

**PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH WITH
THE GERMAN SPEAKING MENNONITES**

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Abstract

German-speaking Mennonite people from Mexico are moving into Southeastern Alberta. They are mainly employed as farm labourers. Their low level of income makes it difficult to provide for the needs of their large families. Many also encounter difficulties because of their lack of English and literacy, unfamiliarity with Canadian ways and laws, and a lack of understanding and trust in the helping agencies and school system.

By using the Participatory Action Research approach and the principles of Community Development, representatives of community health services were able to enter into a unique partnership with the Mennonite people to work toward meeting their identified needs. A family-centred approach was used, with special attention being given to cultural and religious traditions and values. Programs that were developed addressed the needs of the Mennonite people including English as a Second Language, literacy, nutrition, health, safety, dental, socialization, education, and German literacy for the children.

A key finding of the research study was that a participatory action research approach did allow the Mennonite people in this study to find more effective ways of making the transition from life in Mexico to life in southern Alberta. Participants did take steps towards their goal of a better quality of life. As well, agency people found new ways of working with the Mennonite people and with each other.

Finally, this study shows that as Mennonite people adapt to life in Canada changes do occur in their ways of interacting with each other and with the broader community.

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Prairie Rose School District, Community Adult Learning, Write Break, Best Babies
Yes, together we are stronger!

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listening and guiding

Maria, the special one - who shared the vision

The German Speaking Mennonite People - brave enough
to believe we could find ways to work together to *make life better*

My family - who hung in there with love

Our Father above, who chose to bless.

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INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Background And Past Involvement

I first came into contact with the Mennonite people through my work as a public health nurse in 1989. Initially young Mennonite families came to Canada for summer employment in labour-intensive row crop agriculture. Frequently babies would be born to these families while they were in Canada, and it was part of my role to conduct postpartum home visits, and to commence their childhood immunizations. Gradually families began to remain in the region year round, with only vacation time spent in Mexico. My contacts with them became more regular and frequent for a variety of reasons, and my awareness of their needs increased dramatically.

In 1992 I started to meet with the people as individuals or groups to ascertain how we could address their varied needs in a manner that was culturally appropriate. During a Community Health Nursing course in my undergraduate degree I used the Community as Client Model (Anderson & McFarlane, 1988) in carrying out a community assessment of German-speaking Mennonite people in the Bow Island area. In 1995 I completed a cultural assessment with two Mennonite women volunteers for a Cross Cultural Nursing course. Through my employment I also invited some members to group consultations which consisted of a combination of orientation to services in the region and listening to their concerns.

The opportunity for submission of a funding proposal was presented by the Office of the Commissioner of Services for Children which invited proposals that would be written by the people who would realize the benefits. This provided me with a unique opportunity for a participatory action approach to finding acceptable ways to work in partnership with the

Mennonite people in empowering ways.

Justifying The Research

Some of the reasons for my choice of this research topic are listed below:

1. Alberta Health has published literature validating the link between poverty, literacy and health risks (Appendix 1).
2. The Mennonite people in this region are open to, and even requesting assistance to establish educational programs that will help them make the changes they desire.
3. I have been unable to locate documentation of attempts of people or agencies (successful or otherwise) to work in partnership with the Mennonites who have recently migrated from Mexico.
4. There appears to be a need to generate knowledge about working with this group of people.
5. Documentation of the knowledge generated, specific though it may be, might be of benefit to others working with Mennonites and with other identifiable cultural groups.

Choosing An Approach

There is some literature written about the needs of the Mennonite people (Kulig, 1995; Petker, 1993). However I have been unable to locate literature to give me insights into current community development or empowering projects with these people. The Mennonite people in my community have on occasion indicated that they wish to see change in their current status. I recognize the need and have a desire to learn about how to help them bring about sustainable change within the complexities of their culture, one that has traditionally been very closed to change.

Through my graduate studies I had become fascinated by participatory action research,

especially in community development, and had completed a preliminary literature review on the both Mennonite people and Participatory Action Research (PAR) prior to becoming more closely engaged in this project. It seemed to me that PAR would be a useful tool to generate knowledge and understanding that would enable me and members of the Mennonite group to learn together how we could accomplish the changes they desired in their lives.

My involvement has been made possible in part through the encouragement of my employer, the Palliser Regional Health Authority, and the backing and support of the staff employed by the Officer of the Commission of Services for Children. Their insistence that any plan for financial assistance be written by the people who will be the recipients of the benefits opened the door for someone to enter into a partnership with the Mennonite people to accomplish this task. It would probably not have been possible for the people to accomplish this task on their own at this time because of their lack of English, their levels of literacy, their cultural backgrounds, and their powerlessness within our society.

Audience for this Thesis

I searched the literature and on-line databases for documentation of participatory projects with the Mennonites who are returning to Canada from Mexico, and other related countries but I was unable to locate resources from which I could gather information to help me in my work. This documentation is intended for beginners who, like me, want to gain insight from the work of others. While writing these pages, I have kept in mind that I am writing for the Mennonite people as well as those who would like to work with them at the grassroots level. The Mennonite people in our coffee meetings agreed with me that what is happening here in the Bow Island area should be documented and made available so that people in other areas (for example, where their extended families reside) may be encouraged to provide similar opportunities for the Mennonite

people there. In summary, this is written for anyone who is keen to work with the Mennonite population (or other similar groups) with sensitivity and caring so those people who have come to reside among us can have a better life, according to their own definitions.

The Thesis Question

Dick (1995a), in his online article entitled *A Beginners Guide to Action Research*, says that “there are times when the initial use of fuzzy methods to answer fuzzy questions is the only appropriate choice.” He goes on to say that “Action research provides enough flexibility to allow fuzzy beginnings while progressing towards appropriate endings” (p. 5). The fuzzy question that was the foundation for this participatory activity was as follows: Can we learn to work together in ways that are acceptable within the German-speaking Mennonite sub-culture to help bring about changes that the Mennonite people themselves want to see in order to make life better for them in Canada?

Definition of Key Terms

In this paper, the term German-speaking Mennonite refers to those individuals who have moved to Canada from any of the Mennonite settlements in countries such as Mexico, Belize, and Bolivia. The common language spoken is what they refer to as “Low German.”

I use the term agency person when referring to an individual who is employed by a local agency such as the school division, a regional health authority, The Office of the Commissioner of Services for Children, or community adult learning, and is participating in the project with the knowledge and support of their employing agency.

The term community when used in reference to the German-speaking Mennonite people includes those people who are united by their common language, their differentness from the host culture, and the problems they encounter in making their way in a new country. They have a

common history with their roots in the Anabaptism. They have common concerns today. They are the ones to determine whether or not they will have a common future.

Authorization for the research

Permission for this study was granted by the Human Subjects Research Committee of the Faculty of Education, at the University of Lethbridge. My personal involvement in this project was approved by the Palliser Health Authority as outlined in the letter of support by Janice Blair, Vice President of Community Development and Health Promotion (appendix 6). My nursing manager, Gerri Renz, included "Mexican Mennonite Immigrants" on my list of assigned responsibilities in 1996, and in 1997 the "Hope Centre Project" was listed. The Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David Swann, was one of my main encouragers and advisors in addressing the broader determinants of health of the German-speaking Mennonite people in our service area.

Limitations

The findings of this research apply only the particular Mennonite group that participated in this project. The results cannot be generalized to other Mennonite groups residing in Canada for different lengths of time or in different locations.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Introduction

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) model can be used by researchers or facilitators of learning to encourage and enable the members of marginalised communities to generate knowledge about their community and its problems. This knowledge is then used to plan and take action to bring about desired changes in a manner that is appropriate to their cultural context. In this study, PAR was used in community development with the Kanadier Mennonites residing in the Bow Island/ Burdett region in southeastern Alberta.

The literature reviewed provides information about PAR that guided my involvement with the Mennonites. Literature about the Mennonites is also reviewed, as well as a selection of articles that I have found helpful in shaping my thoughts on how to participate with people of a different culture or people who are otherwise marginalised.

This literature review proved to be only a launching point, as the search of literature has been ongoing. In Dick's (1995b) article entitled "Action Research Theses" he suggests that "much of the more specialized literature will be accessed only as the study progresses, and reported adjacent to the relevant findings" (p. 7). I found this to be so.

Definition

Frideres (1992) calls Orlando Fals-Borda the father of participatory action because of his early work, along with Paulo Freire, in the community action approach in Latin America. In Frideres' work entitled "A World of Communities: Participatory Research Perspectives" he includes an article by Fals-Borda, that was submitted to a community development and research conference. Fals Borda (1991) says that "Participatory Action-Research, while emphasizing a rigorous search for knowledge, is an open-ended process of life-and-work" (p. 18). He says it is a

philosophy for life, as much as a method. Its purpose, he says, is to interrupt and transform the present power monopoly to enable deep social and economic change.

McTaggart (1991) credits Kurt Lewin as being the inventor of the term "action research." McTaggart summarizes his perception of Lewin's approach as follows, "action research is the way groups of people can organize the conditions under which they can learn from their own experience and make this experience accessible to others" (p. 170). In the beginning phase, a group identifies a cluster of problems of mutual concern where change for improvement is desired. He summarizes Lewin's description as a proceeding spiral, including planning, action, observing and evaluating the result of the action. Group decision and commitment to improvement are significant components.

Deschler and Ewert (1995) define the term participatory action research (PAR) by looking at each word separately. "Participation," they say, represents a democratization approach in social science research, in which all those included in the process are seen as essential to the generation of useful knowledge regarding problems. The term "action" indicates that the research is intended to contribute directly to taking planned action to manage, improve, or solve practical problems within their community. "Research" is defined as a systematic inquiry to generate knowledge. In summary, their definition includes engaging with a community in a manner that generates knowledge about that particular community and its particular problems, and using this generated knowledge to initiate change on the part of the participants.

Dick and Swepson (1994) confirm that PAR is directed toward the achievement of change. Planned changes are based on understanding, and the understanding is derived from evidence. They agree with Deschler and Ewert (1995) that knowledge gained in this manner cannot be generalized. Claims can be made only about the people or systems studied.

McTaggart (1991) states that besides action, participatory research involves knowledge production, which includes learning new ways to relate to each other to make change possible. Knowledge is developed by the participants, the group, as well as the researcher. The focus of the knowledge gained is on improvement from the target group's perspective.

Carson, Connors, Ripley, and Smits (1989) define action research as an attempt to understand and deal with real life problems, with action as its focus. As well, it is democratic, with the partners as equal owners of the project.

One of the aims of participatory action research is community development or empowerment which assists members of a community to overcome their view of themselves as victims, and learn ways to identify and solve their problems. It encourages them to come to recognize their strengths and enables them to envision culturally relevant solutions (May, Mendelson, & Ferketich, 1995).

Holistic Focus

Deschler and Ewert (1995) state that while the focus of this type of community engagement is holistic in scope, it may address social, political, economic, technological, or relationship issues. Creative solutions for problems are sought that will bring about the desired results through culturally appropriate pathways. The aim of this type of research engagement with communities is to contribute to a fairer and a more just society.

McTaggart (1991) states that PAR is concerned not only with changing individuals, but also their culture and the society to which they belong. However he stresses that, "these changes are not impositions: individuals and groups agree to work together to change themselves, individually and collectively" (p. 172). "It aims to build communities of people committed to enlightening themselves about the relationship between circumstance, action, and consequence in

their own situation and emancipating themselves” (p. 176) from the constraints that limit their power to live out their own values.

Considerations of The Personality And Role of The Researcher

Rothman (1974) writes, “practice wisdom has held that workers can operate effectively across ethnic and racial lines, that appropriate personal attitudes and sensitivities are required to accomplish this, and that the early relationship-forming stage of work may be more complicated and extended under such circumstances” (p. 56). He refers to Lynden’s work in studying Peace Corps workers in the Philippines when he says that more successful workers were those who were “less aggressive, more introverted, and had less experience” (Rothman, 1974, p. 58). He writes that Fahn found practitioners who were more democratic-minded and impatient with the rate of social change were more successful.

One manner of clarifying roles is according to their function (Rothman, 1974). Individuals who perform direct roles have immediate personal contact and may serve as “enabler, motivator, educator, organizer, and socializer” (p. 62). Those in indirect roles may function as “linker, coordinator, consultant, mediator, advocate and broker” (p. 62). When the target group is distrustful or suspicious of an agency a “detached” or “multi-purpose worker” may be beneficial to facilitate communication and establish the linkages between the organization and the target group. The linking person “typically holds values and norms that are in an intermediate position between the units being articulated” (p. 77).

Deschler and Ewert (1995) also address the role of the external participant researcher(s). The researcher or another external source may provide the initial motivation for the engagement, but it is the community and its members who identify and define their concerns. The concerns of the community rather than the interests or agenda of the external participants are used as a

starting point for communication, They also point out that the external researcher comes to stand with and alongside the community, rather than outside as an objective observer or an external consultant. The external participants contribute expertise which includes knowledge of the process, community resources, or any other type of information that the community may not possess. Community participants contribute their knowledge of their unique situation, as well as their strengths. This interactive process allows and encourages the community members to be full participants in the process of knowledge generation, learning about the process as well the common knowledge they have come to share.

McTaggart (1991) cautions about power differentials among participants. Academics may have a tendency to be imperialistic in their relationships because of their command of 'specialized discourses.' He states that special attention must be paid to reciprocity and symmetry of relations so that the community remains in control of the project. Ongoing attention should be directed to ensure authentic participation, and to ensure that the "the agenda of the least powerful become an important focus of the group's work" (p. 175).

Carson et. al. (1989) caution that those who are accustomed to a traditional top-down model could find this type of collaboration especially difficult. Greenwood, Whyte and Harkavy (1993) concur that the leaders must be willing "to take risks, and to permit processes to develop that they did not personally control" (p. 188).

About Participation

McTaggart (1991) differentiates between participation and involvement. He says that participation means ownership in the production of knowledge and the improvements planned. This differs from involvement where the participants are merely entangled or included. He states that mere involvement bears the risk of exploitation of people in carrying out the plans of others.

The people who are involved in the outcomes are to have control over the whole process. He stresses the importance of this in cross-cultural settings, to preclude imperialism.

Generally in PAR there is a merging of academics or experts and community participants. McTaggart (1991) advises that for participation to be authentic regular checks must be incorporated to ensure that the agenda of the least powerful remains the focus. Deschler and Ewert (1995) agree that in PAR “special effort is taken to reduce barriers to participation, especially for those who have been excluded or under-represented in the past” (p .7).

Dick (1995c) discusses the levels of participation in his article “Dimensions of Participation.” He proposes that the researcher as well as the participants have a choice about the level at which they participate, and this level may vary throughout the project. He lists four levels of participation relating to the content; participants may: (a) take the role of informants, providing the data; (b) be interpreters of the data; © be planners and decision-makers; and (d) participate in the implementation.

In the actual research process participants may take the role of facilitators, collecting and interpreting data, or they may participate as co-researchers, involved in all aspects of the project. There may be others who participate only as recipients, being informed about the study and its implications.

Dick suggests that if the group of participants is large, it may be more expedient to choose representatives, a smaller number who are chosen to speak for the remainder. Different people may be involved at different levels.

When choosing participants for informants, Dick states that the researcher should aim to contact what he calls a “maximum diversity sample.” He recommends that data should be collected until data ceases to emerge. Informants are first requested to contribute information,

and then comment on its meaning. After a phase of information gathering, there should be a time of validation and interpretation.

Dick says that often it is the same people who provide the data, interpret it, and participate in the planning. Although outsiders with special knowledge may be included on occasions, it is generally best to include those who are going to be affected by change in the planning process. The researcher may help the participants develop skills as facilitators and researchers, so that they may come to understand their situation in ways that allow them to take more control of their future. In his article "A Beginners' Guide to Action Research," Dick (1995a) says, "As change is intended to result, effective action research depends upon the agreement and commitment of those affected by it" (p. 2).

Community members will gain experience from being active participants in the process of knowledge generation as well as the planning, implementation and evaluation of action that can change or improve their future. This type of empowering involvement actually promotes life long learning. Although participatory action research is generally carried out with a community, the community is composed of individuals. Ewert (1991) cites Zimmermand and Rappaport (1988) in noting that individual empowerment is seen to flow from collective empowerment.

The Process of Participatory Action Research

Prior To The Planning Phase Planning

Dick (1996b) writes, in his article "Managing Change," that in the pre-planning phase the external participants set out to build constructive, healthy and clear relationships with the community members. A level of trust and communication must be established for meaningful conversation to take place, and for the members of the community to enter into a collaborative relationship.

Rothman (1974) writes about the need to address felt needs for change. If people already express discontent with the current reality, they will more likely be open to innovations that result in change. He states that there is a relationship between the acceptance of innovations and the perception of advantages one achieves by the innovation, as well as its compatibility with one's existing values. He recommends identifying and including the target population's opinion leaders who will be most in support of the direction of the plan.

The Cyclical Nature Of PAR

Dick (1995a) states that action research tends to be cyclical or spiral, in that the same steps reoccur in the same sequence. The earlier cycles produce information that is utilized in planning subsequent action. He recommends utilization of the model in which the participants plan, act, observe and reflect. The cyclical process provides opportunity to learn from experience, and is responsive to the evidence. When each step is preceded by planning, and followed by reflection, there is increased opportunity for learning. Because of the cyclical nature, vague beginnings can give way to understanding and more productive, appropriate action. Data-based conclusions can be arrived at throughout the process, and challenged or strengthened by subsequent cycles.

At the outset the cycles are short. Issues, ideas, and assumptions are clarified (McTaggart, 1991). This provides the groundwork for the more difficult questions that arise as the work progresses. He recommends commencing with small groups of participants to make the experience less intimidating. Gradually the cycles can include a wider community of those involved and affected. He suggests that long cycles stifle momentum.

Planning the Action

In his article on managing change, Dick (1996b) says that in the planning phase the situation is analysed. In order to develop an appropriate plan some knowledge is needed about what life is like now, and what the desired future should be. With these understandings a common direction or vision can be agreed upon by and with the community, and common goals established. The action is planned to address a particular problematic situation in the present that requires changing if a different future is to be achieved. It should also identify aspects of the present reality that have to be taken into account. The action plan must be specific enough so that something will be accomplished. He writes, "The risk is that if it is specific, it won't fit. But if it's not specific it may not happen" (p. 2).

Rothman (1974) recommends using partialization and planning for gradual implementation. Partialization is defined as beginning with part of an innovation on part of the population. This allows people to try out the innovation with minimal risk (a demonstration project), and results in a subsequent higher adoption rate. He also states that for maximum participation in the proposed change, the complexity of the plan should be at a level that can be accommodated and understood by the target population. There is generally a higher adoption rate if it is diffused to the people in a manner that is compatible with their norms, values, customs, and power structures and if it is communicated in everyday or familiar terms. The amount of peer support in favour of the plan will also affect the adoption rate.

