CREATIVE CURRICULUM FOR AN INNER CITY:
A CASE STUDY OF ALEX TAYLOR
COMMUNITY SCHOOL

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The purpose of this article is to describe the remarkable transformation of an inner-city school, from what was once a rigidly traditional school to what is now the hub of community activities. Members of the school, home, and community forged partnerships that developed trust, identified needs of the community, and effected cocurricular programs and services for students, parents, preschoolers, senior citizens, and others. The article is a study of 20 years of loving service by a principal and staff and an explanation of their visions of multicultural education.

The Alex Taylor Community School, built in 1907, is located in the inner city of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Eight full-time teachers, one part-time teacher, a custodian, a support staff, and a number of volunteers work with principal Steve Ramsankar as partners in search of excellence in education. The student population is highly transient. Many children live with a single parent, and most families live below the poverty line. Many are on social assistance. A high percentage of the 175 elementary students are new immigrants to Canada; there are currently 25 national and ethnic groups represented. Visitors become immediately aware of the school's cultural diversity when they enter and see a large wall sign that says "Welcome" in 10 different languages.

THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL FAMILY

Alex Taylor is not just a place for children from kindergarten to grade six. Because it has been designated as a "Community School," it receives extra funding from the province, and its mandate includes providing educational programs for adults. As a result, the school welcomes everyone in the community—as its welcoming sign suggests. This openness has prompted the Alex Taylor teaching staff to rethink their vision of what it means to educate. In their perspective, each person has basic and unique needs that the school must responsibly attempt to understand and meet, and each person has
qualities, talents, and abilities to contribute to the school and to the larger community.

The guiding image for such an approach to education is expressed through the metaphor school is a family. In talking with students, principal Steve Ramsankar often tells them:

Remember, children, that we are a family All of us help each other This means that the big people at the school, the teachers and helpers, are parents away from home They should be greeted and treated with respect. If you have a problem, you know that you can go to them for help. Children can always find help at our school This building is our home away from home.

One of the interesting qualities of the metaphor of school as an extended family is that most listeners, regardless of age, can relate positively to the ideal of a caring family. In most cases, the family unit has been the key to individual, cultural, and social survival.

The Alex Taylor concept of family is defined as people who help each other at the school. A custodian, a secretary, a principal, teachers, support staff, parents, guests, senior citizens, police, and volunteers work together to create a school family and make the school a friendlier place. Every individual is vitally important to the operation of the school. Each person can be helped and can help others. In so doing, the meaning of family becomes clearer and stronger. The family unit becomes a primary means for helping people learn to live together in peace and harmony.

The family metaphor is expressed in many ways at Alex Taylor, including through the extensive involvement of volunteers. In fact, some volunteers have worked at the school longer than most of the staff. For instance, Virginia Yankowski, who started helping at Alex Taylor 20 years ago when her children were students, has stayed on to help both children and adults. Mornings, she is frequently in the staff room cooking her Cree specialties—moose-meat cakes and fried bannock—for youngsters who have arrived without breakfast. Every Tuesday she coordinates a luncheon for senior citizens and visitors. Virginia Yankowski is one of many volunteers who are striving to model what it means to live as part of a loving, caring family and to discover ways to help each other.

OUTLINE OF A CO-CREATIVE CURRICULUM

Cherryholmes has defined curriculum as "a study of what is valued and given priority and what is devalued and excluded." At Alex Taylor curriculum is more than a government-mandated program of studies. In addition to the recommended curriculum, Ramsankar and the staff—in a co-creative effort—

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continually search for ways to develop curriculums that relate to the needs of the community's students, parents, senior citizens, and preschoolers. Ram sankar states:

Educators must be cognizant of the fact that we are living in an ever-changing society; therefore, we must be prepared to redefine the curriculum to meet the needs of the community.

