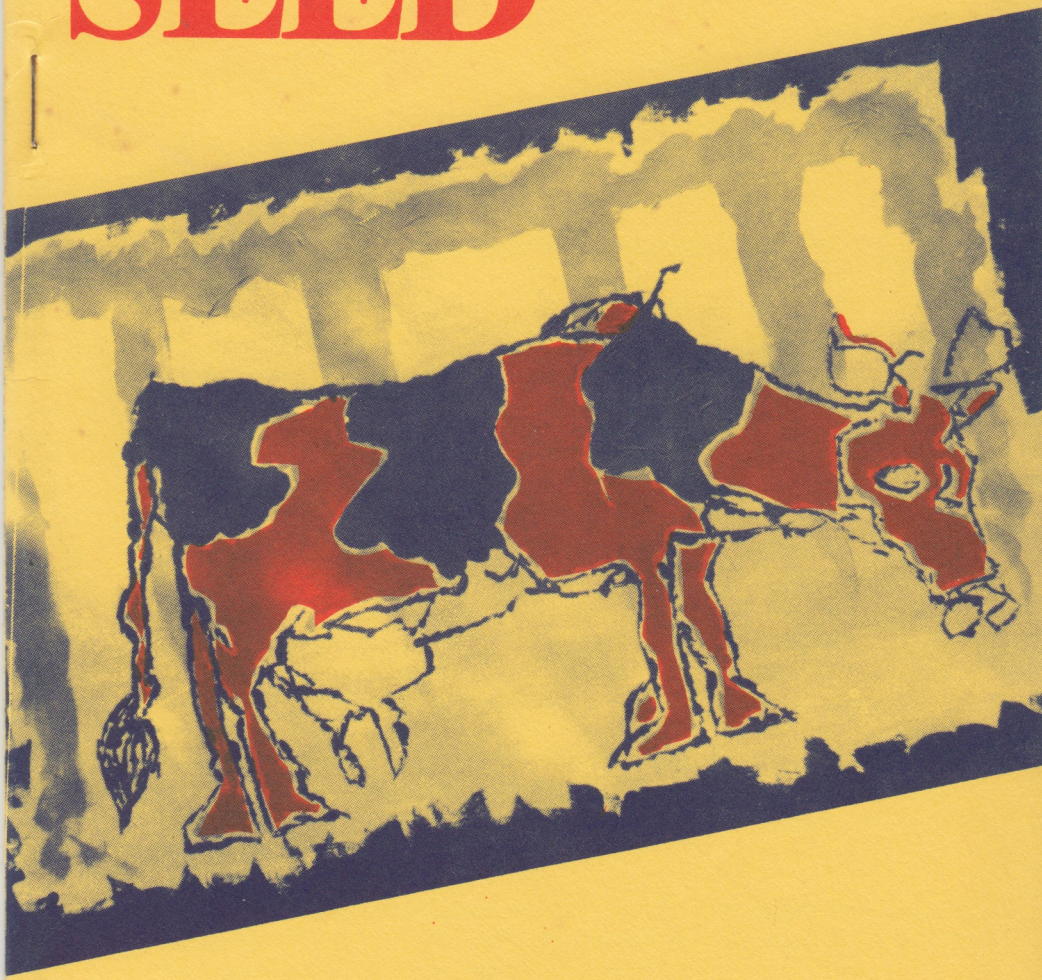


# SEED



## ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL



## INTRODUCTION

Originally, SEED was never intended to be a school. In 1968, summer jobs for students were hard to get, and the Toronto Board of Education responded by initiating an experimental summer program for high school students; the idea was to act as a gigantic switchboard, hooking students up with community resources. A student identified an area of interest, and SEED helped him or her find a person, or place in the city to help carry out the learning. That summer 100 students participated in the program.

The next summer, another 100 attended. Then the students decided not to stop these projects at the end of the summer. They went to conventional school from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and then did this thing called SEED in the evenings. Volunteer resource people, known as "catalysts", held classes in homes, libraries, TV studios and computer labs all over the city.