At the same time as action is being planned, Dick (1995a) says it is also important to establish a monitoring plan. The monitoring plan must have the flexibility to provide for on-going review, and be able to bring replanning into both the planning and implementation phase of action.

Action

The action phase includes implementation of the plan. Dick (1995a) writes, "Action outcomes can usually be achieved only with some commitment from those most affected. One of the most important ways of securing that commitment is through involving those affected" (p. 5).

The observations and understandings gained by continuous monitoring are used to change the current plan and action as required so that it will be more sensitive to the changing needs and responses of the community.

Reflection

Dick and Swepson (1994) stress the importance of taking time for formal reflection as a central part of PAR. This is especially valuable in responding to the changing demands of the situation. It involves returning to the participating community to validate that what is being done is having the desired effect, or if the desired direction has changed in any way. Are the community members continuing to engage with the researchers because they can see that their needs are being addressed in acceptable ways? Has knowledge been generated that would influence the community to alter their direction and goals?

Dick (1996a) writes that reflection is extremely important, as it is reflection that leads to learning. And learning leads to changed behaviour in the future. As we reflect upon past actions he says, "we can most easily make sense of the world in ways which build on our prior understanding. In enhancing that understanding, we become better able to act on the world" (p. 4).

Documentation and Triangulation

McTaggart (1991) states that record keeping should describe what is happening as

accurately as possible, as well as record and analyse "each researcher's own judgements, reactions, and impressions about what is going on". (p. 177) Participants may also record or write their progress and reflections in journals. As well, information should be gathered in naturalistic research ways including participant observation, interviews, field notes, logs, and document analysis. McTaggart (1995) states that the written presentation of the study should be "quite rich with voices and observations to help readers come to their own conclusions" (p. 4).

Validation may also be accomplished through triangulation (McTaggart, 1991). This is achieved by examining for coherence of observations and interpretations and participant confirmation. Dick (1995a) recommends the collection of data from multiple sources within each cycle. Another source for validation may be a community of critical friends who are also committed to the advancement of the study. In addition, Dick includes literature as a data source.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Health Promotion Through Empowering Individuals and Community

May et al. (1995) and Airhinenbuwa (1995) state that traditionally policies and programs for specified groups of people were initiated and controlled by experts. There was little community input or ownership, and the program often dissolved when the expert was no longer on the scene. Alternatively, experts who empower communities set aside their own agendas and become consultants and team members. Gradual disengagement of the experts is also a goal of empowering community development, so that the community can be in control of its destiny. It is the community that establishes the agenda and priorities. As the community begins to learn ways to identify and solve problems, it ceases to view itself as a victim. It is this transformation that empowers the community.

Fleury (1991) notes that empowering potential is an ongoing process within which the development of new and positive health patterns are facilitated. Lowenberg (1995) places this empowerment in the context of the complexities of lifestyle choices, recognizing the input of community and also human frailties. She recognizes that without the broader view, health promotion can easily regress to victim-blaming. M. Kiser, Boario, and Hilton (1995) outline what they call key principles of Paulo Freire for integration into community transformation. They also recommend a training handbook for community health workers which is based on Freire's writings, and prepared from a multidisciplinary approach.

Braddy, Orenstein, Brownstein, and Cook (1992) recognize the reluctance of health professionals to give up control, but stress that people are the essential link for a community program to be empowering. It is the identification and inclusion of key individuals from the outset that sets the foundation for success. Ewert (1991) states that ownership of material

resources, information, and decision-making powers empower individuals within the group, as well as the group as an entity. Airhihenbuwa (1995) says that health education of marginalised people without the inclusion of education for empowerment is not truly health education, but merely an expression of empathy. He also says that having behaviour change as the goal of health education is “middle class language:” he contends the goal should be empowerment and emancipation to enable individuals to take charge of their destinies.

In order for programs to be empowering, they must be culturally relative (May et al., 1995). This sensitivity is essential when working with under-served, economically disadvantaged, and ethnic minority groups that are different from those of the health workers. Welshimer (1995) notes the difficulties one may encounter by simply using a convenient sample from the hard-to-reach groups. In solution she outlines the Community Networking Strategy (CNS) to identify people who are less frequently contacted by existing services, and more typical of the under-served members of that community. Another inherent advantage of the CNS is the opportunity it offers to involve community leaders, professionals, and the average citizen in planning appropriate and effective health education and promotion.

A Multidisciplinary Approach

There is support by various authors. See, for example, Airhihenbuwa (1995), Braddy et al. (1992), Kreuter (1992), Ewert (1991), Fulmer, Cashman, Hattis, Schlaff, and Horgan (1992), Green and Kreuter (1992), Hoover and Schwartz (1992), Rivo, Whitaker, Coward, Liburd, Timoll, Curry, and Tuckson (1992) and Wallerstein (1992) for the collaboration of a variety of disciplines in health promotion planning and research. Coalition-forming includes multidisciplinary and community collaboration. Ewert (1991) explains how using social action theory can contribute to health promotion by not only addressing how human behaviours are self-regulated, but also by understanding how they relate to social interdependence. One insightful suggestion offered by Ewert is that health planners examine people's projects and thus gain insights into higher order goals that motivate the target population. Through increased understanding, more appropriate interventions can be conceived that will result in more dynamic reciprocal relationships between people and their social and environmental context. The framework of social action theory facilitates interdisciplinary collaboration in health promotion as well as public health research.

Wallerstein (1992) reviews research from various social science fields that deals with powerlessness as a risk factor in disease, and the role of empowerment in health promotion. Included in her review are contributions from the research areas of social epidemiology and psychology, community psychology, community competence, and community organizing. This article concludes with a model of empowerment education for health promotion.

The Mennonites Moving to Southeastern Alberta

The History

Redekop (1969) and Brednich (1976) have written about the history of the Anabaptist/Mennonite movement that began in Switzerland and the Upper Rhine Valley in the first half of the 16th Century. From the outset the Mennonites' principal beliefs from the outset have been the literal interpretation of the Bible, baptism of adult believers, separation of church and state, and nonresistance.

Adherence to their religious beliefs and the lack of tolerance by various host cultures has made the Mennonites' history one of persecution and martyrdom. In their early days the group scattered throughout neighbouring European countries in search of an opportunity to live out their faith. In Holland a former Catholic priest by the name of Menno Simons became a leader, and it is from him the name 'Mennonite' was derived. Intolerance in that country led to persecution and the beginning of a series of migrations that appears to have continued to the present. In new lands where they received the promise of freedom to practice their religion, they established totally Mennonite villages apart from the host society. Some of the earlier settlements were in Prussia and Russia, and later in Canada, USA, and South America and, later still, in Mexico and Belize.

During the various migrations, the Mennonite church was divided into separate groups not only because of distance, but also because of differing of values and opinion. The Old Colony Mennonite group is considered to have remained the most conservative and the most closed to interaction with both the host culture and other Mennonite groups (Redekop, 1969).

Redekop (1969) writes about the era at the turn of the twentieth century when the governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan began to voice expectations that Mennonite

children should be educated in English. As well, adults were expected to cooperate in war-supporting efforts such as the Red Cross or buying of war bonds. Many Mennonites chose to migrate rather than compromise. In 1921 an agreement was made with the President of Mexico, who promised them their desired freedoms in that country. Land was purchased by different Mennonite groups, and the migration began. The Canadian Mennonites (Kanadier) settled in Mennonite villages or colonies, according to their church. Some colonies integrated measures of progress. Others remained very conservative and religiously legalistic.

Since the 1970s, there has been a return of Mennonites to Canada mainly from Mexico, but a few have also returned from other South American countries to which they had scattered. Longhurst (1996) says an estimated 27,000 have returned to Canada in the last twenty-five years. Most have settled in southern Ontario, but others have settled in Manitoba and Alberta where they have been able to find employment mostly in agriculturally related work. Economic, religious, and extreme conservatism have been listed among the types of oppression that have influenced the return of the Mennonites to Canada in recent years.

In a personal communication, Abe Fehr (November 1, 1996) stated that those who have come to reside in southeastern Alberta are members of four different groups, namely Sommerfelders, Klein Gemeinde, Rüssländer, and the Altkolonier (in English known as Old Colony). They have each established their churches in this region, and each family is expected to attend and follow the teachings of their particular church.

Insights into The Mennonites' Values and Beliefs

In writing about the groups of Mennonites that have settled into southeastern Alberta, it is a difficult task to try to separate or pinpoint the values held in the different churches or, for that matter, different congregations of the same church. However, there are many commonalities

that can be traced to their common heritage. In this study there will be no effort to distinguish among the various groups unless otherwise stated, but the reader is cautioned against over-generalization in matters relating to German-speaking culture.

Social Control by the Clergy and the Elected

Redekop (1969) writes that the minister, bishop and deacon are held in high regard, because they are the “spokesman for God.” The *Lehrdienst* is responsible for religious matters, and ensuring conformity to religious and social norms. Helling (n.d.) writes about the Aeltester (meaning “elder”), and his election to the position for his proven faithfulness and devotion to traditionalism. The *Kroogha* serves as the watchdog against deviant behaviour. Redekop says that the clergy never force people to do anything against their will, but those whose behaviour is in question are brought before the assembly and asked to abandon the offending behaviour, or face sanctions. Sanctions include denial of church sacraments, surveillance, negative public opinion and shunning. The *Vorsteher* is in charge of secular dealings with the outside world and is deemed knowledgeable in these interactions.

Redekop lists some of the goals of the Old Colony Church. The first and highest goal is salvation as a group. “Therefore, it is important that there be no deviants to spoil the chances of the whole group” (Redekop, 1969, p. 35). The second goal is to live the Old Colony way. Not to do so is profane and out of fellowship with the others. The third goal is that of conformity and preservation of the Old Colony way. Another goal is getting youth to join the church at which time they promise to remain within the church. This is achieved by membership being a prerequisite for marriage. It would appear that the Old Colony members believe that they are the elect of God, and other groups are frustrating the will of God. Redekop (1969) quotes from his field research, “It doesn’t matter if the outsider is a better Christian and adheres to the Bible

twice as much. He belongs to the world. There is no hope for the Mexicans [for example] to ever come out of the world” (p. 31).

The Bible is the source of authority for the clergy, but the ordinary community members have knowledge of only a few passages that support their beliefs. They assume that the truths they are taught are interpreted correctly and remain valid (Redekop, 1969).

Strengthening Their Beliefs

Redekop (1969) also notes numerous ways in which Mennonites strengthen their beliefs. He states that their view of a common enemy without their circles creates a strong unity within. He feels that conflict with external entities is used to sustain solidarity. To compound this there is no separation of sacred and secular, as their total way of life is considered sacred.

Conformity and similarity are also stressed. This is evidenced by the similar ways their villages and houses are laid out, the similar farm equipment they own, and their similar style of clothing. Lack of conformity creates tension and misunderstanding. Brednich (1976) describes the traditional village lay out and combination barn-houses of the Mennonite people in the early Mennonite settlements in Manitoba. He states that in Canada the breaking-up of the closed villages and transition to single farm units has brought about radical changes in the social life of the people.

The emphasis on separation also serves to create solidarity. Redekop (1969) states that separation means no interaction with worldly people, and no cars, trucks, telephone or radios that would bring the world closer to them. For some, the use of rubber tires on their tractors is still forbidden “for fear that the Old Colony youth would use the tractors to go to town, where they would mix with the Mexican people” (Redekop, 1969, p. 33).

The Old Colony Mennonites (OCM) are called upon to persevere and be faithful to the

end so there is no point in trying to get ahead, or increase one's understanding of the world.

According to the OCM, the world is getting worse, so "there is nothing to be gained by becoming more modern or conversant with the new" (Redekop, 1969, p. 44).

Valuing Farming

Brednich (1976) and Redekop (1969) state that traditionally Mennonites have been excellent farmers and "skill in farming ranks very high in the Mennonite system of values" (Brednich, 1976, p. 31). It is important because it is in line with their beliefs and sentiments, and helps them achieve the Mennonite goals.

Views of Education

Helling (n.d.) states that teachers in Mexico are not esteemed members of the community. They are chosen from amongst the *andowners* (those who do not own land) so that they will also have an income and will not be a liability to the community. Helling (n.d.), Petker (1993), and Terichow (1995a) write that as a result of their educational policies, many Mennonite adults and children are functionally illiterate.

Historically there appears to be strong feelings against education. Redekop (1969) offers some of the following views of education as held by the Mennonites: "The more learned, the more perverted" (p. 10), "if our people got more training, they would probably become high minded and not come back" (p. 49), "farming and higher education are not compatible. We feel our calling is to till the soil" (p. 78). All that is required in education, according to Redekop, is to learn enough to be able to farm and read the Bible. Their education level is one of the factors that unites Mennonites and keeps them together in the simple life. Another hindrance to education for the Old Colony people was the access to school materials, as materials with pictures or in bound booklet form are considered worldly.

However, it appears that the attitude to education in private sometimes differs from that in public. In private “many confess their ignorance and their desire for more education” (Redekop, 1969, p. 78). This point is corroborated more recently by Terichow (1995a; 1995b).

Beliefs About Migration

According to Canan (1978) and Driedger (1973), the Mennonites desire to live in a closed religious subsociety, erecting barriers to deter contact and communication with the core society. However, Canan states that the subsocieties have “never been able to live independently of the core society” (Canan, 1978, p. 329). They have suffered from the intrusion of officials desiring legal conformity as well as other unavoidable contacts with the outside world. Canan also writes that rather than lose their religious integrity due to pressures from the core society, Mennonites have a tendency to withdraw and move to a different location. They have repeatedly used withdrawal in the form of migration as the method of survival and propagation of their way of life (Redekop, 1969; Canan, 1978). The migrations may expose them to very primitive conditions but this, too, becomes a part of their religious experience. Canan (1978) writes that migration allows opportunity to cancel all victories and defeats, and another opportunity for a fresh start. The social organization (including church leadership) remains intact and reestablishes in the new location. In time, the new exchange system with the host culture breaks down and the cycle is repeated.

Redekop (1969) writes that migrations are also motivated by dissatisfaction with the Old Colony system, sometimes because it is too confining, and sometimes because different groups become too open to new ideas. Migrations may also occur within the settlements.

Concerning the migrations from Canada to Mexico that occurred in the 1920s, Redekop writes that those who favoured the migrations said it was “absolutely essential to the preservation

of faith” (p. 18). However he states that “many observers felt that the Old Colony could have worked out its problems with the Canadian government if [their leaders] had shown less arrogance and more willingness to talk” (Redekop, 1969, p. 18).

Family Life

Redekop writes that the father is the provider and spokesperson for his large family. The husband provides the material provisions for his family, and holds the ultimate power in the family. The wife is expected to respect and obey her husband, meet his physical needs and care for the home. They accept God’s decision as to the number of children they will have. Children carry out the commands of the parents. Grandparents are given respect and reverence, providing advice and knowledge from the past. Within the church, women are considered almost equal to men, but they are not allowed to express their ideas in public or hold office. In the home the woman may be the one more able to take responsibility and make decisions, but the authority is attributed to the man. Although the Old Colony people forbid the use of alcohol, smoking and crude language, only the women must comply. The rules are stretched for a man “because of his superior authority” (Redekop, 1969, p. 69).

Rank of People

According to Redekop, rank within the Mennonite community is based on age, gender, wealth accumulated by their traditional means, and an ability to use one’s personality in informal influence or leadership. The rank of a farmer is very important because it is consistent with the Old Colony beliefs, and helps them achieve their religious goals. Teachers and renters are afforded low rank as they are seen to be less productive.

Occupation Choices

Redekop writes about the occupational choices available to the people. Until recently, farming has been considered the Mennonite way of life, limiting occupational opportunities. A successful farmer is one who is able to pay his debts, keep an orderly farm, and acquire more land so he can help his children get started on the farm. When there is a shortage of land, other occupations are sought out of necessity. It is preferable that these alternative occupations be related in some way to farming. Examples of possible acceptable alternatives include welding, mechanics, fabrication, implement dealing, and working in town at the cheese factory. Those who do not own land (andowners) may also be appointed as cowherds or teachers for the village, both having equal status.

A woman's only acceptable occupation is that of housewife. If she does not marry, she remains in her parents' home and cares for her aging parents, or serves as a maid for another Mennonite family.

Social

Redekop also talks about inherent social control, which may be exercised informally through discussions and disapproval, or formally through the church. The people are expected to be successful in their work and live as Old Colony Mennonites.

In Canada the Mennonite ministers are not able to exercise as much control over the people as they can in other countries. Redekop attributes this to sociological theory that suggests that power over people is maintained as long as people will comply. When they no longer obey, the attempts to apply it are relaxed. He illustrates this with an example from Mexico where people were ordered to replace their rubber tires with steel wheels by a certain date. However the date came and went and the people did not comply, and nothing came of it. The clergy does not

“force people” into conformity, but there are traditional patterns that pressure people to conform, up to and including excommunication from the group.

Visiting is the only acceptable form of leisure activity or recreation. Conversation generally focuses on other Mennonites, migration, farming, weather and unusual experiences. Communication with, or knowledge of the outside world is limited by their stand against telephones, radios, televisions, and rubber tired vehicles.

Old Colony Mennonites as a Distinct Group

Around 1890 those who are now called Old Colony Mennonites separated themselves from those who were willing to make some adaptations to life in Canada. They chose to adhere rigidly to the old beliefs and traditions. Partnerships with non-Old Colony people were forbidden. According to Redekop, those who did not wish to comply were encouraged to join with other less rigid Mennonite groups that were evolving.

Other Traditions

Redekop also explains the reasons behind some of the strong beliefs they hold to the present time. One is their belief about family planning. Birth control (to the Old Colony people) is considered to be murdering souls by preventing them from being born. People are responsible for every birth prevented, as it is a soul they have killed.

Another is the practice they have acquired through adaptation to living in contact with the Mexican culture. In Mexico officials encourage the people to smuggle whatever they like so they (the officials) can be paid money to overlook it. This is the manner in which Mexican officials reportedly supplement their allegedly poor wages received from the government. It is possible some Mennonites may on occasion attempt to repeat in Canada what they have become accustomed to in Mexico.

Changes in Mennonite Traditions

Longhurst (1995) observed while in Mexico that the same rules that once served to keep the people isolated and on the colonies are the rules that now make the traditional way of farming inefficient and life on the colony unsustainable. Without rubber tires or electricity, farmers cannot now make a living. Because their faith and farming are so completely linked, making changes in farming is not as simple as changing to more productive or convenient methods. He says the Mennonites do not have an adequate process to deal with the subject of compromise or making changes to their traditional life in Mexico. He estimates that around 35,000 have moved to Canada to find work, and probably half of these no longer attend church.