To achieve this goal, Alex Taylor Community School has developed a variety of educational and cultural programs in addition to the instructional programs for kindergarten through 6th grade. They include the following:

- A baby-sitting service for children six months to five years, which enables parents to attend adult education classes at the school.
- A nutrition program to supplement children's diets.
- A self-esteem program based on research by Dr. Jim Battle.
- Cub Scouts, Big Brothers, Brownies, and Girl Guides programs for children both during and after school.
- School and public performances by the school's bell choir and choir.
- Cultural exchange and travel programs within Alberta, elsewhere in Canada, and to other countries. (This year the 6th grade students traveled to Trinidad, where they were welcomed by the prime minister and president of the republic.)
- Social, health, mental health, and dental hygiene programs for students and adults.
- Voluntary summer school for inner-city children.
- A weekly police-in-school liaison program coupled with an awards assembly to recognize students' talents and accomplishments.
- Food and clothing banks for needy families.
- English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for immigrant youth and adults.
- Citizenship programs to introduce children and their parents to the ideals and realities of Canadian culture and citizenship.
- Weekly meals for senior citizens, with students helping to serve the food.
- A senior citizens' drop-in center and recreation program.
- A liaison program for elderly war veterans.
- Further education and evening education programs organized by both the school and the Parents' Society.
- Research projects, work experience, and practicum experiences for university and college students.
- Special events and celebrations, such as a Halloween party and the annual Chinese New Year celebration, which hosts over 400 invited guests and city dignitaries for a dinner and student concerts.
The variety of activities and programs indicates how Alex Taylor strives to educate all the people the school serves. Haggerson has described the process at Alex Taylor as

participation in the continual creation of the universe of one's self, of others, of the dwelling places of the world, that is, a co-creation.

We, as researchers, have changed as persons, as teachers, as scholars as a result of our relationships with those of Alex Taylor. We are part of the co-creation.2

Co-creative curriculum, in this sense, seeks to involve the community, including visiting researchers, in quests to educate themselves and others.

In framing their co-creative curriculum, the principal and teachers continually look at their students and community and search for ways to meet the needs of the total child by creating an environment of trust, love, self-esteem, and hope. Their approach parallels Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" (i.e., "physiological," "safety," "love," "self-esteem," and "self-actualization").3 In practice, however, human needs cannot be easily separated. Instead, trust, love, self-esteem, and hope imply interactions with each other. Together, these four elements provide the organizing framework of the Alex Taylor co-creative curriculum.

Meeting Trust Needs of the Total Child

To foster trust, the teachers and support staff of Alex Taylor watch for ways to meet four kinds of basic needs of the total child: (1) academic, (2) physical-recreational, (3) spiritual, and (4) social-cultural. This vision of needs is derived from Luke 2:52: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." (Italics indicate the key words of the total child concept.)4 This Biblical passage frames a way to look at children's present needs and to encourage each child's unique potential.

One way to help children satisfy their academic needs—to gain "wisdom"—is through the academic curriculum prescribed for elementary schools. Consequently, the Alex Taylor teachers ensure that adequate textbooks and supplies are available, and they work closely with the school's volunteer librarian to coordinate resources for enrichment reading. Teachers meet frequently to discuss the curriculum and plan ways to improve their teaching, and they carefully analyze the results of city and provincial examinations in monitoring students' learning. Weekly assemblies also provide opportunities to recognize academic progress by students.

The academic needs can only be met, however, by simultaneously watching for ways to meet other needs, including the physical-recreational ("stat-
ure”) needs. Meeting these needs involves more than planning and supervising activities in the school classroom, gymnasium, or playground. Ramsankar says:

Hungry children will usually not pay attention in class; they must be fed. Each school day, Alex Taylor children receive nutritious snacks.

If children are improperly dressed, they need to be clothed or taught how to care for themselves in a northern climate. Alex Taylor always has spare clothing on hand for children and adults, and a washer, dryer, and showers are also available for children.

Some children come from unstable home conditions and are deprived of sleep. At Alex Taylor such children are allowed to rest for half an hour in the nurse’s room and attempts are made to counsel with parents.

Since many of the parents in the area cannot afford to take their children on trips, the teachers frequently plan field trips, which vary from a visit to the city zoo, attending a sports event, going on a camping trip, or planning an international excursion.

The spiritual needs, growing in “favour with God,” are harder to address, because in a multicultural school they cannot be defined in a denominational sense. Ramsankar explains the meaning of spiritual at Alex Taylor:

When I speak of the spiritual, I do not mean the church per se. To speak of the spirit and the spiritual is not to speak of something other than human kind, but more as it is lived, known, and demonstrated. Knowing the spiritual refers to knowing one’s self and others and their traditions. I refer to man’s caring spirit and love for each other.