It was hard going for the students. In the spring of 1970, they lobbied the Toronto Board arguing the need to establish SEED as an accredited school. The Board responded positively insisting only that the students accept four teachers to credit the work done.

Today SEED has a core of credit courses, taught by Toronto Board teachers who also monitor a variety of catalyst courses. Student input is still essential in the organization and development of courses.



## STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

"It is a basic policy in the curriculum for Ontario that individual differences are to be accommodated to the greatest extent possible." (OS:IS, 1984)

"While we attempt to put (students) into pigeon holes they constantly restate their individuality. Perhaps for educators ... (there is) a need for young people to be treated as individuals by teachers and administrators alike. This means a willingness ... to recognize and accept the difference between young people."

(King, A.J.C. The Adolescent Experience. CSSTF Toronto, 1986)

1. SEED School is a democratic community. Each member has the right and the opportunity to participate in the governance of the school (in areas of school jurisdiction). Achieving consensus is an important aspect of the school.
2. SEED recognizes the importance of the individual in education; the different interests, learning styles, and objectives of each student are taken into account when planning for the school year. Learning occurs any time, any place, and at any rate; therefore, a flexible approach is required to accommodate these needs. As one student described it:

"SEED offers a space in which a learning environment will take shape." (Steven Lewis, 1987, SEED student.)

3. SEED encourages self-reliance, self-regulation and personal responsibility. Students are expected to make choices about their learning. They are supported by the school in achieving their goals.

"The traditional teacher centered classroom in which the inculcation of knowledge is the major goal, gives way to an altered focus. Learning becomes dialogue. The key to educating the whole individual (involves) crafting a wide range of opportunities for students to recognize and develop their potential." (J. Barker - Sandbrook. Launching Independent Learning, Forum, Mar/Apr/88, Vol. 14, No. 1)

4. SEED defines learning as an ongoing process that reaches beyond the classroom timetable and/or school building. An important aspect of SEED is to encourage and assist students in the use of community resources.

5. SEED is a small school. Because of its size, it is able to individualize learning programs, establish closer personal relationships between staff and students, explore the community for valuable resources, and remain flexible in establishing priorities for each school year.

The message to the student then becomes:

"I believe in you, I trust in you, I know you can handle it, you are listened to, cared for, and very important to (me) us. These six messages reinforce the three things students need ... I like myself, I can think for myself, and there is no problem so great that it cannot be solved." (Coloroso, B., Discipline Without Punishment, Forum, Sept./Oct./87, Vol. 13, No. 3)



## ADMISSIONS

The maximum enrolment of SEED is 120 students. All students considering attending SEED will be interviewed by the Interview Committee which consists of the Co-ordinator, one staff member and at least one student. The purpose of the interview is:

- to determine the suitability of SEED as a learning environment for prospective students
- to inform prospective students about SEED i.e. the expectations, philosophy, governance and structure
- to determine the student's objectives in attending SEED
- to help the student begin to determine a suitable program of activity
- in a case where the student and Interview Committee feel that SEED is not an appropriate environment for meeting the student's needs, to assist the student in finding one that is more appropriate
- to re-interview returning students who have not yet expressed their objectives for the upcoming year

The prospective SEED student may be a student who:

- expresses interest in an alternative approach to education
- has a specific interest and/or goal that she/he wishes to pursue such as a diploma or a career or even a dream
- values creativity in learning
- wants the benefit of a small school environment
- wants to have more input and control over her/his education
- is working at the advanced level
- is beyond Grade 9
- has some record of academic ability or success

## STRUCTURE OF SEED

### SPONSOR GROUP:

Each student at SEED has an assigned staff 'sponsor'. The responsibilities of the sponsor may include:

- assisting students with their academic program
- helping to orient new students to SEED
- monitoring student progress and reporting any changes in program or status
- maintaining up to date records of the students' program, plans, etc.
- periodically informing students of important events or issues at SEED
- being prepared to speak for a student upon request by a parent or the Principal
- acting as an advisor to students concerning personal issues

### GENERAL MEETING:

A unique feature of SEED is that General Meetings offer students the chance to participate in the governance and direction of the school. Specifically, the purposes of the weekly meetings are:

- announcements: any information relevant to the school is exchanged
- discussions: topics of importance to staff or students may be presented for general discussion
- special events: guests speakers, films, presentations, demonstrations, etc.
- decision making: each member of SEED is entitled to vote on issues brought to the meeting by another member

In early September, General Meetings are held on a daily basis to facilitate the orientation of new students. After September, the meetings are held once a week.