Terichow (1995a) writes about her recent visit to the Manitoba Colony in Mexico where she heard some farmers talk about "the need for industry, more education, diversified crops and new methods of farming and marketing" while others spoke of returning to the traditional way of "selling their land and moving to an isolated region in another country" (p. 1). She cites soaring inflation, high interest rates, the devalued peso and shortage of available agricultural land as some of the reasons responsible for Mennonites now seeking change. Longhurst (1995) adds drought, depleted aquifers and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the list. NAFTA reportedly allows entry into Mexico of produce and goods from the United States that can be purchased cheaper than local goods.

Petker (1993) notes that almost all newcomers to southeastern Alberta work on farms, but as they become more comfortable in the culture some move on to mechanics, welding or construction. During the community consultation with Mennonites at the Burdett Community Hall on July 21, 1996, several of the men told us that their goal is to own their own farm or business.

When or if the people start to be involved in using some of the available technology of farming, they are exposed to rapid changes and new types of decisions. Not only is the change in technology a challenge, but Brednich (1976) also suggests there are problems caused by the conflict between the modest way of life their church demands and the wealth they acquire. Brednich suggests there is an increasing tendency to select from core culture only those parts that fit their view of life.

The Needs of the Mennonite People in Southeastern Alberta

When they arrive in Canada they face many challenges in their settlement and adjustments, and often have many needs. *MCC Alberta Kanadier Research Project Report* compiled by Petker (1993) lists four categories of needs. The first need is for assistance with documentation in establishing their legal presence in Canada. The second need is that of orientation, as the Canadian culture is foreign to them. They require help in accessing child tax benefits, unemployment insurance, the health care system, and social assistance. They need help in understand the rules in Canada, and the consequences of ignoring the rules. The third need listed is education. Petker says that they require a re-adjustment of attitude toward education, as the distrust of the education system was what led many Mennonites to Mexico seventy years ago. He states that the general literacy level of most adults returning from Mexico is claimed to be less than a grade three level. To complicate this, they fear losing their children to the world if they allow them into the public school system. On arrival in school the children have special needs because of their lack of English, and the paucity of teaching methods to which they have been exposed in Mexico. Petker also lists the need for adults to learn speak, read and to write English, as lack of these skills is a limitation to them in their search for jobs and in their dealings with government agencies. As well, there is a need for job training because of the advanced

methods of agriculture in Canada, and the limitations of year-round employment within the agricultural sector.

The fourth need Petker lists is that of liberation. He says the returning Mennonites have a "fortress mentality" as a result of a core belief system calling for separation of church and state. On their return to Canada they are not able to settle in colonies, and they often find themselves in an "us versus them" situation. Petker says there is a tendency for 'religious abuse' to occur as the Mennonites often feel themselves in tense situations between the church and the society around them. "They must try to adjust to Canadian society and yet remain in the good graces of their church" (Petker, 1993, p. 10). Salvation to many of the Mennonites is assured by church membership, and the members are under the authority of the minister. Those who do not conform are in danger of excommunication from the church, and this to some groups may mean loss of salvation. Similarly within the home, the strong patriarchal family system is often taken to extremes where the wife and children become chattels to increase the family income. These pressures may manifest themselves in the form of alcohol abuse, physical abuse, and even incest within the family.

Kulig (1995), in her *Community Assessment of the Kanadier (Mexican) Mennonite* derived from a study done by her nursing students, lists the needs identified by key informants from outside the Mennonite Community to include education about health and nutrition, public education for the children, and education about Canadian services and institutions, as well as the need for the English language. One of her student researchers noted a need for the women to be treated better and to be allowed more rights, but does not clarify by whom. Another also noted that the women felt isolated and had a need for socialization, and information about family planning. The key informants saw large families to be contributing to the social isolation and

economic problems.

Kulig's needs assessment included asking the Kanadier what they perceived as their needs. Respondents reported "themselves as healthy with little need for specific intervention" (p. 32). Key informants also noted the need for more interpreters, English classes, and explanation of the health care system.

Summarizing data from this community needs assessment, Kulig concluded that the central need is for education. Educational needs include English for jobs, communication, and assisting their children with school work. Health education was seen as a need, as was job skill training. She also says there is a need for advocacy to assist Mennonites in obtaining better housing and employment conditions, and having their religious and cultural beliefs understood and respected.

Cross-Cultural Aspects of Participation

Dick and Dalmau (1994) use the metaphor of an onion to describe generation of understanding about another culture. A social system or culture is likened to an onion. The skin, or outer layer of behaviour and events is all that is apparent from the outside but, beneath, are deeper levels of existence that are not directly detectable. Culture is present in every layer, but the real existence is at the core. Engaging with a culture for diagnosis or intervention is best accomplished in such a way that engagement also occurs at the level of the core.

Although words and behaviours give us information about a culture, it is not so much the words but the meaning that lies close to the core. However, the core can only be approached through the surface. Many of the actions people carry out do not necessarily reflect their core culture. Some actions are merely developed habits, little more than accidents of history, which continue because no one has bothered to discontinue them. Alternatively, the continuing maintenance of certain habits may provide some deeper understanding of a culture.

Some of the aspects of culture which are deep-seated may exist at the unconscious level. Much of what is taken-for-granted within a culture may have grown with the culture to preserve its history. A way of behaving may have had significance in history, but the reason for it may have become lost over time, and only the artifact remains. Dick and Dalmau (1994) stress that “unless the deeper cultural levels of existence are addressed in some way, you cannot expect much change to result” (p. 5) as a result of action research.

Edmunds (1993) in her article about trans-cultural nursing care in a school setting, writes that the dominant cultural meanings and action patterns of the Old Colony Mennonites she worked with in Ontario were:

(1) *presence*, especially of family members (for example, extended families or

mother with their children); (2) *spiritual relatedness*, such as the use of prayer in daily routines and during times of physical and emotional stress; (3) *being responsible for*, especially mothers toward children; (4) *respect and traditional lifeways and values*; (5) *reciprocity* (for example, mutual aid among families); (6) *connectedness* with extended family members, the community and a shared history; and (7) *privacy* related to sexual matters. (p. 135)

These care meanings, Edmund says, are derived from the Mennonites' world view: their religious and philosophical beliefs; their kinship, cultural and social factors; and educational factors, as well as their economic way of life associated with their agrarian society.

Brunt, Lindsey, and Hopkinson (1997) in their article about heart health promotion in the Hutterite community expressed their concern that in their efforts to help the Hutterian Brethren improve their heart health, they might unwittingly "undermine their values and beliefs" (p.10). They suggest that empowerment that aims to undermine hegemony through grassroots action may not be appropriate for all cultures.

Deschler and Ewert (1995) say that the primary purpose of participatory research in community development is the generation of knowledge by the poor and oppressed and those who work with them. "It assumes that knowledge generates power and that people's knowledge is central to social change" (p. 4). Thomas (1996) in his writing about variants of participatory research suggests viewing studies on a continuum rather than by some absolute standard of purity. If viewed in this way, then PAR in a cultural setting allows the group of participants to decide what change, and how much change is appropriate for them.

THE STUDY

Introduction

I first came into contact with the Mennonite people through my work as public health nurse in 1989. I was made aware of two families residing in my district. I was led to believe that they were not receptive to interaction with public health nurses, and that immunizations were contrary to their belief system, but several years earlier I had been introduced to a phrase that has continued to guide my thoughts and inquiry to date. "T'aint necessarily so!"

Initially young Mennonite families came to Canada for summer employment in labour intensive, row-crop agriculture. Frequently babies would be born to these families while they were in Canada, and it was part of my role to conduct home visits for the babies, and to commence their immunizations. I can recall vividly one of my early visits to a young mother in 1991. I located the family by the land location provided by their employer. They resided about 16 miles from town in an old farm house that was badly in need of repair. Two families were residing together. The furnishings consisted of a table and a couple chairs, two mattresses on the floor, and suitcases. This was the first baby for the mother. The other mother in the home, a sister-in-law had two small children and was expecting a third child soon. Often families in such circumstances did not remain long enough for the child to receive its first immunization at two months of age. They returned to Mexico when harvest was completed. In the early days this was the typical story of the Mennonite migrant workers in our area.

Gradually families began to return earlier in the spring and stay later in the fall. This entitled some to Unemployment Insurance benefits and, as a result, they began to remain in the region year round, spending only extended vacations back in Mexico. My contacts with them

became more regular and frequent for a variety of health reasons, and my awareness of their needs increased dramatically.

At present some families still come for short periods of time each season and reside in rooms in a local motel or rent small semi-furnished dwellings which may or may not be provided by the employer. Other families claim they are remaining in Canada only for a period of a few years and plan to move back to Mexico after they have accumulated enough money to accomplish their desired goals back in Mexico. Others admit to long range plans to remain in Canada, and are starting to buy, or consider buying a home or farming property.

In 1992 I started to meet with the people as individuals or groups to ascertain how their varied needs could be addressed in a manner that was culturally appropriate. During a Community Health Nursing course in my undergraduate studies I used the Community as Client Model (Anderson & McFarlane, 1988) in carrying out a community assessment of German-speaking Mennonite people in the Bow Island area. In 1995 I completed a cultural assessment with two Mennonite mothers for a Cross Cultural Nursing course. Through my continuing employment as a public health nurse, I also invited some members to group consultations which consisted of a combination of orientation to services in the region and listening to their concerns.

Apart from my formal duties as a public health nurse I spearheaded clothing drives in the community to secure clothing for the children to attend school, or to keep the whole family warm in the harsh winter weather. The women often were seen around the town with only sweaters or light jackets and bare legs, making the townspeople shiver at the sight. The community responded overwhelmingly. One year I noted that several families who were planning to stay for the winter had their children sleeping on the floor in drafty rundown houses. I asked the community to respond so that no children would need to sleep on the floor in the winter in our

town. Enough beds were donated, as well as blankets, coats and boots.

In 1992 Mennonite people began talking more to authorities about their needs for English literacy to help them in their jobs. In response, the county's literacy coordinator organized about eight weeks of English (ESL) classes. A few local volunteers tried to carry on with the classes after the allocated funds were depleted. The coming of summer brought these classes to a halt as the men and the volunteers returned to the fields.

The next year more formal classes were organized with increased financial backing. Partnerships were formed with Medicine Hat College, Unemployment Insurance (UI), the local literacy coordinator and Worlds of Women located in Medicine Hat. English classes were organized for men, the cost being covered by UI. Worlds of Women paid for a series of classes for the women. About four men attended the ESL classes regularly. Most of them had not comprehended that their regular attendance was tied to their receiving the UI benefit. Regular attendance at school was something foreign to them, and there were hard feelings on the part of some of the students when they learned of the connection between attendance and financial assistance. By their standards family obligations to immediate or extended family were deemed to be more important than school. While the people continued to express their need for English as a second language, as well as literacy, they did not want classes that were associated with the UI benefits. Through conversations with the Mennonite people as well as the Mennonites, I became aware of communication difficulties in the schools, hospital, clinics and in the community. The opportunity for submission of an Early Intervention Proposal (EIP) for financial assistance came through the Office of the Commissioner of Services for Children and families, a branch of Social Services. They were interested in receiving proposals that would be written by the people who would realize the benefits. This provided an unique opportunity for a

participatory action approach to finding acceptable ways to enter into a partnership with the people in empowering ways.

In my graduate course work I had completed course work on the Mennonite people, including a cultural assessment, and a literature review. I had also completed a literature review on Participatory Action Research (PAR). I had previously tried to help establish programs for the Mennonite people, but a participatory action approach had not been tried. Would this method of working with the people bring positive sustainable results that would positively impact on the broader determinants of their health?

Timeline

The following timeline provides an overview of the progress and direction of this PAR initiative.

June 14, 1996	Agency meeting to discuss the needs of the people
July 21, 1996	Barbecue supper in Burdett, listening to the people
July 30, 1996	Meeting in the park to start to make plans
September 5, 1996	The joint committee meets to plan
September 7, 1996	Reporting the plan back to the larger group
September 28, 1996	Harold reports back the response of the Old Colony Mennonites
October 25, 1996	The plan is submitted to EIP
November 20, 1996	Coffee meeting at Burdett school to plan ESL
December 2, 1996	We are told of opposition to the plan by school and MCC
December 3, 1996	ESL classes start in Bow Island
December 5, 1996	Maria gives her support

December 6, 1996	Our first meeting with the project approval committee
December 17, 1996	Submission of the rewritten plan
December 19, 1996	Meeting with the principals
January 7, 1997	Project approval meeting with the Mennonites is attendance
January 21, 1997	Receive promise of support from Prairie Rose School Division
January - February 1997	Continuing communications with the people about the project
February 27, 1997	Notification of acceptance of the funding proposal
March 6, 1997	Coffee Meeting, formalizing plans to set up project
March 7, 1997	Tour of Medicine Hat College trades division
March 1997	Working together to gather the supplies for the project
April 1, 1997	Maria begins her work as paid coordinator of the project
April 15, 1997	Coffee meeting in the court room, named the Hope Centre
June 1, 1997	Moved into the court house area
June 10, 1997	Agency advisory meeting, Maria reports of schooling concerns
June 20, 1997	English classes recess for the summer
July 20, 1997	Coffee meeting, approval for daycamp
August 1-29, 1997	Daycamp each Thursday
August 12, 1997	Potluck at the Burdett Hall (evaluation)
August 26, 1997	Meeting with Prairie Rose School District about concerns
September 2, 1997	Receive the Prairie Rose Proposal
September 3, 1997	Coffee Meeting to consider the proposal
September 3, 1997	Documentation for this report concludes

A Meeting of the Concerned

On the fourteenth of June 1996 a meeting was called to discuss the needs of the Mennonite people in our region. Coreen Thacker, the Nursing Supervisor at the Bow Island Health Centre, called the meeting. Eight agency people were present, together with Maria (Beuckert) Yates, a lady of Mennonite descent. Six of the agency members were associated with the Palliser Health Authority, one was the county literacy coordinator, and one a representative from the Commissioner of Services for Children and Families (CSCF). We were told that some members of this group had met the previous year to design a program to benefit the local Mennonite children, but had not been successful in securing funding. Dwight Dombowski from CSCF shared our concerns for the Mennonite people and was invited to this meeting to assist us in the process.

Four questions were addressed at this meeting:

1. Who should be included in the planning?
2. What are the services required?
3. How do we get the participants to the table?
4. How will the administrative support be handled?

The minutes of this meeting list suggested partners should include the Prairie Rose School District (PRSD), the RCMP, Community Health Services (CHS) previously known as the Health Unit, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) and, most importantly of all, the Mennonite people themselves.

At this meeting I shared a report of the outcome of a focus group that I had held with the Mennonite people in December 1996. Two of the needs the people had identified at that time were English as a Second Language and the need for driver's education so they could obtain

driver's licenses. It was the consensus that many needs were evident in the community, but the Mennonite people themselves should help in determining the priority of their needs.

It was decided that a social event should be planned as a first step to invite the people to participate in discussions. A hamburger barbecue was planned for July 21, 1996 to be held at the Burdett Hall. Agency funds were allocated to cover the major items. Agency people were to bring salads, and the Mennonite people were asked to bring desserts.

Four individuals were selected from the group to work with the Mennonite people to continue communications following the barbecue. The literacy coordinator, Brenda Stryker, volunteered her expertise. Coreen Thacker volunteered to remain active in bringing agency groups together for collaboration. Dwight Dombowski offered his continuing support and knowledge in Community Development as well as in the CSCF grant application process. I also agreed to be a part of this group because of my history of working with the group, and my frequent interactions with the young families.

My Personal Reflections on This Meeting

At this meeting Dwight asked the question. "Who is missing at this table?" It was obvious to me that there were no traditional Mennonites at the table. I had been previously involved in Community Development with peasants in the Republic of Haiti, and was well acquainted with the principles of Community Development and how they stand in conflict with our traditional programs planned for the people by knowledgeable agency representatives. My recent literature review on health promotion through community development had strengthened my views on the positive results possible when members of the target community participate in the planning.

I must admit I was later embarrassed by my brazen comment. " Well if the Mennonite

people are not represented at the table, then I don't have time to be here either!" From personal experience in previous community development work as well as knowledge gained through my studies, I had come to believe strongly that programs planned for a group of people by outsiders are paternalistic in nature, and do not produce sustainable change. Following this meeting I apologized to our Vice-President of Health Promotion and Community Development, who was also in attendance, for being so forward in saying what I would or would not do as an employee under her jurisdiction, however I felt strongly on this point. To my relief, she was supportive of the stand I had taken. I later came to understand that this was exactly what the EIP guidelines meant when they insisted that the "plan is to be written by the people who will be benefited by it."

Coming Together to Converse

Spreading the word of invitation to the supper took various forms. I made personal phone calls to numerous families, telling them about the barbeque and asking them to tell their Mennonite acquaintances. Bilingual announcements (English and High German) were posted at various locations in Burdett and Bow Island. Local residents and agency representatives who were known to have a special interest in the community were invited to attend and act as facilitators of the conversations. A local member of the Mennonite community was contacted to serve as translator.

Approximately 240 Mennonites came to the event, including children. While the numerous hamburgers were grilling, people mingled and visited. The meal of hamburgers, salads and dessert was enjoyed and, much to our amazement, there was ample food.

Following the meal the adults were invited to gather around the tables for a meeting. A

facilitator had been asked to locate at each table to help encourage the discussion and report back to the group. The proposed format of the meeting was presented to the facilitators prior to the meeting, so each would have an idea of the direction the meeting might take. The facilitators were asked only to have blank paper and pencils at the table to help them jot down key points.

The children played in the nearby playground. The adults and older children found their way to the tables, men on one side of the hall and women on the other. I facilitated the meeting assisted by the translator, Henry.

The agency representatives were there to listen. As the leader of the meeting I spoke very little, following the proposed outline. The ease of the people increased as the meeting progressed.

At the beginning of the session we welcomed the recent arrivals to our region with a handclap. Then the people were all included as they raised their hands or stood to identify the length of time they had been in Canada. One family had come to Manitoba about 10 years ago. A few other families reported coming from Mexico to southeastern Alberta about seven or eight years ago, but because of lack of work had returned for the winter months. Some had arrived within the last few months. Many of the families had moved 15 to 20 times. It seemed that some could not even remember the number of times they had moved.

The people enjoyed one woman's story about the promises her husband had made to entice her to leave her extended family and move to Canada. He had promised her clothes, furniture, and the ability to purchase whatever she wanted. She laughed as she told her story, and the group laughed with her. Had they all had similar dreams?

The people told us they could not live in Mexico because there had been no rain and, therefore, no crops. The husbands had promised to provide for their wives, and this was very

difficult in Mexico. In Mexico there was little or nothing available by way of jobs, money, or opportunity. Those were the three main reasons cited for coming to Canada.