Consequently, the school staff continually look for ways to help students feel better about themselves and care about others. For example, a recent school assembly was devoted to the United Nations declaration calling for an end to discrimination. At the assembly children, parents, and community leaders sang songs, said prayers, and expressed their hopes that the world could become a more loving place.

The social-cultural needs, growing in “favour” with “man,” focus on ways to get along and help others. Students are taught to obey the rules of the school, such as “no fighting” or “no name calling.” Children are continually encouraged to learn how to cooperate and respect each other. For their own safety, children are also reminded why they should not play in the parking lot or near the busy street that borders the school, and they are taught how to cross streets safely. Discussions at the frequent school assemblies teach them how to talk with police officers and to respect them as protectors of law and order in Canada, not as public officials who should be feared.

Students are also encouraged to think of and help others. They can assist the custodian by picking up things that clutter school hallways. Additionally, they are given opportunities to help senior citizens. When a city newspaper reported that senior citizens in the area were unable to afford a decent meal, the school staff and volunteers brought the seniors into the school and allowed the children to help serve them a nutritious hot lunch. Ramsankar maintains:

Children will be less inclined to steal from, mug, or take advantage of senior citizens if they have had frequent opportunities to see, talk, and interact with them. Children
need to have frequent opportunities to help older people in order to understand that seniors are human beings and to appreciate their accomplishments.

Understanding the total child—including the academic, physical-recreational, spiritual, and social-cultural needs—helps Alex Taylor staff members assess what children require. As these needs are met, children learn to trust the people responsible for operating schools and to see school as a place where meaningful learning can occur.

*Greeting to Meet Love Needs*

Fostering a trust that school is a safe, nourishing, uplifting, and helpful place opens doors for the simultaneous teaching of love. As Ramsankar frequently emphasizes, "If we do not trust each other, we cannot love each other." The Alex Taylor staff place a daily emphasis on making loving contact with fellow human beings, regardless of their status in society, their ethnic background, or their individual problems. The primary method for teaching this principle is simple but profoundly powerful: all children and adults at the school learn to greet one another.

The greetings usually take place when children or adults enter or leave the school, but they may also occur throughout the day, especially when people look like they could use a hug. Although a welcome frequently results in an embrace, a greeting may simply be a handshake or a verbal salutation. No one is excluded, children, teachers, parents, custodians, and visitors must have their presence cordially acknowledged. According to Ramsankar,

A hug or handshake in the morning exudes warmth and sets the tone for the day. Students need that kind of daily contact and affirmation. They need to know that we care about them, that they are important, and that we love them. Therefore, we must be consistent and do it daily. I believe that saying "hello" is a teaching activity.

Levinas has described visible and audible contact with others as "an exposure of being," and the ethical responsibilities implied in such encounters go beyond the being or will of any individual. They are signified on the basis of "the-one-for-the-other." During his research at Alex Taylor Community School for the past two years, Hart has described how the repeated attempts to greet and to recognize responsibility for the welfare of others have affected him:

Ramsankar’s meaning of “hello” is not the perfunctory greeting which many people thoughtlessly mumble, instead, it is an authentic invitation of concern extended to someone else. Whether accompanied by an embrace of the arms, the clasp of a handshake, a meeting of the eyes, or a pricking of the eardrums, an Alex Taylor “hello”

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is an attempt to open up or continue a conversation—a caring relationship—with another.\footnote{Charles Hart, "Defining and Cherishing the Being of a Leading Teacher: A Reflective Study of Steve Ramsankar" (unpublished manuscript presented at a research symposium at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1988), p. 6}

Thus, the teaching of love is redefined at Alex Taylor as any daily tactile, visual, or auditory opportunity for anyone—and everyone—at the school to become mutually involved with and concerned about others.

The attempt to demonstrate love during one of the briefest of teaching moments—exchanging hellos—opens other ways of learning how to love others. If a child is having problems, the principal or teachers can often tell and find ways to help. Students practice a buddy system of watching out for each other. If a student is ill, the buddy may take homework to his friend, thus showing concern for his charge. In turn, teachers as well as students look for ways to help members of the community. Children write letters and visit lonely war veterans. The goal is to help people love their fellow human beings.