### STAFF MEETING:

The staff at SEED usually meet once a week. Students are welcome to attend and participate except when specific students are being discussed or OSSTF business is being attended to.

### INTERVIEW COMMITTEE:

Each student who intends to enrol at SEED is interviewed by this committee. The committee should consist of the Co-ordinator, one staff member, and at least one student. The purpose of the interview and the nature of prospective students are discussed in the section on 'Admissions'.



## ORIENTATION:

Because SEED differs in many ways from regular school, an orientation program is valuable to new students. Topics may include: SEED philosophy, the credit system, the structure of SEED, community resources, writing skills, catalysts and mentorships. Staff and returning students share the responsibility for orienting new community members.

## THREE WEEK TRIAL:

All students are given a three week trial period. During this time, they have the opportunity to explore the school, begin to engage in their academic program, and decide whether or not they feel that SEED has been a good choice for them. The sponsor also has the opportunity to assist the student in making the adjustment to the school or to advise the student on an alternative placement in the event that expectations are not being realized.

## GUIDANCE:

The Co-ordinator helps students with university applications and career counselling, but any staff member is ready to help in her/his role as Sponsor.

## COURSES AND CREDITS:

It is possible to study just about anything at SEED. Each student is expected to design a program that suits her/his interests, needs, and abilities. However, only those courses which conform to Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines and for which a "minimum of 110 hours has been scheduled" are considered credit courses for diploma purposes. Students who entered Grade 9 before September, 1984 can earn S.S.G.D. (Grade 12) until August, 1989, and/or the S.S.H.G.D. (Grade 13) until August, 1990. Students who began high school as of or after September, 1984 are under "OS:IS" and must fulfill the requirements for the O.S.S.D., 30 credits, which may include six Ontario Academic Credits (O.A.C.s).

If a student completes a course of study whose subject matter will not fit into any Ministry guideline but which has required as much work, (or more), as a Ministry credit, a "SEED equivalent credit" may be issued. It will not count toward a diploma, but it does recognize what the student has accomplished in a formal way.

A 'course' can be structured in one or more of the following ways:

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Classes:          | small group, 'seminar' format — facilitated by SEED staff — usually at SEED   |
| Catalyst classes: | facilitated by a volunteer resource person, monitored by SEED staff — can take place at SEED or in the community — may run all or part of the year — usually seminar format |

Individualized  
Study units:

units of study developed by student and teacher to accommodate individual interests and learning styles — facilitated and monitored by SEED staff through regular meetings.

Correspondence course: independent study using Independent Learning Centre (I.L.C.) courses — monitored by SEED staff

Internships: individually arranged placements — student works with a 'mentor' but is monitored by SEED staff — experiential learning

Auditing at university: student sits in on university classes to supplement program at SEED — submits work for evaluation purposes to SEED staff member as part of a high school credit

Interest course: any subject, any length, taught by anyone — an outline or description of work done is made available

Classes at other schools: part-time study at SEED combined with regular day programs, night or summer school courses

Co-op: formal arrangement with an employer to use 'learning on the job' for credit — can be paid or volunteer work

Exchanges: participation in a "Network" exchange to the U.S. during the school year — also, participation in second language learning exchanges in summer or during school year.

## EVALUATION

Evaluation is a vital part of learning at SEED. A variety of techniques may be used where appropriate. These may include essays, theatrical performance, portfolios, journals, annotated bibliographies and seminar presentations. Math and languages usually require completion of regular tests and O.A.C. level credits may require a formal exam. Final grades are the responsibility of SEED staff but input from student, catalysts, mentors, etc. is also sought.

## CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The SEED community recognizes that important informal educational experiences may occur outside the school building. Therefore, a number of co-curricular activities occur at SEED during the school year. These may include:

- guest speakers/special events — these involve a wide range of topics and occur often in conjunction with General Meetings and/or a subject class



- field trips — outside the school either as “whole” school events or in connection with specific subject areas e.g. Stratford Festival, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, cross country skiing, urban studies
- SEED “Feasts” — potluck dinners which include performances by students and/or staff
- physical activities — while SEED does not have specific space designed for physical fitness activities, use is made of community centers and outdoor recreation facilities in order to provide a variety of experiences e.g. jogging, cycling, ice skating, volleyball, badminton
- Network — exchanges are possible with 10 American schools for periods of 3 weeks to 3 months, usually in January to March. Studies at SEED must be organized first
- exchanges — students from other countries are welcomed and invited to share their perspectives with us.

## EXPECTATIONS — STUDENTS

### SEED students are expected to:

- be committed to the philosophy of SEED
- familiarize themselves with available opportunities for learning and then actively select the learning style and activities to which they are most suited
- be active in at least four SEED-related courses or activities (to be regarded as full time)
- continuously evaluate their objectives in consultation with their sponsor, subject teacher or another staff member
- be aware of the “Students Rights and Responsibilities” as outlined in the Toronto Board’s handbook
- make herself/himself aware of credit requirements and accept responsibilities for keeping records of all work accomplished including independent study units
- be prepared to participate in selecting and designing course content and format
- attend General Meetings in order to participate fully in the functioning of the community
- maintain regular contact with the staff members who are their Sponsors, participate in Sponsor Group activities, and keep the appropriate staff member informed about all catalyst activities and independent study units
- be prepared to search for catalysts, and participate in catalyst courses
- participate in an orientation program
- complete an initial three week trial period



## EXPECTATIONS — STAFF

In addition to behaving in accordance with the Education Act, contract obligations and OSSTF membership, SEED staff members are expected to:

- be committed to the philosophy of SEED
- be sensitive to individual learning styles, needs and interests and to help develop curriculum accordingly
- be committed to flexible and innovative approaches to learning and evaluation
- promote and encourage self-regulated learning for each student
- co-operate with other staff members to preserve and promote the philosophy of SEED
- act as an advisor to help students with their personal concerns and needs
- maintain regular communication with the members of their sponsor group
- work with students to establish clear academic objectives
- monitor and evaluate student work and assist students in documentation and record keeping for credit purposes
- encourage and monitor some level of independent study in each student's program
- recognize the importance of the 'small group' process in learning and to organize, promote and participate in class activities
- actively promote the use of community resources for learning, including the development of catalyst programs
- contribute their expertise to curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities
- co-ordinate subject resources in their "department"
- work with catalysts and their students to formulate clear expectations and work requirements for the course
- help catalysts and their classes evaluate the strengths, weaknesses and academic successes of their program. This may involve attending catalyst classes occasionally
- help orient new members of the community (students, catalysts, staff, etc.) to the SEED philosophy and the structure of the school
- participate in General Meetings and Staff Meetings
- be available to students during the school day. In the event that this is not possible, the secretary will be informed as to the whereabouts of the staff member and the time of return
- draw up courses of study

## HOURS OF OPERATION:

The secretary opens the school at 8:45 a.m. and the office is closed at 4:45 p.m. Monday to Friday with the same holidays as traditional schools. The 'school' hours are flexible.

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## EXPECTATIONS OF CATALYSTS

- be committed to the philosophy of SEED
- be sensitive to individual differences, gifts, talents and interests and help develop curriculum accordingly
- be committed to flexible and innovative approaches to learning and evaluation
- promote and encourage self-regulation and self-direction for each student
- co-operate with other staff members to promote the philosophy of SEED
- act as an advisor to help students with their personal concerns and needs
- maintain regular communication with the members of their sponsor group
- work with students to establish clear academic objectives
- monitor and evaluate student work and assist students in documentation and record keeping for credit purposes
- encourage and monitor some level of independent study in each student's program
- recognize the importance of the "small group" process in learning and to organize, promote and participate in class activities
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