Lack of work in the winter causes some to return to Mexico for the season. Some young families seemed content to do so and would like to continue that practice, but others said they would like to have a sense of permanence, a place to call home. The men had aspirations for good homes and good futures. They feel that the Unemployment Insurance benefits that they receive during the winter months are not sufficient to raise a family and make house payments. They would like to become self sufficient, owning their own businesses, and homes.

It was interesting to note the responses of the women, as their comments often differed from their husbands'. They stated they were happy with the jobs their husbands have, and they had good homes. Some spoke of a desire to settle and put down roots.

I presented to them a drawing of a locked padlock with a chain attached. On the end of the chain was a key.

Padlock - Chain - Key

*The chain represents parts of our lives.
We must progress along the links of the chain
before we can arrive at the key that will open the lock.*

*Each has already progressed along the chain
. . .leaving family and home, getting a job, working to learn English.*

What is the next link in your chain that keeps you from your door of opportunity?

*It may be the same for some.
It may be different for others.*

What would make it easier to get to the next link?

Would it be easier working together?

Would it help having others work with you in getting to the next link?

The people then spoke of many things that were important to them. A listing of comments follows by category:

Family related comments

- we want our children to grow to be healthy, decent human beings
- we want our children taught to do what is good
- we want them to become aware of their history
- we like living in Southern Alberta; the people are friendly.
- it is important to have a house to live in

School related comments

- we want our 'kids' to be welcome in school, to have friends at school and to learn both German and English
- we would like education first to help in running a farm. English is not enough, we also need math and other subjects
- education should first make farming easier
- school should teach the management of the farm
- the men want agricultural education for themselves so they can pass their knowledge on to their sons

- we want to be able to read so we can understand rules and farming practice
- the table of boys stated health, education and a helping attitude were important.
- we want to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic
- adults want to learn to speak English better and learn how to read
- there are schools here, if you are willing to go
- we want more religion in school, rather than sex education
- we would like to have a Christian school, focussing on German and English, and teaching the Bible
- it is sufficient to go to school until grade eight
- what do the 15 to 18-year old boys do after they finish grade eight? (my question)
- education is important
- it is important to stay in school
- we want an alternate school program
- one lady told about taking classes for two years in a nearby location. Apart from the special classes for English, she also took computer lessons and Social Studies.
- we would like to have information on dealing with emergencies, such as choking
(from a table with a Red Cross worker)

Employment related comments

- hoeing beets makes our backs sore
- what should these 'kids' do in the winter when there are no jobs on farms and they cannot collect UI?
- one told a story of having a year round job, and how he is now finalizing details to purchase the house he lives in

- we would like to own farms, and exchange labour for the use of machinery to farm their land
-we would like to have more business opportunities, such as low interest loans, and benefit from ties with university, college, and banks (from a table with a local farmer as facilitator)

It should be noted that the arrangements of the above comments are not meant to be leading to conclusions in the conversation, but are grouped in related topics. The order of comments received provided in Figure 1. Facilitators stood to report to the larger group what had been stated at the small table discussions.

An invitation was given to those who would like to participate in making plans to move onto the next step (link in the chain) to sign a sheet, and become part of a working group along with some of the agency people in the room. Seventeen Mennonite people signed the sheet. The people were asked to suggest a suitable location and date for the meeting. They suggested that the 30th of July, 1996 would be suitable, and Centennial Park in Bow Island would be a suitable location. In case of rain, and alternate site, "in the building where the babies get their needles." i.e., the provincial building, was chosen.

Seven individuals signed a sheet indicating they would be interested in English lessons. They requested that any plans made by a smaller group should be reported back to this larger group for their input.

The people joined in cleaning the hall after the meeting.

My personal reflections on this meeting

This day of conversation and friendship proved to be a greater success than we would have dreamed. Redekop (1969) says that visiting is the only acceptable form of leisure activity. It appears that we had chosen a culturally appropriate activity to seek their input.

The facilitators did not to display the agendas as they had been requested. I did not want

the Mennonite people to feel inferior or intimidated because they could not read the 'instructions'. I requested the pencils and small notepads be used only so that we would not lose key points. These pieces of paper were collected and were useful to us in compiling the data.

There were no ministers in attendance. An invitation was sent to the Old Colony church leaders in Vauxhall as this is where our local Old Colony Mennonites attend church, although I am not sure if it was communicated. Another minister was asked if he would say a prayer preceding the meal, and yet another minister was approached to say the prayer following the meal. (I had inquired enough to know that prayer was said before and after a meal.) One of the ministers responded that Sunday was a very busy day for him, and he was not sure he could attend. He appeared rather curt on the telephone. I came to understand prior to the supper that it is preferred in some groups that prayer is said quietly and individually, so there was no mention of a group prayer whatsoever.

Another minister had planned a youth event for the same afternoon. A group of older teen girls came to the hall, and visited freely with us prior to leaving for their youth's event. Whether or not this event was planned prior to the announcement of the supper, I don't know.

The group facilitators were not experienced in their role. A few comments presented from the tables appear to reflect the thoughts and priorities of the facilitator, such as choking being mentioned from the table facilitated by the Red Cross representative, and low interest loans coming from a local farmer. My comments were also recorded from the front when I asked about the youth from age 15 to 18. I have chosen to include all of the comments recorded by the scribe to give a more complete picture of the conversation.

Care was taken to include the people in decision-making right from the outset. The Mennonite people decided the time and place of the next meeting.

What the People Told Us - July 21, 1997

- ▶ could not live in Mexico
- ▶ no rain - no crops
- ▶ opportunity education is important
- ▶ winter lack of work causes to go back to Mexico
- ▶ husband promised to provide for wife
- ▶ mostly jobs, money, opportunity
- ▶ little of nothing in Mexico with respect to jobs, money opportunity
- ▶ house story in Canada all year
- ▶ provide Christian school, focus on English and German
- ▶ school sufficient to go to grade eight
- ▶ happy with jobs husbands have got, like a sense of permanence, a place to call home
- ▶ important to stay in school
- ▶ some young families would like to continue travelling back and forth between Canada and Mexico
- ▶ want children to grow to be health, decent human beings
- ▶ important to have a house to live in
- ▶ a desire to settle down, put down roots
- ▶ kids be welcome in school, German, English, friends at school
- ▶ become aware of history
- ▶ most women of opinion that they have good jobs and homes
- ▶ aspirations of good homes and good futures
- ▶ people become self-sufficient, have own business, Would like education first to create and ease in running the farm. English is not enough, need math and other subjects
- ▶ interest in agricultural education so they can pass their knowledge on to their sons
- ▶ like southern Alberta, people re friendly
- ▶ boys say health, education, helping attitude is important
- ▶ hoeing beets makes their back sore
- ▶ reading, writing and arithmetic
- ▶ reading to understand rules and farming practice
- ▶ children taught to do what is good
- ▶ ESL and adult literacy
- ▶ reading, computer lessons, special education, social studies, school for two years
- ▶ schools are there if you are willing to go
- ▶ writing most important
- ▶ emergencies, choking babies
- ▶ more religion in school vs. Human sexuality
- ▶ business opportunity - low interest loans. Tie into university, college, banks
- ▶ children to learn to read German, school system to teach German, Christian schooling, Bible school, English classes in winter. Easy to provide.
- ▶ own farms, exchange labour for use of equipment. Boss will do this but land is hard to find.
- ▶ work is hard to find in winter
- ▶ house has payments. UIC not enough to raise family and make house payments
- ▶ school to teach the management of the farm
- ▶ what do we do with the 15 to 18 year old boys and girls
- ▶ what do these kids do in the winter
- ▶ alternate school program

First Steps in Participation

The meeting in the gazebo at the park in Bow Island was scheduled to begin at 8:00 p. m. Precisely at that time the vehicles arrived. Eighteen adults came to the meeting, including four women. Some of their children also came to play in the park. The agency people present were Coreen, Dwight and I. I commenced this meeting by asking the people to think about four questions:

1. What is life like now?
2. What can we learn from the past?
3. What would things be like if they were good? (for example, healthy, balanced)
4. What has to happen, and what do we have to do to get from where we are now to where we want to be in the future?

The list of comments gathered at the previous meeting was read. The people present agreed that this fairly represented what was said at the gathering. They indicated that this was a good place to start from, and these points were still important to them. At this meeting it was stressed that their ideas and participation were necessary if a plan was to be effective.

In order to include all community members in the plan, the group was asked to respond to the needs of various age groups. They stated that children up to five years old had no needs, as the children pick up the English language easily. Some of the children attend kindergarten which prepares them for school.

Next they were asked about the needs of the five to twelve-year-olds. They talked about the children feeling bad the first month or two when they start school and do not speak the language. but they learn the language quickly. I asked if they thought their children would benefit from English preparation prior to starting school. They felt that when the children mix and play

with the other children, they soon catch up. However, they indicated they did not want sex education taught to their children. Bible and German lessons would be desirable. One parent stated, "The school does fairly well for the children, especially if these (German and Bible) were added."

Next the needs of the thirteen to twenty-five-year-olds were addressed. They recognized that lack of an adequate education and English skills would make it hard for their children to be successful in Canada. The group agreed that boys at that age wanted to be working on a farm. They said this age group needed to speak, read and write English. They also needed mathematics, mechanics and other farm related skills. (Part of this group were young men apparently in that age category.) They indicated that they would be prepared to attend evening or winter classes so they could learn these things. Some of the women also indicated an interest in attending classes.

Those twenty-five years and older said their needs were for speaking, reading and writing English.

The entire group appeared to enter into discussion freely. One person said. "It was good for you ask questions." I then asked if they could select four Mennonite people to sit on a committee with four agency people to write up a plan to see if we could access financial assistance from EIP funds offered by the Officer of the Commissioner of Services for Families and Children.

Prior to this meeting I had inquired of individual Mennonite people how elections are held in the Mennonite Church. I was informed that all nominating and voting are done on paper. There are no shows of hands or verbal nominations. The first ballot is the nominating ballot. Those names with the fewest number of ballots are then deleted. Voting continues in this way until it is clear which names have the majority votes.

I asked this group in the park how they select a few people to speak for their group. They outlined the voting method I had been informed about previously and agreed on how this voting would be done. At the outset, the men only accepted ballots. I then asked the questions, "Should the women also vote?" They agreed the women should vote. Due to their method of elections, there were several sessions of casting ballots. At the outset no women entered ballots, but gradually they entered into the voting, hesitantly at first, taking a paper, but not always completing it. As the voting progressed, I was able to move aside, and they took over the process. Four individuals were chosen, and an alternate.

It was clarified that if the plan was not successful in obtaining financial assistance, we would then investigate making a plan that we could afford. The next meeting date was set for the committee to commence work on a plan. As previously requested, it was agreed the plan was to be brought back to the larger group for their input.

My personal reflections on what happened at that meeting in the park

In preparation for this meeting I had studied The Community Story Framework, a Tool for Participatory Community Analysis copyrighted by the Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning (Bopp, Bopp & Norris, 1994). This was the source of the four questions posed. In retrospect, I can now see that the source of these questions comes more from a humanistic modern philosophy and may not be consistent with the religious values, teachings, and the history of decisions made by the Mennonite people (Redekop, 1969, p. 44). As I reflected on this several months later, I was amazed that they continued to participate. I feel that this was balanced by the repetition of our desire to learn how to work with them in a way that was acceptable to their culture and religion. We regularly asked them to tell us when we had made errors so that we could make changes. We reassured them that we did not want to change their culture or religion.

However, we saw their families were suffering hardships and experiencing discrimination in employment because of their lack of English skills. Whole families were being effected by their lower incomes and inability to converse, read and write the English language. The experience I gained while helping and listening to the people over previous years may have also helped increase their level of trust in our genuine desire to help.

The assessment of the people systematically according to age groups was also adapted from Bopp et al. (1994). I had created a separate category for the preschool ages. However in reflection on the age category of 13 -25 years old, I can see that this was too broad. By nineteen or twenty many are married and already parents, so it would not be right to group these with the 13-year-olds who may or may not be in school. In retrospect I would change the lower age grouping to thirteen to sixteen-year-olds.

Traditionally business meetings do not include women voting. However, this has become a trend in subsequent meetings. When a new woman joins the decision-making meetings, this always comes up. The men and women voice their support that in these meetings all present may vote. The women vote hesitantly at first but more comfortably the longer they are a part of the group.

One of the men elected onto the committee began to shiver uncontrollably once he realized that his name was chosen. He did not become a continuing member of the group as he moved away for employment but I could not get this scene off my mind. Shortly after, I wrote in my journal about him.

*John Neufeld**

He wrapped his arms around himself

to warm . . .

and calm the shivers

that were running about his body.

His chin quivered

but he stood firm against the chill wind

of change and responsibility.

"It's okay to say 'no' to the nomination, John," I said.

But he stood firm as his body shook.

He would not back away.

Change, challenge, and responsibility.

TRUE PIONEERS OF A NEW ERA.

September 11, 1996.

remembering your bravery the evening of elections

**The name has been changed to preserve the privacy of the brave pioneer.*

The One and Only Joint Committee Meeting

The men were extremely busy in the fields with haying and harvest. It was agreed that the first committee would be called on a rainy evening but there were no rainy days in August.

The agency committee members started to become nervous that the funds would not be available for fall English classes if the proposal was delayed too long, so, in preparation for the first committee meeting, Coreen Thacker, as well as the literacy coordinator and I, met to examine the information we had received from the people and to start forming responses to the twenty-six questions asked on the EIP application forms.

The joint committee meeting was finally called on September 5, 1996. The twenty-six questions were reviewed with our comments. Our responses to the questions were discussed with the three committee members who attended. We considered the following four questions:

- Is this what we want?
- Is this what we think will work?
- Is this what is right for your people?
- Does any of this appear to put your people in a bad light?

Some changes were made and a budget was drafted (see Appendix 2).

One of the Mennonite men asked, "Do the people (meaning local residents) really want us to move ahead in this area?" When this particular man first came to the area, he felt that some people did not want them to do well so they would move on to other locations. Another man commented that "Last year Taber started something like this. Pretty soon there was nothing left." I suggested that we should look into what happened at Taber so the same thing would not happen in our area. We discussed the appeal process inherent in the plan, and how important it was for

the Mennonite people to participate by speaking out whenever things were not going well.

One interesting conversation took place at this meeting. Henry asked, "Is alcohol a problem? Ruth, you know more about the Mennonite people in the area that I do." I responded that I had noted it to be a problem with some. I also told him that when I had invited one family to the barbecue at Burdett Hall, the wife asked what we would do if people brought alcohol to the barbecue. She herself did not allow their friends to bring it into her house.

I observed that we needed a common vocabulary. My journaling noted some word meanings that I struggled with in this meeting. Life skills, prejudice, discrimination, community development, empowerment, culture, and cultural centre were some of the words that the Mennonite people had not encountered before. Some attempts were made at the meeting to define these words that were included in the proposal because we as agency persons felt, in our naivety, that they were the trendy words that would capture grant dollars.

The proposal was to be brought to the larger group in two days. The document was hard to read, and there seemed to be redundancy in the responses to many questions. It was felt we needed a summary in simpler English to present to the people, some with limited English skills.

My personal reflections on the committee meeting

I have often wondered if it was appropriate for us to do the preliminary work of starting to form responses to the questions without the committee members present. In this case I cannot see that it hindered the process. The men were already under considerable pressure due to their work and family commitments. Under different circumstances it may have hindered the process in that they may have seen themselves only as token participants in someone else's plan.

As I reflected on the difficulty we had in explaining some of our "helpers" jargon, (words such as life skills, discrimination) I became uncomfortable with the message of

superiority it seemed to send. I felt that the use of jargon would work against full participation in that knowledge is power, and participation has to do with the sharing of power. If the Mennonite people could not be comfortable with the concepts and the words, then we would have to seek other ways to communicate, to find common ground where all could participate fully. This is one of the difficulties of participating with people who are in various stages of acquiring a second language.

When I was asked the question about alcohol, I was shocked to realize that perhaps I had a better bird's-eye view of the community as a whole than almost anyone else. Perhaps they did not view themselves as a common community because they did not all have a common church, or common habits. In actuality there are four churches in our area: the Old Colony Mennonite Church, Klein Gemeinde, Sommerfelder and Evangelical Mennonite Church. What seems to unite them as a community is their language, that they are different from the host society, and the problems they encounter in making their way in a new country. Would these be sufficient to bring them together to function as a community in this project?

Reflecting on the Planning

In preparation for the meeting to report back to the larger group, I prepared a summary of the happenings to date and the Proposal document (Appendix 3). One of the Mennonite committee members ("Henry", who had also served as translator at the barbecue) had agreed to chair the meeting, with my help. When he arrived for the meeting he confided to me that he almost stayed home because he had the flu. He didn't know if he'd be able to stay for the entire meeting.

The meeting was attended by six laymen and one minister. Some of these people had

never met previously. Dwight Dombowski from the Office of the Commissioner for Children and I were the only agency representatives present. The plan was reviewed.

Henry said that another committee member had called him the evening before to say he thought the plan was “too big” and “too much.” We were left with the impression that he did not want to be involved any longer. In the meeting two others indicated that the dollar figure of the budget was frightening. Henry asked if they would be expected to pay it back if the plan did not work. Dwight reassured them that this would not be the case. He also reassured them that he was considering funding for more than three years. He reassured them that if it was within his power, he would not withdraw the funding and have the project flop.

They were also confused as to what a ‘cultural centre’ might be. The minister was able to help with an explanation because he knew of a cultural centre that had been started in Bolivia and one or two that were operating in Mexico.

One man emphasized that it was his responsibility to train his children. They would learn from working along with him in the field. He talked about life in Mexico where the homes are in a row, and everything they need is on the farm. Everyone learns at home. It was brought to his attention that things are not the same here. He lives on the farmstead of his employer. Would the employer be willing to let his children learn on his expensive farm machinery? Some families could not reside on farm sites where they could have chickens and pigs, and access to learning from their fathers. (This man takes his children out of school after grade six, and educates them by home schooling and helping with the farm work.) Dwight responded by noting a variety of jobs they would not be able to train their children to do.

The minister said they would like to take the plans and discuss them more freely apart from agency persons. We gave him copies of the proposal, the plan, and the list of comments

from the barbecue. He assured us he would report back to us in about two weeks.

I had difficulty closing the meeting, as people did not seem to want to get up and leave. Finally I asked how they closed their meetings. Did they pray? The minister responded, "not always." The people continued to sit around the tables, either in silence or chit chatting about other things. Eventually I rose and left the room. Following the meeting the minister took me aside. "I don't know if you know about these people. We are from three groups. My group prays out loud, but some of them don't." As we continued to visit, I told him that it was because of the differences in the groups that we had decided to work through the people rather than through the churches. He agreed.