Celebrating Self-Esteem Needs

The quest for agape love concurrently reinforces the need for self-esteem. Ramsankar explains why:

To me, the single most important area which we must address is that of self-esteem, because if I don’t feel good about myself, how can I feel good about you? At one time I was reluctant to say that I loved myself—that was being conceited. Today, I have changed my opinion—because if I do not love myself how could I love you?

Self-esteem involves reciprocal encouragement of the self and others. Teachers need to love themselves if they are going to teach children to have self-esteem. That is one reason students are not the only ones welcomed to school, teachers often need to be hugged or lovingly greeted just as much as students.

The challenge of teaching self-esteem, therefore, means that each person in the school must learn to feel good about his or her own talents, accomplishments, and level of mental health. It also means that each person learns to encourage others to feel good about themselves.

For the past 15 years, Ramsankar and the Alex Taylor staff have worked closely with Dr. Jim Battle, a well-known advocate of self-esteem and a clinical psychologist in the Edmonton Public Schools. In 1975 Battle piloted a program at Alex Taylor for testing a child’s self-esteem, and this program is currently used in schools in 25 countries. From the results of his testing of children at Alex Taylor, Battle has concluded, "We find that this school is enormously successful in increasing self-esteem."\footnote{Janice Tyrwhitt, "A Loving Principal," \textit{Readers' Digest} 131 (August 1987) 83}

Some of the basic principles described in Battle’s book \textit{9 to 19: Crucial Years for Self-esteem in Children and Youth} help explain how Ramsankar and
Steve Ramsankar and Charles Hart

his staff work to increase self-esteem. Battle maintains that a family environment that seeks to foster self-esteem should provide the following conditions:

Unconditional positive regard, as put forth by Rogers, is a process in which parents communicate to their children that they are loved unconditionally. That is, they communicate to their children that caring for and prizing them is not contingent on any predetermined conditions. Children who have this from their parents realize that their parents love them at all times, even when they behave in a fashion that their parents consider to be inappropriate.

Encouragement Parents who encourage their children emphasize positives rather than negatives. They minimize the importance of children’s mistakes while recognizing and helping to build their assets and strengths.

Reflective listening is a process which involves grasping what the child feels and means, and then stating or reflecting this meaning in a fashion so that the child feels understood and accepted. Thus, the technique of reflective listening works as a sort of mirror that enables the child to see him or herself more clearly.

Battle believes these processes outline the ways parents should build their children’s self-esteem. He describes other actions for educators. Ramsankar, however, has interpreted “unconditional positive regard,” “encouragement,” and “reflective listening” as the foundation for how he and his teaching staff relate to Alex Taylor’s family of children, parents, volunteers, and visitors. The daily greetings are, in a sense, a ritual demonstrating unconditional love. If students misbehave, the impropriety of the actions will be discussed and accounted for as quickly as possible, but when students pass teachers or the principal in the hall, they know that they will still receive a friendly, concerned greeting. The teacher may not have liked the behavior of a particular student, but the teacher still cares for the student as a person. The same principle applies to aides, volunteers, or visitors. Everyone is welcomed back regardless of the time spent away from the school. According to Ramsankar’s way of looking at building self-esteem:

Each person is unique and is a very special human being. Each has strengths and weaknesses. To me it is morally wrong to dwell on the weaknesses of a fellow human being, but by capitalizing on the strengths of each individual, achievements are boundless.

Thus, the means to achieving unconditional love at Alex Taylor Community School is to look at the strengths of each person and, in so doing, to see the incredible worth and potential of each human being.

This does not imply that Ramsankar or his staff ignore problems. Part of the challenge of encouraging self-esteem is to turn problems into learning opportunities. For instance, if a student frequently instigates fights, a plan is worked out with the child for learning to control his or her temper. Like many human problems, the fighting may not immediately stop, but if the child can begin to learn how to be friendlier and helpful to others and to reduce the

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number of fights, then that is a beginning and is recognized as a positive learning step.

From another perspective, if immigrant parents have poor self-esteem because they cannot talk with their children about school, then the Alex Taylor answer is to invite the parents to come to the school for free language instruction. Day-care services at the school enable parents who have small children to attend the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Learning English, associating with parents who face similar problems, and having the opportunity to interact with their children’s teachers can help such parents improve their ability to communicate and to feel better about themselves and the education of their family. For the Alex Taylor staff, fostering self-esteem is a process of encouraging ongoing learning.

