, it puts the ratio of adults to children at about one to five. But this ratio, while attractive, is not necessarily why parents have chosen this particular school as an alternative to public school.

THIS FEELING, that their students is marching to a slightly different drum from other students, is the reason that parents are opting for alternative schooling all across the country.

Either Heinen, director of curriculum in the Livonia School District, has just chaired a study for the Livonia Board of Education on alternative schooling, but was not ready to speak about it because the board has not yet studied it.

"The study is an indication that the

board of education is aware of alternative programming and the degree to which it is increasing in the country," she observed. "They wanted to be more knowledgeable about it in order to make recommendations."

Defining alternative schooling, she noted that all educators want to educate children. "But they are beginning to recognize that different youngsters have different needs and learn in different ways."



You can find your way on this nature walk with the help of expert information supplied by

Karen Sand of Detroit and Jenny Ruokolaenen of Farmington. (Staff photo by Art Emanuel)

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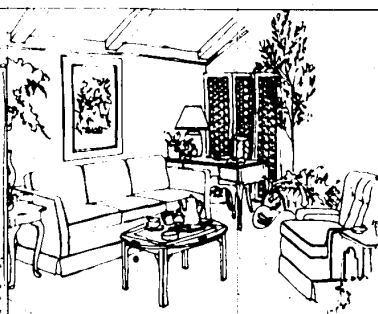


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