My personal reflections on the meeting

Perhaps one thing that made this participatory action project difficult was the connection it had to money. First, it was apparent the Mennonite people had not had experience with access to thousands of dollars. Second, they have been accustomed to working hard for everything they have received. The idea of a grant or gift, especially of the amount requested, was foreign to them, perhaps even against their religion. Third, the receiving of money is generally associated with obligations on the part of the receiver. What would the hidden obligations be? What commitments would they be entering into that they may regret down the road? We had made the commitment to participate with them even if there were no grant dollars obtained. However, having the funds would certainly make it easier to pay teachers and find a facility in which to hold classes. Their income was so meagre it barely covered their basic needs; nor were they in the habit of paying for learning under their system.

It appeared that some thought they could transplant life as they knew it in their settlements in Mexico directly into the Canadian setting. It was not that simple. In Mexico they

were the land owners. Here they were the employees and their children did not fit into the picture in the same way as they did in Mexico. Some work for large corporation farms, others obtain whatever employment they can for the growing season and may change jobs frequently. Making a new life in Canada could not be as simple as duplicating what was in Mexico. Moreover, this group was composed of individuals with varying views about change and adherence to the way of life as they knew it in Mexico.

How were Dwight's comments taken when he suggested to them that their children may want to have careers different to those of their parents, careers as artists, computer operators, or journalists; for example? Was this thought frightening to them when they place such high value on farming (Brednich, 1976, p. 31)? Was this thought seen as contrary to their religious teachings? Did it make us appear as a threat to their traditional culture? Would this phase of our work have been less anxiety-producing if the agency participants had been more sensitive to their cultural values and perceived threats? Or was this an important little "seed" that would continue to grow, and in the future open up new fields of employment in Canada when new technology would decrease the amount of manual labour in agriculture?

I had at least one thing in common with the people that evening. Anxiety. They had fears of the unknown. What is a cultural centre, and how will it impact on us? How will we feel obligated if we do receive money? What will the church say? Is it right to enter into a partnership with these people and their government organizations?

My anxieties came in part from reading their anxiety levels. Did Henry actually have the flu, or did he have a nervous stomach due to his anxiety? One committee member had already withdrawn? Would all withdraw? How can I keep other agency people alert to these concerns?

Reporting Back

The Mennonite people accepted our offer to hold their meeting in our conference room in the provincial building. A committee member had called to ensure that the key to the conference room had been returned, and to ask if there was a cost for use of the room. I assured him there was no cost and asked how the meeting went. He said that the minister ("Harold") who had been present at the previous meeting would bring us a letter they had prepared.

After a few postponements, we were able to meet. Harold came alone, and Coreen accompanied me. We conversed openly in this meeting about many things. He brought us the following document. I have chosen not to enter this document in the appendix because it contains the names of actual individuals. To enhance understanding I will allocate numbers to individuals. Otherwise the document is included as it was presented.

Points to Discuss

1. Individual #1 says the old colonist people held a meeting at Grassy Lake, at which they went over [The Plan]. About 25 married men were present at this meeting. The leaders of their group [Vortheher] said this plan was not for them. They see it as dangerous, and a threat to their religion.
2. Most people go back to Mexico for the winter, especially the ones with larger families. Some of the most vocal people are not dependable.
3. About 90% of the Mexican mennonites send money back to Mexico to pay for some debt, or are investing in their farm, or equipment.
4. 50%-60% would move back to Mexico if things improved in Mexico.
 - A. If they got more rain

B. If the economy would stabilize somewhat.

5. The difference in religion between the old colonist and us [Individual #2 & Individual #3].

A. The new birth in Jesus Christ.

B. Our salvation through faith, and not only through works

C. Traditions. Clothing, The importance of education, Not working with other groups.

D. They see other groups as, a threat.

6. 5 people attended the Bow Island meeting in wed. Evening. The names are Individual #2, Individual #1, Individual #4, Individual #5 and myself (Harold). Individual #1 encouraged these points, but with no support from his people.

7. Here are some point that we would see as nassesary, or valuable, from the point that are talking about on [The Plan] paper.

A. Evening classes to learn english language. But not through employment, because they want to work a day here or there to keep their boss happy.

B. Welding, mechanics, drivers education, classes would likely be well attanded, but more so by adults than 12 - 14 year old children.

8. Stress management classes may be needed, but people will probably not attend.

9. If there was an office, plus 1 larger room in one building, with a german &

english speaking person in the office, to help with, filling out papers, making up wills, make phone calls, interpret legal mail, etc, this would be helpful.

The large room could be used for classes, and a meeting room.

10. Private school is their aim, not just changes in the public schools.

As we conversed with Harold, I jotted key comments on my paper. Beside point four I wrote, "They aren't sure how much time we should spend on them, as many of them did not intend to remain in Canada."

Comments at point five state that A and B refer to beliefs held by Harold's church. Point D is more important to the Old Colony Mennonite (OCM) church. Other comments read, "The German language is a part of their faith, as well as their tradition." "A formal group is a threat to the OCM." He also stated that OCM members sitting on a joint board with non OCM people would go against their Biblical interpretation of not being unequally yoked together. Therefore, the future running of this plan by a board is a threat. Furthermore, Harold stated that the OCM people feared that with this plan their people would be treated like our people in this country. They could be sent to jail like our people.

He explained that there are differing views on education. His group believed very much in education, apart from the secular system; that is, in their own schools. The OCM did not want their people to have a good education so they would not be influenced from outside.

My journal entries provide more detailed explanations:

The minister tells us there is a man who by position they call a Vortherer (pronounced Fursthere). He is not a minister (or usually not). He is a very

influential man who the people are very influenced by. Unsure how he gets into that position. He resides in La Crete. He apparently read over the plan we had prepared and was adamant the people should not partner in it. For example he told Individual #1 (who is himself unable to read the plan) that the plan states that if a man is drinking alcohol, he, as part of the committee, would be responsible for going to that man about his drinking problem. Harold did not know what the English reading capabilities of the Vortherer would be. It is feasible that he may not understand what was written, but let on that he did. He may make recommendations to Individual #1 contrary to the plan, whether concocted to frighten them, or perhaps just misunderstood. Individual #1 told Harold that the local ministers had not instructed them not to cooperate with us, because they knew that they needed someone to bring English classes to them. They could not do it on their own.

...With the OCM, they view anything that is contrary to tradition (that which is passed down to them through their elders, families) with suspicion, as something that may draw them away.

Harold says according to his church we should not change the plan in anyway. Except that they would like to see the English classes in three locations, namely Grassy Lake, their private school, and Bow Island.

He also felt their people would not feel comfortable to sit on a board. The Mennonite people do not want confrontation. They would sooner lie to avoid it. Rather, we could continue to meet with the people to request input. Harold seemed to be more comfortable with loose association, so that his people

would be free to draw back if they felt their boundaries were being violated.

Harold felt that if we had English classes the OCM would attend, if there were no strings attached.

Following this meeting Coreen tried to contact a minister from the OCM to set up a meeting, but there was no response. We abandoned this idea as a meeting with the minister may have resulted in a formal announcement not to associate with us.

My personal reflections on their responses

*Maybe we haven't started back far enough,
at a more primitive level of community development.
We hadn't anticipated their suspicions of us,
and our potential destructive power to their society.*

*If we'd gone to the jungles,
and seen a people with rings in their noses,
we would have been more aware of their possible suspicions of us.*

*But they come to us
speaking our own language,
dressed like us,
driving cars like ours.
We expect they communicate like us.*

But . . .

*They have been taught that we are the evil to be separate from
and to view our efforts as intrusion and threat.
(They seem to view other Mennonite groups in similar ways.)*

Finding a New Way

The Mennonite people were still open to being involved with us, but we had to find a new way to work with them if we were to include people from each church. I phoned the Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) settlement worker to ask about how we should proceed. He simply suggested calling the people together for coffee meetings, and conversing with them in that manner rather than having a formal board. Dwight agreed that we should continue with the funding proposal without the usual board structure they required as this was indeed a community development proposal. We were offering to participate with this community at their level of comfort. The plan was rewritten replacing the words 'board' and 'committee' with coffee meetings. An agency meeting was held to report on progress. Those present remained supportive of the project and all agreed that we should submit the revised plan for funding consideration.

Harold called from time to time wondering if funds would be available for ESL in his area, as they would like to make plans. He discussed possible locations for the project, and cautioned against renting a large amount of space. Harold was very concerned that we be frugal with financial commitments for the site.

We planned for a coffee meeting to plan English and literacy classes. This meeting was held the twentieth of November 1996 at the Burdett school. We invited the Mennonite private school teachers to present their ESL materials and also the local literacy coordinator. It was a crisp night, thirty below Celsius. In spite of the weather, eighteen Mennonites attended this meeting; in addition there were the three teachers

from the Mennonite school, Coreen, the literacy coordinator, and a volunteer ESL teacher (“Karen”) who spoke their dialect. At this meeting I asked the people individually what they wanted to learn. They agreed they wanted to learn to read, write, and to be able to explain things in English.

The Mennonite school presented their books entitled ‘Learning to Read.’ distributed by Christian Light Education. This was the same material used by all ages of children in their school who are learning to read. The course emphasized phonics, and they explained the phonics game which they also used.

The literacy coordinator did not bring sample materials as requested, but brought various detailed teachers’ guides instead. She spoke to the people about life skills education as well, emphasizing things they could also learn about living in Canada. I showed them a literacy tool called ‘The Peace Seekers, the story of Canadian Mennonites from the Reformation to the Present,’ a series by Thiessen, Schellenberg, and Stoutenburg (1995). At the Bow Island site the curriculum would be less rigid. We were offering a flexible course so they could learn the things they wanted to learn.

A few had attended classes the previous year organized by MCC in a neighbouring location. One person stated that he didn’t like that class because the instructor had an accent, and they couldn’t understand his speech. The others said they would be very happy if they could learn as much again as they learned last year. We asked that the people sign a sheet according to the location they preferred to attend. Nine signed up for Bow Island, and about the same number signed up for the Mennonite school location. Some had signed both papers.

The day of this meeting I had taken my noon lunch in the hospital cafeteria, and I

was shocked to hear about the gossip reportedly travelling throughout the Mennonite community. A hospital employee, whose husband was a local farmer and could converse with them in their dialect, shared this with me. She told me that the RCMP had gone to the Mennonite school to check it out, and that I had reportedly sent them. I called Harold, the director of the school, and asked him if he thought I was responsible. He said, "That's ridiculous." He said he had called a staff meeting and all the teachers were aware of the purpose of the RCMP visit. Furthermore, he said the RCMP had come from Taber, not from Bow Island.

Prior to the meeting that evening I spoke privately to an informal leader from the OCM, "Jake." I told him that a rumour was circulating that was not true. If others had also heard that rumour, then tonight would be a good opportunity to clarify this as the teachers from that school were present at this meeting. Before the group dispersed, I saw him with a group of people around him, speaking to them in German.

My personal reflections on our participating and planning

The coffee meetings had become regular opportunities for reflection and planning, a central part of the Participatory Action cycle. We had called them as the need for consultation arose, and the weather suited. A core group attended regularly. Others attended more sporadically.

It would seem likely that rumour of the nature recounted here has great potential to destroy trust. However, in this case I was able to diffuse the rumour, and heard no more of it. How many rumours have we not heard about? How many people have not been participating because of rumours? Working in PAR is not for cowards.

It had also been reported that Jake had said he would never go to any more

meetings if those Mennonites from the neighbouring town (and different church) were there. To my knowledge, he has never missed a coffee meeting. He has become a respected informal leader in the group.

But it's like I said . . .

T'aint necessarily so.

The People's Plan

I arranged to start ESL classes in an old house owned by a local church. They provided the facilities free of charge. Two teachers from the local Christian School joined me in volunteering one evening a week to teach. Both of the teachers had previous ESL instruction experience. Classes began on the third of December. Although several Mennonite families were leaving to return to Mexico for the Christmas season, those who were unable to go were feeling lonely and welcomed a social activity. The first two evenings of the week they studied the sounds of letters, did some basic reading, and worked on expanding their vocabulary. I started my weekly class using the 'Peace Seekers' series and also the Nobody's Perfect Parenting materials (published by Health and Welfare Canada and written in simple English). I was surprised at the interest in their heritage, but lack of depth of understanding. They thought Menno Simons lived in Canada in the 1500s. They were not aware that their ancestors had come from locations other than Canada.

One of the stories from the book had been used as a sermon illustration two weeks before in one of the churches. What impressed me were the smiles upon their faces as we got into the study. The people did not even leave the tables when I

announced break. After we had read the lesson as a group a few times, three individuals were brave enough to try reading a paragraph on their own. None had ever read English aloud before. They were proud of their accomplishment, and so was I.

On the fifth of December Maria (a lady of Mennonite descent, married to a non-Mennonite) phoned Coreen to say she wanted to talk about the proposal. We had not heard from her since the agency meeting on the fourteenth of June. The elementary school now employed her as a teacher's aid/ home school liaison worker with the Mennonite families. Coreen and I met with her. She gave us many suggestions, and asked how she could apply to work with the project.

On the sixth of December 1996, Coreen and I met with the EIP project approval committee. They were very concerned about assuring appropriate cross-cultural interactions. EIP allocated a significant portion of their funds to aboriginal programs. They were being very cautious that we would not repeat mistakes made in the past with the aboriginal people.

They also questioned how this proposal would help the Mennonite women and children. Although as representatives from various agencies, we understood these funds were meant to benefit children, we were finding that we could not achieve benefits for the children except through access to the adults. We explained that although the families were 'formally' closed to having programming for their children, this was not necessarily the reality. Some local grandmas were holding a club for the children, providing Bible stories and craft opportunities. About fifty children and some mothers attended these sessions.

Another major obstacle was that we wrote the proposal from the agency

perspective. "The people who will benefit from the project must write the plan," the EIP representatives told us. It did not seem to matter that the Mennonite people could not write for themselves (unfathomable in their eyes); nor did they accept that we had written what they had told us, and with their approval. "The people must write it," they said, and they could not alter their guidelines.

The EIP representatives requested that we return the seventh of January 1997 with the plan rewritten by the people, and representatives from the Mennonite group be present for the presentation. We reported this to some key Mennonite people. They reacted by saying this was ridiculous as we had written what they had told us to write. They may have given up at this point had we not persisted.

Maria had contacted us at a critical time. Her roots were in the Mennonite culture, although she had broken tradition, received a college education and married an English Canadian. She gave freely of her time to dictate the plan for me to retype, written in "us" terms. One small section was added to the original plan to include babysitting of the children during English classes, and training of the babysitters.

We then gave the plan to Henry for his input as he could read English. (Appendix 2) He phoned back to say he saw no problem with the plan. He said, "The most important thing is that there is no attempt to change the religion. This plan does not apply to my family, but I can see that others could benefit." (Henry can read and write English, owns his own land, and has his first child in attendance at the Mennonite school.)

My personal reflections on the writing of the plan for financial assistance

Teaching English to this group of people was very different from my experience teaching Medical English to medical students in the University of King Christophe in Haiti. I was surprised that many of these people were unable to read words like 'a' and 'at.' They didn't know what kind of word 'the' was. Many did not know the sounds of the consonants although they were the same as in the German language.

Con conversationally, some were doing fairly well; although, some women appeared timid.

Although discouraged by having to rewrite the plan in 'us' terms, I can see now that this emphasized to the people that this was their plan, and we were just helping their plan happen. This little detour probably strengthened the plan in the end. It eventually brought the people face to face with persons serving within the government framework, and they found them to be understanding, caring people.

Rough Waters

I would never have anticipated the roughness of these uncharted waters we were entering. Just prior to the meeting on the sixth of December, Dwight gave us a copy of a letter written by the MCC office. The approval committee had access to this letter. It stated that although they were supportive of the direction of the plan, they were concerned that it contained a condescending tone as I had written 'The Plan' in simple English so the people could understand it, but this, they said, implied that we viewed the people as simple. I explained to the committee that these were not simple people. They had limited English comprehension, but many of their children were on honour rolls in the schools. I told them I had never had opportunity to meet the author of the letter; nor

had their MCC worker attended any of the coffee or agency meetings. Things had been written about someone the author had never met or observed in interactions with the Mennonite people. I explained to the committee that the previous evening I had volunteer-taught eleven eager learners in my Mennonite ESL class. These were not simple people, many had simply been deprived of the same opportunities that we have had.

Problems also arose with the public school system. Dwight asked us to try to get the public school system on-side. He had received phone calls from the elementary school principal and the assistant superintendent, opposing our proposal. We arranged to meet with the principals on December 19, 1997 to discuss the plan, and request a letter of support.

At 7:30 on the morning of December 19 the MCC worker finally returned one of my calls, reaching me at my home. He stated that he opposed the plan because all three principals opposed it. We furthermore stated that we needed to work with the schools. I presented my opinion that one principal opposed it and was trying to influence the others. I also told him that the Mennonites and the other schools their children attended were not opposing the plan.

He was of the understanding that the schools had not received an opportunity to talk about the plan but I answered that although the principal himself had not attended agency meetings, he had sent another teacher in his place. He stated that he stood with the principal, because he and the principal were doing good things with the Mennonite people at the parents' meetings. I explained to him that our plan addressed all families, not just those with children attending the public schools. We were also interested with

the prenatal nutrition of the mother and the safety of the children in their homes. How would the school reach into the homes of the young families? How would the school address the needs of those who did not attend?

He then added that he, too, had no input into the plan, and that he had no knowledge of it at all. Although we had notified him of the agency meetings, he had not attended. My journal entries contain records of my conversations with him, some over the telephone, and two others over meals with him and his wife in restaurants. I assured him that I had asked the people in conversations and coffee meetings if we needed to have him present at our decision-making meetings. They replied that they could speak for themselves, so saw no reason for his presence.

I asked him, "What shall we tell the Mennonite people when we don't get the money? Shall I tell them that the principal phoned the Officer of Commission and opposed it, and that you support him in opposing it?" His response showed his displeasure. Nevertheless, I responded that the people had a right to know the truth. He responded that there are a bunch of lies going around, and I agreed. Not a good start to the day!

The meeting with the principals followed this telephone call at 8:30 a.m. at a school. Coreen, Maria, and I attended this meeting. The elementary teacher entered the meeting last. He did not bring his chair to the round table provided, but sat against the wall. In response to my "Good morning . . ." he grunted. He did not look at me, or anyone else in the room. No one else greeted him, nor he anyone else.

Coreen talked about the background to this project. She explained that the EIP funding proposals were to be supported by four pillars: education, health, social services

and justice. We needed the collaboration of all.