Reflective listening is one of many communication techniques the Alex Taylor staff use each day to promote self-esteem. Tyrwhitt described an occasion on which a little girl was crying because her new coat had been dirtied, Ramsankar listened to the girl’s concerns and assured her that Halleen Turner (the school secretary) could get the stain out. The child was not made to feel as if her concerns were unimportant, instead, the staff listened. Hart described an incident in which a troubled boy briefly stood by the seldom-closed door of the principal’s office, was quickly recognized, hugged, and invited in for a private conversation with Ramsankar. The boy never had to ask for help because Ramsankar’s senses were open to listening and helping the child.

The receptivity to communication is further symbolized by a staff room that is always open, where parents, children, visitors, and staff members can sit down, share a drink of milk, coffee, or tea, and converse with one another. For the Alex Taylor staff, active listening is vital for identifying, dealing with, and resolving problems and for creating an inviting, friendly atmosphere where everyone feels welcome.

But the most important part of the Alex Taylor process for fostering self-esteem is celebrating strengths. Ramsankar elaborates on his meaning for celebration. “Every human being likes to be recognized. Recognition provides motivation, which can lead to high achievement and the elevation of self-esteem. Recognition is a form of celebration.” Thus, various means for celebrating accomplishments are continually sought.

In a way, the frequent greetings in the hallways and classrooms are daily celebrations of each individual. An exchange of hellos provides opportunities to recognize recent accomplishments: “How is my friend, who is doing better with his math?” (said to a grade one student); “Phi just won an academic

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9Janice Tyrwhitt, “A Loving Principal,” Readers’ Digest 131 (August 1987) 84
10Charles Hart, “Defining and Cherishing the Being of a Leading Teacher A Reflective Study of Steve Ramsankar” (unpublished manuscript presented at a research symposium at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1988), p 8
scholarship” (said to a graduate of Alex Taylor who has returned to help teach summer school classes); “Francis is one of our hardest working parent volunteers” (said to one of the aides who is at the school nearly every day). The purpose of such minicelebrations is to acknowledge and praise strengths. Ramsankar emphasizes that “we have to look for strengths, even in failure times.”

Weekly student assemblies are part of a more formal “symbolic ritual” designed to celebrate the achievements of students. Singing is an important part of celebrating at these assemblies. Patriotic anthems (“O Canada” and “God Save the Queen”) serve as the invocation and benediction of the assembly, they help the children learn to honor their country (in many cases a country their parents have recently adopted). Songs of happiness (such as “If You’re Happy and You Know It Clap Your Hands,” “Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes,” or “I Love to Go A-Wandering”) remind students of things they can be thankful for and of the adventures that growing up can bring.

Prayer follows the singing of Canada’s national anthem. Students recite the Lord’s Prayer, not as an attempt to convert people to Christianity, but to convey the importance of recognizing the vitality that the spiritual can give to education. Ramsankar tells why:

I believe in a power that is greater than myself. I am sure that most people do. It does not matter whether we are Hindu, Moslem, Shinto, Buddhist, or Christian—we all can share the spiritual celebration of others’ accomplishments.

The recited prayer, in this sense, is a reminder that all persons, regardless of their religion or lack of religion, need to recognize and celebrate spiritual ways to journey the earth peacefully.

Teachers present the “Student of the Week Award” not just to recognize academic excellence. Awards are presented for such things as listening well, trying harder, loving, caring, sharing, consistent or improved attendance, demonstrating responsible citizenship, or responsibly completing homework assignments. Those selected as “Students of the Week” are presented with a certificate, photographed, and their pictures are displayed in the hallway. Children’s birthdays are also recognized. The yearly graduation assembly honors students who have completed six years of schooling.

Recognition, though, does not always have to involve a formal certificate or a special occasion, it can be as simple as one of the students bringing a kitten to the assembly and sharing the joy of talking about and caressing the pet with peers and teachers. Even though an assembly is held every week, there is never a shortage of accomplishments or talents or precious posses-

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1. Par Sylvie Lundy, “Les Petits Arrivent le Ventre Creux et mal Vetus,” l'éLundi (December 1987) 37
Informing students of the school’s activities and calendar of events at the assemblies allows everyone to know what is happening at their school and to recognize the accomplishments of various groups. the school choir, the hand bell choir, the school’s Cub Scout and Brownie programs, or the Big Brothers and Big Sisters groups. Announcements about school activities may invite new students to participate in these groups, or the information may simply encourage children to look forward to field trips to the zoo, a football game, or a school exchange program with a sister school in Banff.