The following points came out of that meeting:

1. The school teacher who had attended the agency meetings did not represent the elementary school. She was only there to report to the principal.

2. The school liaison worker who had attended the agency meetings was not employed by any of the three schools but, rather, by the Prairie Rose Division.

Apparently, he did not speak for the schools when he was supportive of the plan.

3. What would the 'rednecks' in the community say if the Mennonites got money? This money was for aboriginals. We don't have them in our area. We are trying to access funds meant for them for another cultural group with many needs.

4. The Mennonite people don't want sex education in the schools.

5. The elementary school principal insisted that all the teachers needed to be united and write one letter of support. They disputed this. The Burdett principal said he would write his own, and the other said he would write a one-pager because that is all he had time for. The elementary school principal then insisted that at least the Bow Island teachers should write a common letter. As this was the final day of school, the letters would have needed to be written before the end of their day.

6. The elementary principal said he felt they should distribute all the EIP funds through the schools. In response, I read to them some of the key indicators that the Early Intervention programs were looking for. Included in them were nutritional needs of the pregnant moms. I asked, "How did the schools plan to address such needs?"

7. The sustainability of the funding for the school's Mennonite liaison worker was discussed. The school receives \$600 for each child not born in Canada, but the

Burdett principal pointed out that few children qualify. Two principals felt these funds would not continue at the current level.

8. The elementary school teacher stated that the plan discourages school attendance. He feared that Mennonite children would not attend school or learn in traditional Canadian ways.

9. The Mennonite children in Burdett are able to attend school through the ninth grade, when they have to move on to Bow Island to high school. Yet no Mennonite children in Bow Island attend past grade six, except for one family that comes in from Burdett for high school.

10. The Burdett principal indicated that he sends out a truancy officer the first day of school. The kids come to school and stay in school. He also said that he works with families if they feel they cannot allow their children to attend every day, or must miss some classes due to family responsibilities. The truancy officer was used once in the Bow Island area but it turned out to be a very negative experience, not to be repeated.

11. The principals let it be known they had a problem with the way in which Social Services was restructuring, throwing away money by hiring highly paid people for the two to three years of the restructuring period. (Social Services is the source of the EIP funds).

12. The principals complained that they had not understood what was expected in the EIP funding proposal submission. We explained our experiences in discovering that the Mennonites had to write the plan, not the agencies.

Coreen received the letter of support from the Burdett principal later that day. The letter from the other principals was sent directly to Dwight in the Commissioner's

office. He received the following letter in his office December 23, and he forwarded it to us by fax on January 2, 1997. The text of the letter reads as follows:

As administrators of the two public schools in Bow Island we have been asked to provide input to the proposal being put forward by the Forty Mile Focus Group.

We have had opportunity to review some aspects of the preliminary proposal but have not seen the final budget proposal. We do understand that \$30,000 (or 52%) of the \$58,000 budget is being proposed for the position of coordinator. On the surface it would appear than an inordinately high proportion of the proposed budget is being funnelled towards administration.

Both schools have established ESL Programs that could benefit from improved funding and support. As well Prairie Rose Regional Division has established a "Liaison" position to work with our Kanadier parents. On the surface it would appear that there is a duplication of effort and that "closer" cooperation with the schools and school system would benefit both programs.

We are tentatively in support of this proposal but feel that we need to have a greater input from the "Education" component and there is a need to give greater consideration to the needs of the school age children and the programs already in place in the affected schools.

We feel that this proposal needs further review and consideration by school and central office administration and by the staffs of the schools in the service areas affected.

Following the meeting at school, I called the board chairperson of the local MCC, to see if he had the most recent copy of the funding proposal. I explained to him how we had not intentionally excluded the MCC worker, but rather than we had invited him to some meetings. When he did not attend, we had asked the people how necessary it was to have him present. They told us that they could speak for themselves. I also explained to him that the people who would benefit from the plan must write it. We could not write their plan, and neither could they (i.e., the MCC). The people wrote the plan. During the conversation he became more cordial.

On December 24 I spoke to Harold, sending him the most recent proposal. He responded that he would come to the next meeting we were to have with the approval committee. He would even try to bring the MCC worker and his wife with him. He would also bring local Mennonites to explain how English classes for adults would be supportive of women and children.

My personal reflections on the difficulties

It seems that we are learning not only about participating with the Mennonite people, but also about participating with agencies interested in helping them. The latter task may be the more difficult.

Support letters arrived from the other partnering agencies. Burdett School's letter of support arrived as promised. However, the Bow Island principals sent their joint letter directly to the EIP office in Lethbridge. When Dwight called to say he had received the letter, he seemed annoyed about their inference that we allocated 52% of the funds for administration. He had himself recommended that we hire a front-line, full-time worker for the project. This position was not being considered administration.

In explanation, I would like to comment on a conversation I held with two women about the topic of sex education. In Mexico, they told me, they traditionally give sex education to married couples the afternoon following their morning wedding. The parents of the bride and groom tell them what they feel they need to know.

One evening in English class we were using the Nobody's Perfect Parenting materials for reading and English conversation. The book told how children even the same age and same sex may be quite different in what they can do. The air seemed immediately charged. (Here we were talking about sex and children, too.) I explained that sex meant gender. They seemed quite puzzled. I gave the example of filling out forms. Often it asks for the person's sex, requesting to tick off either M or F. We took out our driver's licenses. Some could not believe it would say sex on a driver's license. I explained that sex in these instances stated whether you were male or female, and did not pertain to the sexual act between a husband and wife. Sex education in the schools dealt with things about being male and female, including learning the correct names for their body parts, and how their bodies work.

Early in January, I met with Coreen and Maria to review the letters of support and also the budget, in preparation for returning to the approval committee on January 7. Maria was naturally uneasy about the stance the school (her employer) had taken, and the plan the people had approved. We were also to complete forms listing the partnering agencies and their contributions. It appeared to us that the school was not partnering with a view to contributing, but rather seeking benefit for its existing programs.

Stories Told by the People

The Mennonites were present at the next meeting with the project approval board held on January 7. Harold was there, the MCC settlement worker and his wife, two school teachers from the Mennonite private school, three farm labourers, and Maria. Coreen and I were there speaking for the agency committee. At this meeting each person entered the conversation, telling stories of their difficulties. We emphasized that the plan benefited the whole family, with children receiving benefits even though most of the action was directed at adults. We reported that there were 65 children in the Mennonite private school, 25 Mennonite children in the Bow Island Elementary school, 14 in the Christian school in Bow Island, 10 in the public school (grades four to 12) all of whom are in grades four to six, and 47 in the Burdett school.

Maria told her story. Her parents allowed her to continue in school past grade six, but they did not discourage her when she wanted to quit school in grade 10. As a teenager at home she became very depressed as she realized that she didn't want to spend the rest of her life cleaning house. She took upgrading, went on to college and received a diploma as a travel consultant.

A school teacher told how his mother had recently taken two years of upgrading. He told about how much better it is when his mother can help the children with homework, rather than having to depend on the siblings.

Two individuals told stories about visits to doctors. On these visits they felt their concerns were minimized because they were 'just Mennonites,' or else because the women couldn't explain their health problems in English.

Maria told a story about when her family first came to Canada. Her older sister

developed a strep throat. They knew nothing about the types of illness people got in Canada. The child's throat became very sore, and her lips very dry. The doctor sent them home without treatment or advice. They'd never seen dry lips before in Mexico, they didn't even know enough to put Vaseline on the child's lips. Her lips cracked so badly that she has scars to this day.

A lady told about her children failing in school. As parents they did not understand what the teachers were trying to tell them, so they avoided contact with the teachers. Now that he is older, her son told her what the teachers had been trying to explain. Now she understands what was happening years ago.

People told of the long hours the men work in the fields, and women having to take children to appointments alone. They often speak less English than the men, and are not assertive. The women often do not have drivers' licenses. I explained how it was a dilemma for me as a health nurse, understanding the risks involved, but still wanting them to come to the clinic for immunizations and health teaching. I believe we also communicated nonverbally about our respect for one another, and caring about the concerns of the people. Stories of this nature continued over coffee in the restaurant even after we had left the meeting.

Two days later we received a call that the approval committee was "really, really impressed" and that this committee had recommended the approved of our proposal. We did not receive the final approval from Edmonton until February 27.

Reflections on the second meeting with the project approval board

The differences with the MCC worker abated after his conversations with the Mennonite people about the project. At this meeting he was very supportive of the plan

and also Coreen and me. We were able to overlook differences entirely for the good of the Mennonite people.

Individuals telling their own stories proved far more effective than the second hand reports we could give. Their responses to the questions were very sincere, as they told about their limited income and the number of children they had. They conveyed their genuineness and humility. I kept thinking, "They can't help but love these people and feel their concerns."

It was also positive that the Mennonites present could converse knowledgeably about the plan. Harold obviously had been networking with his people, as four of the individuals I had never met previously.

Waiting and Carrying On

Communication continued with individuals and groups. We continued to converse with the MCC worker. Dwight from the EIP office assured us that the proposal had enough positives that it could proceed even without some of the schools on side. The lines of communication were kept open with the Prairie Rose Regional School District office.

We shared the letter from the two school principals with only key individuals. They agreed that we should not share this problem with the larger group at this time for two reasons. First, we did not want the Mennonite people to turn against the public schools. Second, we did not want the people to know the hassles we were going through on their behalf because, being peaceful people, they might choose to draw back.

Individuals within the Mennonite community, who were not present for the

presentation, inquired about the response to our presentation, and offered their help in building furniture or attending auction sales to purchased used furnishings. We also discussed their responses to English classes, and heard positive feedback. When class attendance lagged one night, I inquired of the people if something was not going well. They reminded me that sometimes they have other things to do. We talked about the importance of communicating about things, so that we can make changes to keep the program suitable to them.

On the thirteenth of January 1997 an agency advisory meeting was held. We invited the Mennonite people present to retell some of the stories related to the project approval committee. They told how the plan would benefit the children through some services for adults. We carried on planning with the hope that we would receive funding. We held a discussion about the qualifications the coordinator should possess. The MCC worker suggested the person should not attend one of the four local Mennonite churches so the other groups would not be excluded or threatened. A committee of three Mennonites and three agency people was struck to find and hire a coordinator. Following the agency meeting The MCC representatives and Mennonite people present remained to work on the budget.

On January fourteenth, I received a call from Maria, asking if she could come to talk. She told me that she didn't think she could sleep at night if she did not apply for the position of coordinator. Maria attended neither of the churches as she had married a non-Mennonite. She was employed as a teacher's aide at the elementary school and the local school Mennonite liaison worker. Even as she acknowledged the fragile nature of the project's relationship with her school, she assured me that two of the three principals

were encouraging her in this step. She seemed to have a deep conviction that she should make herself available for this position.

On January seventeenth I received a call from the Prairie Rose Deputy Superintendent requesting an appointment as they were prepared to endorse the program by way of a letter. This meeting took place January 21, with the assistant superintendent and the elementary school principal attending. They suggested various ways that the schools could partner in the project. The major points were that they would support Maria's leaving her position with Prairie Rose should she be chosen as coordinator of the project. They would still like to use her services to get the children registered in school at the beginning of the school year. They would also like her to continue to make phone calls for the teachers to the parents. They had applied for an EIP grant as well, and had agreed to EIP's stipulation that they give us \$5,000 worth of support (which, incidently, we have not yet received). Their suggested use of the funds was for a TV/VCR machine, or a similar educational aid. They acknowledged that their inconsistent attendance at the agency meetings had been a problem.

I visited the Tween Valley Mennonite School in session, and toured their adult ESL classroom. Their ESL teacher spoke of the adult student enthusiasm, and requests for increased days of class. They had about ten students registered in day classes and the same number in the evening. If funds were to come available, we intended to help this site with the purchase of start-up books and an hourly reimbursement for the teacher.

I visited Grassy Lake School in the next jurisdiction where 20% of the students are Mennonites. I invited their school to participate in the agency advisory meetings, and the principal was very open to attending. He envisioned that a school liaison worker

could help them 'zap' some students out of the Mennonite School in their district, as his school numbers are dwindling. I told him that in this project we hoped to get kids into school, any school, where they could learn and their parents would support them.

Another minister from a different church called to ask about the plans we had for the Mennonite people. He and his wife came to my office on January 27, 1997. He talked about his church's views. He encourages people to have a 'good education,' but each family decides where. A couple of years ago they discussed having a school, but their people were so scattered it was not feasible. He seemed supportive of the idea of working directly with the people and "leaving their church attendance out." He also cautioned against affiliating too closely with the MCC.

He talked about the Mennonite people not wanting to be called Kanadier. "It means nothing to them." He said he had asked his people what they wanted to be called. They agreed on 'German speaking families.' He felt the name of our project 'German Speaking Mennonite Community Development' was an appropriate title, as there is nothing wrong with being called a Mennonite. "We are Mennonites, and have been for a long time," he said.

He also related that his people did not wish their children to be involved in sports. He had concerns about the pressure put on children to participate in physical education in school. Computers are also a source of concern for him, especially computer games. He conceded, however, that computers are now in many places and it may be necessary to become familiar with them.

On February tenth this same minister and his wife returned to my office for further discussions after they had time to go over the plan on their own. He said he is in

full agreement with the proposal. He encouraged me with these words, "You will make mistakes, but do not be discouraged by them, as everyone does. Just try to fix them and go on." He said we would probably get bad reports spread among the people, even those who we think are participating with us. He felt the people would gradually come to see the good in it. "Do not be discouraged if there are small groups who do not enter in. They will be watching." He suggested a minister be treated the same as the common people so that the work does not seem to be church related, allowing all the people to feel free to participate.

This minister said that the Mennonite people in our region tend to move back and forth between the churches. Sometimes the church is full. If people don't like something, they move on to another church, and there are many empty benches. The church does not have control over the people in Canada as it did in Mexico.

I invited him to come to visit my English literacy class. That night he came just prior to coffee time, announcing that he had come for coffee as invited. He sat at one end of the long table, and I (the teacher) at the other. It was a little harder to teach this session, as it appeared that he was accustomed to being the leader in a group. He declined when it came his turn to read. However, by the end of the session he also took his regular turn to read in English falteringly. He took a book home with him. The next session he arrived before all the other students as I was preparing for class. He expressed concern that others would not attend if he did, and he didn't want to hinder others from coming. I reassured him that this probably would not be the case. We were all here on equal ground, as learners. The people came as usual, and he continued with the classes until his work commitments prevented him from doing so in the spring.

My personal reflections on our learning to participate

One of our volunteer teachers taught only a few weeks and found she could not carry on because of her family responsibilities. I often taught two evenings a week, and found that spending this amount of time with the people in classes helped my understanding of them to grow. Perhaps they also became more trusting of my participation with them.

On one occasion I invited the group to come to my house for English class. I explained that I had been to most of their homes through my work, but only a couple had ever been to my home. Fourteen of us snuggled around my dining room table for lessons, drank coffee and ate matrimonial squares standing around in my kitchen and family room. The numbers increased in class after that, as they seemed to attend more regularly until the work in the fields became a priority.

It seemed that the EIP funding office was trying to strengthen the partnership between the school district and our project. Although we did not see any of the financial benefits they had promised us, we did start to communicate and participate on different levels and in constructive ways. However, on an individual level there were still subtle pressures on Maria. Before she left her employment with the school, the local superintendent had instructed her that she should continue to do her best to steer all the new families she met through the project to his schools. The Assistant Superintendent had indicated the school's position was that school attendance is the goal. He stressed that the people would not be pressured to attend any particular school, as the people should be deciding this for themselves. He felt that if the parents make that decision, they are more likely to support the attendance of their students.

Coffee Meeting Decision Making

On February 27, 1997 we received notification of the acceptance of our funding proposal. We notified key individuals and a coffee meeting was called for March 4. Now that we knew we had a budget, an advertisement for the position of coordinator was placed in the local newspapers, and we arranged to tour possible rental facilities to house the project.

Two ministers, one woman and four men who had actively supported the proposal attended this meeting, as well as Maria, Coreen and I. We toured five locations in the town of Bow Island, having agreed that the home site for the program should be in Bow Island as it would be closest to those who were working in the development of the project. We discussed the pros and cons of each site. The Mennonite group members chose their decision making methods. First they chose to eliminate the least desirable, and then to choose the most desirable location. They prioritized each site according to their preferences with the vacant courthouse in the provincial building being number one. The old driver's licensing room in the same building was their second choice. Until a facility was available, the Palliser Health Authority had offered office space in the Community Health Services Office, also in the Provincial Building (an empty office beside mine).

They compiled a list of furnishings to buy. The original list included a desk, a filing cabinet, a fridge, a vacuum cleaner, a used T.V. and VCR, and at least 50 matching chairs. Different individuals volunteered to look for various items, some at auction sales.

We attempted to give the program a name, but nothing seemed to suit so we

agreed to continue to think about that. Two men were elected by Mennonite election fashion to sit on the coordinator interview committee. One individual was very apprehensive because of his alleged English comprehension, but also probably because of his limited English literacy. His friends encouraged him, and he consented. There was a discussion about whether or not we should include the MCC settlement worker in the interview. After assuring each other that we would not allow one person to dominate the decision making, we all agreed to his inclusion. As applicants might come from other areas, we reasoned, and he had connections in other areas, he might have some background knowledge that would help in the choosing. We also decided that a local school principal and I should participate in the interviewing. Then we agreed upon a job description.

In the end, we interviewed three candidates. Maria Yates was chosen for the Coordinator's position, and signed the contract to commence work April, 1997.

My personal reflections on the unfolding project

At this coffee meeting participants began to converse among themselves in more depth. On occasions they would break off into discussions in their German dialect, and then explain to us the direction of the conversation in English. Sometimes I would not know how to continue in facilitating this meeting, but the people always came to my rescue. A couple times I did it on purpose to encourage them in indirect leadership.

Time lines placed upon us by the project were very stressful. We were allocated start-up funds that needed to be spent by the end of March. Funds for the period of April 1, 1997 to March 31, 1998 were budgeted only for facility costs, coordinator's salary, and Program expenses to pay individuals contracted to teach. Decisions were made

hastily, and this did not allow for the expenditures to be adjusted to the unfolding of the program. This also placed an additional time pressure on me. I was given relief to cover my public health nursing duties to enable me to spend some days completely on the project. My journal entry March 29 reads, "Things have been so busy trying to get this project into a program. I'm certainly behind on my journaling." My previous entry was dated March 6.

Taking Ownership

In the days that followed the March 4 coffee meeting the men started their search for used equipment for the project. They visited auction sales (which they like to do anyhow). They telephoned my house the evening before a sale. I kept reassuring them of my trust in their decisions, and the dollar values we had budgeted for the items. Their first purchase was a 28-inch television set with a stand. As we did not have a place to place this after purchase, one of the families kept it in their home till we had a base for our project.

Maria and I were joined by two Mennonite men for the first day trip to Lethbridge to shop for new items. I identified with them in that I had never shopped like this before, either. We had to keep reassuring ourselves that we had been given the money to spend to help the Mennonite people. Peter had never been to a Costco store before, and was overwhelmed at the size of the store and the quantity of buying we needed to do to turn our start-up funds into materials to last a year. After a lunch of sausage buns at the food counter, he started to enter into the decision making. We purchased many items on our list and priced out others. I am sure he was relieved to see

that I was the one paying the bill. They loaded our purchases onto Peter's truck, and then we went on to Walmart to purchase toys for the child care room.

At Walmart Jake stayed to guard the truck, so Peter became the co-shopper. This time he was more able to participate in the decisions. He was apprehensive about people holding him responsible for making poor choices, especially if a child should be hurt at play. We discussed the safety aspects of each purchase, and he chose a kitchen centre for the girls, and a tool centre for the boys. These toys have remained favourites with the children.

Confidence in themselves and knowledge of what was required was growing. They went alone on the next trip to view and possibly purchase used chairs. Although we had understood there were only twenty chairs to check out, in actuality there were more. Within the capabilities of the budget, they returned with 44 matching chairs.

We made a second trip to Lethbridge to shop. This time the men brought their wives, leaving the children with friends. The women insisted that we do the same things as on the previous trip. So we had sausage buns again, and peanut buster parfaits again at the same location.

Until the men were required to return to the fields, they spent their time assembling more furniture, constructing a coat rack, and purchasing or delivering equipment. This also became a social time for them. Men from different churches who had met in English classes, planned together, shopped together, and now worked together. They accomplished much before spring farm work filled their days and evenings.

My personal reflections on the participation

It was hard for us to realize that our dreams were becoming reality. I was inwardly apprehensive as we had not yet received the promised funds. (Apparently Palliser Health Authority (PHA) had confidence as they advanced us the funds to commence the purchases.) On occasions another nurse was sent to relieve me so I could work on the project. The confidence and support provided by the PHA managerial and administrative staff overwhelmed me.

The people were coming to grasp that these funds were coming from a grant, but needed reassurances that there were no strings attached, such as repayment if the program faltered. These funds were there to support our learning to work together for the benefit of the people.

The men who were involved in the initial work seemed to grasp more quickly that this was their program. They responded to requests for their input and helped make decisions. It is my feeling that we genuinely shared decisions. They understood the financial time-lines as well. It is fortunate for the process that this time pressure occurred when the men had time to share in the work and decisions. Had the short time allowed for purchasing of the start-up equipment been during a busy farming season, they would have not been able to participate in the same way.

Learning More About the People

Spending time with the people during the days of purchasing the supplies provided me with opportunities to hear their stories, and learn more about their hopes,

dreams, and fears. Getting to know about their lives was also a fascinating opportunity, and made the travelling hours pass like minutes.

“Jake” and “Helen” told about their life in Mexico. They lived in a very little house. He travelled to a Mexican town to work until he had enough money to buy a tractor. He then started to deliver the farmers’ milk to the cheese factory each morning. He would come home for 10 minutes for lunch, and then buy gasoline for the farmers and deliver that. The farmers would trust him with large sums of money to buy their fuel. Helen interjected, “But we had no money.”

Jake also told how he is now buying his house here. About \$1000 of his back rent was applied to the purchase price. He will make annual payments for three years. He wants to fix the house up for resale, refinishing it in a manner similar to the Hutterite homes. He liked the interior finishing of the Hutterite homes as they look so fresh and clean. I asked him who he thought would be the buyer of his home, as perhaps the manner in which he finishes his home should be suited to who his perspective buyer would be. Would it be Mennonites or local residents? I suggested that what is considered ‘nice’ in one person’s eyes is not necessarily the same for a person of another culture. This seemed to be a new way of thinking to him.

He also spoke about owning some land in Mexico, as he still wants to own a good house there. He worries about raising his family in Canada because they will not “turn out.” He plans to move his family back to Mexico sometime in the future. The urgency to move back seems not as critical now as it was in our conversations a couple of years ago.

“Peter” and “Maria” also own a small house and furniture in Mexico. Maria’s

brother and family live there at present. They do not talk about moving back. Peter has obtained his Class I driver's license, but he can only use it in his work on the farm because he cannot read or write to do commercial truck driving. This way he has to go on Unemployment Insurance in the winter, and it is financially difficult for the family. He attends English literacy classes, and I encouraged him about his progress, telling him that in a couple of years he could overcome that obstacle if he sticks with the classes. Then he could probably have year round employment.

Peter was selling musical cassettes for his sister-in-law who was a member of a singing group from Manitoba. I was surprised to see their picture on the cassette cover, not at all dressed according to the Mennonite tradition. They sang hymns that are quite common in Canadian churches, with a musical accompaniment, including drums. There is no musical accompaniment to singing in either Peter or Jake's church but he seemed very proud of his sister-in-law's musical accomplishment.

Peter was starting to grow a mustache. As a group we joked about this. I suggested that what was important was whether or not his wife like it. I asked about the acceptability of this in his church. He says a couple men in his church have one, and nothing is said. Jake said no one in his Old Colony church had a mustache. He says he's been planning to visit Peter's church. It is not as far away from his home as is his own church.

Jake said that the Mennonite people have been invited to the school to meet with the teachers at Bow Island elementary. He says it is probably because some of the people are moving their children out of the school. Why? Because we want our children to learn from the Bible like they do in other schools. "But that is very expensive," I said. He

answered, "that is true, but my children are only at this stage for a short time of my life," and he wanted them to have this religious training. The cost was worth it, even if he would have to go away from home to find work through the winter. He seems to think he could go north to find work during the winter. Helen said, "If you do, I go! I go with you!"

Helen said she'll never go to the ESL classes. Jake just laughed and said, "Yes, you will." Helen indicated she would rather think of the centre as a place to get occasional babysitting or cleaning employment to make a little extra money.

My personal reflections on their values and culture

After the conversation about schooling, I called the Bow Island Elementary school to discuss this. Although the ESL segment uses Bible stories in their teaching for 30 minutes twice a week, and the Lord's prayer is repeated in the morning, it seems the Mennonite people don't seem to comprehend or place value on this. I suggested that the school send home regular papers from these classes, so the parents could be more aware of what is being done to honour their request. I suggested that Maria perhaps should continue to return to the school to do this teaching, even though she was already employed by the project, because we were all determined to do whatever was helpful to keep the children in school. The principal said the school was seeking someone to come on staff with them who could replace Maria. He felt that Jake was the only dissatisfied parent, and said he was getting tired of his constant worrying about 'sex ed' teaching, teaching Bible in school, etc. "I've come to the point that I don't care where they go to school, as long as they are in school," said the principal.

Spending time with the Mennonite people has been helping me in the process of

triangulation. It has been helpful to compare or validate what I have been reading with their points of view. Also it has helped me in understanding their occasional silences in the coffee meetings when there are other agency people present.

Spending time with the Mennonite people is an essential element of trust building. Not only is it important for me to know them and their culture, but for them to know and trust me.

The Students Speak

March 26, 1997 was my final evening to teach the evening ESL classes. I had taught one or two evenings for four months until the funds arrived. Not only did I want participants to reflect on the classes, but it was also time to submit a progress report for EIP.

I explained the need to generate a report, and the significance of their comments to further planning efforts. I invited each to say something. As they were not able to write the statements, I acted as their scribe. Their individual comments follow:

"I can read a little . . .

which I couldn't in the past.

I can write a little . . .

which I couldn't in the past.

Now I understand more words on the newspapers.

I read the cars and trucks for sale.

I read the sales."

"We had a letter in Grassy Lake about keeping dogs home.

I could understand more than I could before."

"I understand English better.

I understand more of what my boss tells me.

My boss told me I learned lots in class."

"Class helped me understand.

Before I came to class I hardly knew any English."

"Class helped me in understanding and reading.

When I first came to class I wouldn't talk to people in English.

Now I will."

"Class helped me in reading.

The kids help me at home.

The kids are happy and excited that I am learning.

I feel better about myself."

One of the women said she takes the materials home and teaches them to her husband who stays home with the children and is also too bashful to come to class. I spoke to him at a public event. Never before had this shy man looked me in the eye when he spoke to me. This time he did, when he told me his wife was bringing home materials and he is learning some, too.

During one coffee break Jake told of his recent trip to Mexico. He said he surprised

himself that he could read road signs now. He had travelled the same road several times before, not being able to read the signs.

When another of the women first came to class, she would hardly even repeat the words loud enough for me to tell if she was saying them correctly. It seemed that she could not bear the embarrassment of not say them right. She responded to a lighthearted approach in class. During breaks it became obvious that she understood a fair bit of English, but would only respond in German, expecting someone to translate for her. The first time she chatted casually with me in English was during the coffee break at the last class.

I requested more student feedback in June. The ESL instructor provided me with a written report of the students responses (Figure 2).

My personal reflection on the impact of the ESL classes

I feel that this class had many hidden benefits, apart from what it did to increase participants' skills in learning to read, understand, and write English. Friendships were formed among the people. Their self esteem was rising as they felt more confident in the language. Some seemed surprised at how much they had learned in such a short time.

The classes were held in an old house owned by a local church. We were allowed to use these facilities free of charge. I think it was meaningful to them that people were accepting of them in the community and wanted them to do well. I remember one of the first meetings one person had asked if we thought people here really wanted them to do well.

In these classes they learned how to talk about their bodies during doctors' visits, how to write cheques the Canadian way, how to ask about things in the grocery store, and other similar useful like skills.

In my classes I always gave them options about what they would like to learn, apart from

the basic mechanics of the reading and writing lessons. For example, when it came time to order the literacy materials for the coming year, they agreed they would like to continue with the Laubach Literacy materials that we had been using to date. Decision making opportunities were being provided in class, too, in keeping with the participation in decision making of the project.

I also made new friends. Some of the people from the English classes have become active participants in the project. The classes were also one vehicle useful for spreading news about the progress of the funding proposal, and later, the development of the project for those who did not attend the coffee meetings.

In June I asked the ESL instructor to again obtain feedback about the English classes from the students. She provided me with a written report (figure 2).

Student Feedback

June 3, 1997

- Students like the connection of seeing the words spelled on the board, hearing them said, and having them explained.
- They expressed confidence in using their English more because of the chance they have in class to pronounce things and to hear them pronounced by others. Words they can read they now know how to say.
- Everyone unanimously agreed that they read better.
 - Several students expressed happiness at increased spelling skills
 - they expressed gratitude because they want to be able to function more fully in the community and feel they need to read to do so.
 - those who ~~read~~ could read even before attending said they often didn't understand what they read. They see a difference in how much more they understand since they began coming to class.
- Students like having someone to go over their questions. They are happy to have someone to ask that they feel comfortable with.
 - they bring in notes + questionnaires from their children's schools to have them explained.
 - in class we read labels so they are more educated as they shop. We cover details like warning symbols and UV ratings.
 - students bring questions from work. If they hear terms they don't understand they feel comfortable to ask someone
- Students like to have someone to go over what they've said or written so they can make corrections and know they're doing it right. Confidence and skill both improve.

The Cycle Continues

The coordinator started her new role April 1, 1997. In the office she proved her ability to look after the many details of the work. She visited people in their homes often. In their homes she addressed numerous concerns, and received information about needs in other families. On occasions we visited the homes together, especially when she was aware there were health-related concerns.

Coreen continued to carry out the role of agency communicator. She conversed with Department of Public Works in Edmonton, the local MLA, and the province's Minister of Social Services about securing the old courthouse facility for use by the project. We even got permission to hold a coffee meeting in the location prior to the approval, allowing a larger number of people the opportunity to view the site.

Sixteen Mennonite people attended that coffee meeting on April 15, along with Maria, Coreen and me. It was a lovely spring evening, one of the first warm ones. It would have been a great evening for the farmers to be in the fields. We moved our newly acquired chairs into the courtroom for that evening, and initiated our new coffeepot. I led the meeting, and it progressed as follows:

1. Are there things you want us to talk about? (Additions to the agenda . . . no response)
2. Report on happenings of the last meeting:

A committee was chosen to interview and hire the coordinator. The people were also told about the selection process used in selecting this facility to house the project. Opportunity was given for a tour.

3. Hiring the coordinator:

Maria was hired as coordinator and began her role April 1, 1997.

4. English Classes:

We reported that 25 students had taken English classes at the Tween Valley School site in day or evening classes. Those sessions finished at the end of March. The Bow Island class was continuing. We also reported that some start-up funds had paid for the German classes in Burdett School. The people were aware of these classes, and some of the parents present had taken their children.

5. Coordinator's Report:

Maria told about her work in helping people with paperwork requiring reading and writing, home visits, and attending the Parent Advisory Councils in the schools.

6. Future Classes:

Some people indicated interest in a First Aid course and the possibility of a babysitting course was discussed. It seemed that the women wanted to take this as well the older girls. They told us there was a need for Bible Classes, as once the children moved on past grade three there was no longer opportunity for this in the public school in Bow Island. They agreed that the children could stay after school, and the parents would be willing to drive for those children who might miss the school bus. Maria volunteered to teach these children, as she had previously done in Bow Island Elementary while still employed there.

We discussed the English classes in Bow Island. On occasions there were up to 17 present. About 30 had attended. There appeared to be a need for different levels, as some students were progressing rapidly and new students were joining. Some of the women were interested in daytime classes. The old house was now getting too small to accommodate the group. We discussed whether or not the people should pay for their books, as the funds were no

longer available to replenish supplies as they were being used. The cost was \$10.00 per level, and there were four levels.

We discussed various choices in learning. Computer programs had been purchased for individualized learning, and would be available when a location for the computers could be arranged. There was no stated interest in drivers' education at that time but some men were interested in safe chemical use, stating that June might be the best time for such a course. Two of the women reported on the series of eight nutrition classes they had attended. They requested another nutrition class, preferably before June.

7. A name for the project:

Participants were asked for a name for the project. They agreed the name should be in English. Some similar initiatives have been called learning centres, but they wondered how the people "out there" would perceive this. We discussed words like 'help' and 'hope'. Hope was a new word for many. They defined and discussed this in German. Coreen suggested trying to make the letters of the name meaningful. We agreed that 'H' could stand for *helping*, 'O' and 'P' could stand for *our people*. We stumbled over 'E'. Although the word *excel* was new to all of them, we explained it as 'do excellent', and they understood that. They decided that they would vote as follows.

A check mark (✓) means "I want the name."

A straight line (-) means "I'm not ready to decide now. It doesn't necessarily mean 'no'."

Thirteen ballots were marked '✓'.

Two ballots were marked '-'.

The people all agreed with nods that thirteen votes were enough. We had named our project

“HOPE, *helping our people excel.*”

8. Other matters.

One man voiced concern about the use of a video camera purchased by the project, expressing the opinion that participants in the programs should not be videotaped without consent. The intent behind the purchase of the video camera was explained. The camera was to tape pertinent classes or complete sessions for those who missed them, to build a library for those who were not able to attend. In the future there might not be enough money to pay for bringing these classes to the site again. One person said he had overheard a comment that an individual would not come to English classes because he had heard they were videotaped. The English students assured him that no such thing had ever occurred.

I asked permission to write about what we were learning from working together. We agreed that this type of opportunity was not available to Mennonites in other areas. The people talked about their friends and relatives who lived in other regions who did not have the same opportunities they now had. I told them that we needed to learn how to work with the German-speaking people, just as they needed to learn how to work with us. “You have helped me learn how we can work together,” I told them. “I have also been taking university courses that have helped me learn about ways to work with you in culturally appropriate ways.” I assured them, “I will not use your names.” One person asked if the writing would go in the newspapers. I told them the writing would be housed in the University library so that other professional people would be able to access it, and maybe it would help them learn about working with their people. It was agreed they did not have a problem with my writing for this purpose.

Working With the Families

Maria, the project's coordinator, began to spend additional time with the Mennonite families, either at her office or, more often, in their homes. By spending time with the people she could listen to their many concerns and provide them with more appropriate assistance.

She became aware of the Open Wide Dental Clinic Program that provided free service for emergency dental needs once during the year. For this service a pre-registration was required. She facilitated this process, enabling sixteen children and two adults to receive services in Medicine Hat. Ten of these children were referred to the Emergency Dental Assistance Program for Children program which, unfortunately, used up the total of that organization's funds for the year. Yet this appeared to be just the tip of the iceberg, as there were many other Mennonite children also badly in need of dental service. Dental care was not a priority with parents in part because there were so many other more visible pressing financial concerns.

Representatives of the Dental Department of Palliser Health Regions Community Health Services were also aware of the extent of the needs of Mennonite children through their school programs. Because of the great need arrangements were made for the Palliser Department to rent a dental facility in Bow Island for one day per month in which inspection, teaching, cleaning and fluoride treatments for the affordable cost of \$5.00 per child. Although this was open to all local children, the great needs of the Mennonite children were primarily influential in bringing this service to the area.

Maria also became aware of the different needs of the families who had broken with the Mennonite tradition. One woman spoke to Maria and I of her feelings of isolation and separation from the extended family members residing in the same community. Were there ways we could participate with these people when they did not feel accepted by their own people, and did not

yet feel connected to the host culture?

As coordinator, she received contacts in many ways. Sometimes the school would phone with a concern. While visiting in one home, she would often hear of another family that would also like a visit. People brought their mail to her for interpretation and sought her assistance in completing simple forms. She translated school letters and doctors' appointments. At other times she would make phone calls for me (the Public Health Nurse) to converse about health-related concerns, or she would bring back health concerns to me, and we would return for a joint visit.

This occurred in the case of a family who moved from Ontario with a developmentally disabled eighteen year old child requiring special educational services. We facilitated contacts with Handicapped Children's Services for her needs. In another instance, a child was suffering from psychological effects following an eye injury, and, in yet another, we helped a mother who was suffering from an illness that required medical treatment, but had not been in the area long enough to learn who the doctors were, or how to contact them. We helped her make the first appointment, and told her about Alberta Health Care coverage. Sometimes the people who had recently arrived from Mexico were distrustful of caregivers such as immunization providers. Often Maria translated for many of these discussions, explaining the local approach to immunization.

Maria also supervised the work of the ESL instructor. She organized and visited the classes, moving them into the Hope Centre when it became available in June 1997. She helped make local arrangements for the Nutrition classes, and translated for them as well. Some families participated readily in the planned activities of the Hope Centre. Others were often limited from full participation by the sheer size of their families, or by the objections of family members, particularly husbands.