Welcoming visitors is a regular part of the assembly ritual. Almost every week a policeman visits the school and combines discussions about traffic safety, personal safety in the neighborhood, or drug abuse and alcoholism with demonstrations of friendship and fun. Other special guests, such as the prime minister of Trinidad, federal and provincial politicians, judges, lawyers, business people, former students who have graduated from high school or university, university researchers, and service groups have attended and spoken at the assemblies. These assemblies help the children recognize the importance of various people in their lives. They learn, for example, that police are human beings who preserve law and order and care for the welfare of the community. Students also have the opportunity to interact with important people in the community, to recognize and be recognized by them.

It is not only official speakers, however, who are recognized at the weekly assembly. Parents frequently attend, often bringing younger children with them. Each attending parent and child is introduced to the assembly. Every person is considered important. At the beginning of the 1988 summer school session, the new custodian offered to answer the telephone while the rest of the staff attended the assembly, but Ramsankar’s immediate reply was, “No, the phone calls can wait; it is more important that you be introduced to the children.” This new custodian came to understand that his presence in the school merited recognition.

In their research, Haggerson, Macagnoni, and Ramsankar made the following discovery: “We realized that this weekly event was an experience that most of the children eagerly anticipated. They expected us to stop and speak with them. They expected verbal response and gesture and affirmation.” The weekly assembly is an opportunity for children and adults to interact with one another and nurture relationships. It is a weekly celebration of present and potential strengths.

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A similar ritual occurs at a weekly dinner for senior citizens. Prayers of thankfulness are offered for the food; seniors are informed of events happening at the school for both themselves and the children; guests are welcomed and often invited to speak, and children are invited to help in serving the food. Usually Ramsankar tells some of his favorite old jokes, although Frank Sklove (a 1918 graduate of Alex Taylor who actively supports the school) has taken to writing new jokes for Ramsankar. The dinner for senior citizens reminds everyone that the past is worth remembering.

Other planned and impromptu celebrations occur throughout the year. Each month staff members’ or volunteers’ birthdays are acknowledged with birthday cake, a gift (such as a flower), and a song in the staff room. The seniors hold bingo games regularly, with food (instead of money) as prizes. They also meet for activities such as shuffleboard, carpet bowling, or informal parties. In October, a neighboring high school organizes a Halloween party for the children, distributing free candy and supervising challenging games. Christmas is a busy time, with concerts and gift packages for each of the children. Seniors receive free dinners on Boxing Day and New Year’s Day. During the long winter season, events such as “Cabin Fever Day” encourage students to dress up and put on a talent show. Every spring, the police prepare a free pancake breakfast at the school, play games with the children, and take them for motorcycle rides.

The highlight of the school year for the past 20 years has been the celebration of the Chinese New Year, usually in early February. Over 400 parents and guests attend a free dinner. The mayor of the city is often present and invited to speak, along with representatives from the federal parliament and the provincial legislature. Prominent school board members and officers, federal judges, and church leaders attend. Expressions of good will are phrased in Chinese, and Chinese customs are described. Children and volunteers prepare numerous displays of Chinese myths or symbols, and many children dress in ethnic clothing. After dinner, the children stage a performance of plays, singing, oriental music, choral speech readings, ribbon dances, stick dances, and the lion dance. In one evening, Alex Taylor Community School brings together political leaders, business people, officials, educators, parents, senior citizens, and children. A large city is transformed into an integrated community that participates in what Sergiovanni has described as “culture building” and the “practicing of purposing.”

Through this cultural celebration, children and adults learn to understand and love one another.

**Actualizing Hopes for Miracles**

Hope underlies the attempts to meet the human needs of trust, love, and self-esteem. Such hope is expressed by encouraging the possibilities for being

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and becoming uniquely yet responsibly human, and it searches for discoveries about the reasons for living. Ramsankar articulates the fundamental hope of his philosophy:

I believe that every person was created by God and that each person has a God-given purpose for living. Part of my purpose as an educator is to help others discover their divine yet individual purposes for living.

This hope echoes Frankl's transcendental search for personal meanings of living: "He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how." Such a philosophy assumes that children and adults can realize accomplishments, goals, and quests. Both can actualize miracles of educational growth by helping one another discover individual purposes for living.

The miracles of actualization often can take a considerable amount of time and may appear insignificant to outsiders. Ramsankar, for example, relates how many members of the Native population who lived in the neighborhood refused to come near the school or to encourage their children to attend. Drugs, alcoholism, prostitution, and gambling were persistent problems for them. Ramsankar and his staff reached out, however, and began to develop a sense of trust with them. After several years of showing friendship, a few Natives started coming into the school and the staff room. Ramsankar, in turn, encouraged them to work as volunteers and paid them an honorarium, which began to lift their esteem in their own eyes and in the eyes of their children. For the past nine years, about 10 Natives have helped as volunteers and aides. They are discovering dignified purposes for living.

In working with adults, the actualizing hopes are for the present and the near future; children, however, connote a greater hope for the 21st century. Marlene Poloway, the Community School Coordinator at Alex Taylor, explains her visions for the hope that children represent:

Today's youth are the ones who will alter prejudice that has been in existence for hundreds of years. Youth exchanges and the integration of youth from all parts of the world into our school have given our youth valuable education about the similarities they all share. It is through these similarities that common goals will be established. Through this, an appreciation for the uniqueness of others will develop.

From Poloway's comments, the purposes underlying the Alex Taylor curriculum are made more clear. Children are fed, clothed, groomed, loved, and helped to feel good about themselves and others. These actions are not

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17 Marlene Poloway, cited in Steve Ramsankar, "Visions of the Future: Dynamic Synthesis of Many Cultures" (keynote address presented at the Council of Saskatoon Social Studies Conference, Saskatoon, October 1987), p. 6
performed as ends in and of themselves, they foreshadow how future adults can live responsibly and "learn to walk the earth edifyingly together." 18

In societies that are multicultural and will continue to become more so, children provide hope that human beings can love, care, and reach out to others in tolerance, understanding, love, and peace. 19 Faith in the future achievements of children is the reason why Henry Adams could say, "A teacher affects eternity; he/she can never tell where his/her influence stops." 20

CONCLUSION

Previous studies have attempted in various ways to describe the qualities of Alex Taylor Community School. Haggerson, Macagnoni, and Ramsankar emphasized the "aliveness: the spirit of well-being." 21 A WCCI videotape, "A Multicultural Approach to Citizenship and Educating the Total Child," emphasized the ways of meeting the needs of students. 22 The CBC Man Alive television program characterized the school as "a loving place." 23 An ACCESS videotape explored how education at Alex Taylor is approached as a "partnership" with the community. 24 Tyrwhitt focused on the leadership of "a loving principal." 25 What these previous analyses and this article are attempting to find is a way to talk about the spiritual foundation that underlies the school's ethos.

Huebner has suggested that there are no direct ways of knowing the spiritual: only indirect ways of knowing and testifying to it. 26 What is most important about Alex Taylor may be impossible to adequately describe in words. At the very least this article is another attempt to witness how Alex Taylor Community School has changed the lives of many students, teachers, aides, parents, volunteers, and researchers for the better. As the Chancellor

18 Ted Tetsuo Aoki, "Celebrating the Meaning of Being" (unpublished commencement address presented at the graduation ceremonies of the University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Alberta, May 1988)
22 Steve Ramsankar, "A Multicultural Approach to Citizenship and Educating the Total Child" (videotape available through Dr. Maxine Dunfee, Executive Secretary of the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, 1985)
23 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "School as a Loving Place," Man Alive television series (Toronto: CBC, fall 1985)
24 ACCESS Alberta, "Partners in Education" (videotape production available through ACCESS Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, 1988)
25 Janice Tyrwhitt, "A Loving Principal," Readers' Digest 131 (August 1987), 80
of the University of Alberta said in a letter to Ramsankar informing him that he would receive an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws:

The Senate has chosen to honor a person whose work as a gifted and dedicated teacher and humanitarian has enriched the lives of so many children and adults; and who has brought a sense of dignity and purpose to many whose future might otherwise have been without hope or promise.27

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27Teve H Miller, unpublished letter to Steve Ramsankar, December 1988, p 1