A group of older women were holding weekly Bible classes for the Mennonite children in the basement of one of the churches in Bow Island one afternoon a week. Maria linked herself with this established group and worked with the women and the thirty-five children who attended. One woman told the preschool-age children a story in their German dialect. The five moms who remained with their children sat in on the German class. When, due to ill health, the leader of this group became unable to attend regularly, Maria took her place, reading English Bible stories to the children and helping them with their crafts and, when this group recommenced after summer holidays, it was in the Hope Centre. The same women came to help, under Maria's leadership this time. The location may make it more difficult for the children to attend, as they must cross the highway and walk to the outskirts of town. If this proves to be a barrier, it will be returned to the original site in the church basement.

Maria and I continued to meet regularly to discuss the progress of the project and the needs of the families. We worked together through the evaluation process provided to us by the EIP program. A sample page is found in Appendix 4. On June 2, 1997, we wrote, "ESL - Some of the more advanced students are not attending regularly. Do we need levels of classes? The men are no longer attending regularly due to work conflict." "Some men won't allow their wives to come without them." Toward the end of June the ESL classes came to a halt because of lagging attendance. Plans were made to recommence in the fall.

Visits to the Grassy Lake area uncovered concerns a couple of families had with their children in school. One mother told Maria that her children came home from school with bruises inflicted by the other children, and she had to accompany them to their classrooms each morning for them to attend. She wished for her children to attend school in Burdett where she understood they would not be treated in this way.

Over the summer months Maria addressed these concerns with representatives of the Prairie Rose School Division and the Grassy Lake School. Arrangements were made for the parents to drive their children across the Horizon school boundary line, into the Prairie Rose District where a school bus would pick them up and deliver them to Burdett School. In September five children were transported in this manner. Other parents who had expressed interest in this option chose to stay where they were rather than drive their children to the bus and back every day.

In the spring some children were taken out of school at twelve years of age to work with their fathers on local farms doing contract work such as picking rocks. Although at the outset the parents spoke of a short period of absence from school, in actuality those students did not return to the classroom. As the fathers obtained contracts on many farms, the children lost interest in returning to school. We were aware of this situation, but could not come up with a way of approaching these families that we felt would be consistent with the fundamental principles that guided the work of the project.

Many new families were moving into the area for this busy season in agriculture. Maria posted Help Wanted advertisements from the local newspaper in her office and listings obtained from Job Search at the local library. An ESL class visited the public library where the Mennonite people were introduced to computerized job search databank available there. As well, community agencies and individuals were steadily becoming more aware of our work and donating toys for our child care facility, games, books, craft supplies, and good used clothing for children.

On June 10, 1997 we held an Agency Advisory meeting. This was to be a chance for those who attended to tour the facility and receive updates. In addition, we had wanted to discuss school concerns prior to summer vacation, but could not because the schools did not send

representation.

On July 17, 1997 I wrote, "It's a slow week. Families are in the fields. They are starting to plan group activities for themselves - a baby shower. People from different churches are coming together and being friends. Summer programming is slower than we hoped. A non-Mennonite babysitter doesn't seem to work for ESL classes - cultural sensitivities. The budget seems too restrictive. There is no money for evaluation and planning."

We held a coffee meeting on July 28, 1997. Approximately twelve adults attended. As usual we asked for feedback concerning our activities. We were told there had been a few problems with babysitting for ESL. Maria had been unable to find a Mennonite to commit to babysitting in the evenings, so a young sister of the ESL instructor babysat but was unable to control the children. An incident also occurred during one of the evening ESL classes. It appears that a teenage boy cleaning in the main part of the provincial building had made loud ghost-like noises at the doorway connecting the two areas. This was very frightening to the class of women, as the sound came from the direction of the babysitting centre. One mother became so frightened she refused to return to class until her husband could again attend. I spoke to the woman responsible for the cleaning service for that area of the building. (This same family had held the cleaning contract years earlier and had complained about the condition of the washrooms after one of the Mennonite assessment meetings. They had threatened to prohibit them from using the facility.) I agreed with her that a childish prank may have motivated this action, but I raised the possibility of discrimination may have been a factor. In the end, the Mennonite people agreed that young people of all cultures sometimes behave in ways that are not wise. The Mennonite men seemed more amused about it than the women had been.

In the middle of the summer, the demands of manual labour in the fields were less

pressing for the women and older children. Maria and I asked the coffee meeting group about holding a Day Camp for children on Thursdays in August. We hoped this would provide something special and affordable for the children before school started again. The parents were quite supportive of this plan as the children were getting bored at home. They agreed upon the hours of 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p. m.. The Red Cross babysitting course was to be run during this time, too, so we invited mothers to remain if they wished, anticipating that some activities could be planned for them. All who attended were to bring their own lunch.

They also planned a group supper for August 12 in Burdett Hall, similar to the initial barbecue in July of 1996. Dinner was to be a potluck as the Mennonite people agreed that preparing a barbecue would be difficult for them. They agreed to a time of discussion and planning following the meal, similar to that of the previous year. We could see how this would assist with evaluation and planning.

My personal reflections about working with the families

As Maria and I sat together to discuss her activities, I was surprised at the number of new families to the area. She had contact with more than twenty families of whom we had no record in Community Health Services. These families had not had children in school over the winter; nor had they received any services through the Public Health Nursing Department. Two new families had also moved to the Foremost area, which brought the first Mennonite students into the classrooms of the Foremost school. Will these people leave again in the fall, or does this mean the numbers who will reside permanently in our community are increasing more rapidly than anticipated?

With the MCC worker and the Burdett principal, we discussed our concerns over the boys being taken out of school to pick rocks for such long periods. We learned that legislation

appears to provide for children to miss school to work on the family farm, on occasions.

However, the Mennonite families move from farm to farm with their children, the absences become extended and, in reality, the children do not return to school. Maria and I discussed the ethical considerations of, on the one hand, participating with the people and, on the other, speaking to others about what we learn through our participation. We discussed talking to the local MLA to find out if there may need to be changes in legislation to discourage farmers from contracting with families in this manner. We could see that some families only had their children in school about one month in the fall, then left for Mexico, and returned to school for only about one month in the spring.

Program Planning or Participatory Action

As agency people we have a tendency to plan programs to meet people's needs as we perceive them. It is true that exposure to new things helps people to have a greater variety of choices. I acknowledge that the actions recounted in this section were not conceived through participatory action according to my understanding of the definition. The participatory action undertaken with the group is only part of the broader setting, and other plans agency people have for this group.

Over the past year, the principal of Burdett school has been quite involved with the parents of his students. It was his desire to take the parents on a tour of Medicine Hat College and, in particular, the trades areas. Eleven men went on the tour along with the principal and Maria, who then was still the school's liaison person with the Mennonite families.

One day, in my office, of the men told me of their experience. One man in their tour group had been a carpenter for thirty years, and he himself was a welder, but neither holds

papers. He told how the college could “read” their skills and subtract from the regular hours needed in the apprenticeship program. However, because of previous misunderstandings when Unemployment Insurance was paying for English classes, he personally is “scared” to be involved with them. I explained that we cannot afford to bring these formal programs to the Hope Centre. However, we could work toward providing the people with the English literacy skills to make these programs a possibility for them.

In subsequent coffee meeting discussions it was expressed that the men should be the ones to get these certificates so they could teach their children, as that was their responsibility. Our conversation centred on the operation of the project, so I also pointed out that this decision to go on the field trip was not typical of how we would make decisions in the project. The decision to go was made by the principal, in the manner decisions are made in school with the children. However, because the people decided they wanted to go, it was in a way the people’s decision, so the project funds would cover their mileage on this occasion.

The people had also indicated a desire to have German classes for their children in school. The same principal had acted on that information, and had commenced German classes in his school Friday afternoons. The people in the project were not involved in the planning of this activity either, but it had been one of their requests. Initially the school had paid the instructor, but when our funds became available the project paid for the final three months of instruction.

Another example of this type of programming was the nutrition classes provided by the Best Babies Project based in Community Health Services in Medicine Hat. They had received some programming funds from Health and Welfare Canada to fund their involvement with the Mennonite people. Meetings were being held jointly between employees of the Palliser and Chinook Health Region to address the Mennonite people’s needs. In the process we invited a

group of Mennonite women from both regions to a meeting to talk about what health topics they would like for classes. The women seemed very interested in nutrition classes, where they would come together for instruction, and actual cooking. This idea was first field-tested at a location accessible to women from both regions. Staff from both health regions shared the responsibility of the program. It was well accepted by those who attended, so each region continued to carry the program individually in varied forms. We discussed the nutrition classes in the coffee meetings, and there was no opposition to them by the group. Therefore we also partnered in this project, by paying for the facility and babysitting, with Best Babies paying the other expenses. In the more recent coffee meetings women reported on the classes, and the decision was made if and when to hold the next class.

My personal reflections on our program planning

It may take a few years to realize the benefits from the seeds sown during the college tour. Will they be more open to allowing their children to continue in school to obtain enough education to allow them to be prepared for entry into apprenticeships? We understand that we are involved in an evolving process, and the answers will be in the future. There are many influences on the Mennonite people. The Hope Centre is but one.

The Mennonite people feel that continuing in the German language is important for their children so they can write letters and communicate with their grandparents in Mexico. Many adults themselves cannot write the German language, and read only what is required in church. Although one school has a program to translate school letters into German that does not mean the people can read it. One man who has progressed fairly well with English literacy said that he puts the English letter and German letter side by side, and from that he can get a better understanding of the information contained.

We noted that the nutrition club addressed the social needs of the women to which they were reluctant to admit in the presence of their husbands at larger meetings. One was so overwhelmed at this opportunity to talk with women that she had difficulty controlling her tears throughout one session. Another came to babysit for subsequent sessions as this was about her only opportunity to be with women. Through this avenue she was becoming acquainted with other women. She was now able to visit over the telephone with other women and take turns watching others' children, giving her time to do things on her own. The women from this group also requested use of the facility to host a baby shower for two new mothers. More than twenty women attended. They had a social event Monday morning following the shower when they returned to clean the facility. The socialization of these women was probably key to some later opportunities that allowed us to work with women and children.

Day Camp

Maria and I planned the activities for the first day of camp, but subsequent plans were made with the mothers and helpers. The day started with singing, as this seemed to have worked well in previous Bible classes. Then Maria read Bible stories to the older children, and a grandmother came to tell the German stories to the preschool age children.

During storytime I held a microwave cooking session for the mothers. As part of the class we prepared a nutritious afternoon snack for the children. (Microwave cooking was the extent of our cooking capabilities at the Hope Centre at this time.)

After storytime the children did crafts, had reading groups, and then played games outside. In the afternoon, the three to six-year-old children had a playschool. Their teacher spoke the language of the children, but most of the talking was done in English to increase their English

skills. The girls nine years of age and older (including some older Mennonite girls considered to be helpers) had a Red Cross babysitting course for 90 minutes each afternoon. Mothers chose to sit in on this class.

At noon we gathered in the large area or around the table in the kitchen to eat our sack lunches. Quiet time followed as we darkened the room and watched videos. During this time the babies generally went to sleep.

The first day went well with about 40 children and four moms present but it was hectic, as the children were excited. We had hired a babysitter, but the babies were often carried by the older sisters and remained with them most of the time. The mothers took them when they fussed. The playschool was a little overwhelming with 16 children in a small room.

The second Thursday about forty-five children attended. This day went like clock work. The helpers were now aware of how they could help, and the children were more settled. We moved the playschool into a larger area, and the babysitting class to the conference room of the provincial building.

The moms came and went throughout this session, doing shopping, cooking meals at home, or attending doctors' appointments. Some chose to stay home to bake and sew with the children gone. As we ate lunch together, the mothers were able to get ideas about nutritious lunches from observing what we and other children brought.

In the second session I led the women's craft time as their leader was unable to attend. They were doing needlepoint. The motto on their cloth read, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." This was the second week on their craft, and they did not understand the words they were creating. Although the woman who was helping with their craft time understood and spoke some of their language, she did not understand that the women could not read. We

discussed the meanings of the words and the sentence. They recognized these words as being from the Bible. We sat around the table and talked about their craft, and about the realities of their life without “great riches.”

About forty-five children and three moms attended the third class. There were reports of concerns ‘other mothers had’ with the showing of Bible Story videos as one child reportedly had bad dreams after viewing David and Goliath. Another said that television viewing is not good, and viewing Bible stories on it makes it worse. Others were quite pleased to see the stories, and said their husbands also wanted to see them. So, we showed the video ‘Homeward Bound,’ and it seemed well accepted. This week we had a stand-in playschool teacher. Her previous playschool experience was evidenced by the fascinating activities she arranged for the children. However, the black spiders they made as a craft were not endearing to the mothers, or was it their culture?

We invited the MCC settlement worker and his wife to visit day camp. They did, making this their first visit to the Hope Centre. A local woman taking graduate studies with a focus on ESL also came to visit the Day Camp, and spent the rest of the day helping. Volunteers from the local community who had been involved in the previous children’s classes were starting to drop in to see how they could help. The Hope Centre was a beehive of pleasant activity this day.

Maria had overheard the children talking in German, saying their parents were going to let them miss the first day of school to come to day camp at the Hope Centre. The fourth and final session had to be changed to a Wednesday because we had mistakenly booked it for first day of class for the public school. I was unable to attend this class due to conflicting schedules. Around 50 children attended, and several mothers came and went throughout the day.

That same day four Mennonite families came to my public health nursing office who had not previously had any contact with the Hope Centre. I took them for a visit to the Hope Centre

where they were greeted with happy visiting sounds from the kitchen full of women, and enticed by the smell of popcorn. Mennonite women in attendance took their turns providing guided tours of the daycamp in progress for the newcomers.

Soon, however, the summer day camp was over, it was time to get back into the school schedule. The after-school Bible Classes reconvened. We offered to continue with a weekly playschool, but there was not sufficient interest at this time.

My personal reflections of daycamp

Deciding what is culturally appropriate or offending has been difficult, as this means different things to different people. The infrequency of the coffee meetings makes it harder to ask for group decisions on the acceptability of things. Even in those meetings there are differing views. However, it seems to be of benefit for them to know that we are at least checking regularly to see if this or that is acceptable within their culture. (Do you think it would be okay to show 'Homeward Bound'? It's a video about a family and their animals.)

This time spent with the children was a special time for me, as the hugs were many, and the children cuddled in for video time. Maria had more of a formal approach to coordinating the event, probably the more German approach. She chose to be called Mrs. . . . , similar to a teacher in school, but they knew me simply as Ruth.

Our conversations with the parents were also informative. One mother said that her fifteen-year-old son is employed by a greenhouse near Medicine Hat. He gets \$4.00 per hour and must load one sack of corn every minute. However, he does not get paid for his first week of work. Is that considered job training? We recommended that she consult the MCC settlement worker about this concern, as he is more aware of employment issues. (We should also become more aware so we can help them to understand the laws of the land and their rights.)

At the beginning of this project it appeared that we would not be able to have programs for the children. The parents said their children did not have needs. They were willing to participate with us for their ESL and other adult needs. One year had passed and we are now offering children's programming with the parents' full approval. What had made the difference? Was it an increase in the trust of our motives? Or was it seen as a social event, not related to needs of the children? Would admitting that their children have needs suggest that they were not good parents, in that they were not meeting all the needs of their children? Or had they simply not given it that much thought? Maybe we need to stop looking at this program as a means to meeting their needs, and start looking at it as a way to identify their strengths, and participate with them according to their strengths. At the potluck supper I asked the question, "What do we need for the future?" One man responded, "God's blessing."

The Planning Potluck

A potluck meeting was planned for August 12, 1997 to seek input and evaluation from a larger number of people, similar to the previous year. However, only about ten families attended the potluck dinner at the Burdett Hall, a far smaller representation than the previous year. The families brought a variety of foods commonly eaten in Canada. The men and the women visited in separate groups. The children played near the entrance or in the near by park.

After the meal they gathered around the tables, the men in one group and the women in another. Maria sat with the men, Coreen with the women. I facilitated the meeting. They requested that the meeting be translated. The translation occasionally shifted between the different men present. The questions were:

1. Is this what you had in mind when we first met here a year ago?

2. Do you still want the same things?
3. Can you see that this program will help make your life better in Canada?
4. What is working, even a little? What is not working?
5. What would you like to see for this coming year?
6. What would you like to see for the future?

The people told us that, although they could not believe how far we had come in one year, we were doing the things they had in mind. What they wanted was still to be able to learn to speak, read, and write English better.

One man told about what it was like for him before he attended English classes. He was too hesitant to speak to people on the street in English. Now he can and does speak, and he now has friends. They thought the English classes were working. They requested evening classes again this year for those who continued to work, and daytime classes for those who were not working.

They spoke about the recent advances in technology, and how they would have to read to keep their jobs on the farms, as even the tractors come with computer readouts. One told of having to leave his tractor to find the boss. He was afraid that the words flashing on the screen might be a danger signal. They asked about the possibility of having someone from an implement dealership explain the new advances, so they could handle the large equipment safely.

One family said their daughter did not want to attend school for grade seven in Bow Island. Could children home school at the Hope Centre where Maria could help them with their work from time to time? We told them that we did not think this would be a possibility.

My personal reflections on the potluck

The numbers who attended the potluck were smaller than anticipated. Was this because it

was planned on short notice? Was there inadequate advertising as posters were not used this year? Was this a sign of faltering support? Or did it mean things were going well and did not need to be changed? Was the request to bring food a deterrent? Did some not approve of decision making on Sunday? Were they afraid of being asked to sit on a committee again? As we continue to participate perhaps we will find out the answers to some of these questions.

The Prairie Rose Proposal

Maria continued to speak with the Superintendent of the Prairie Rose School District about the concerns of the Mennonite families. A meeting was held on August 26, 1997 to discuss the concerns. The local principals, the District Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent and the Coordinator of Student Services attended this meeting. Coreen, Maria and I were attended from the Hope Centre.

The agenda Maria prepared listed three concerns: (1) Grassy Lake bussing concerns; (2) Senator Gershaw ESL/religion; and (3) Home Schooling/Hope Centre.

Arrangements were made for children to be bussed from within our county line to the Burdett school. The parents would be responsible for transporting their children to a safe location to meet the bus.

The principal from Gershaw stated he did not feel religion classes would be tolerated in his school. However, he suggest perhaps the elementary school liaison worker could come to Gershaw for an ESL class and she could use the Bible in that class.

Maria reported about the one child who was reluctant to attend school for grade seven in Bow Island. The mom had asked if she could be home schooled at the Hope Centre. A discussion was held about the number of students not attending school, or not attending regularly who could

access a program at the Hope Centre. The school representatives stressed that they felt the best place for the Mennonite children was in the regular classrooms. The Superintendent also made it clear that he would not support any effort to “entice” children already registered with another school. However, he supported the rights of parents to choose the appropriate schooling for their children. He then suggested offering individualized education for students of Junior High School age not attending school. The program could be completely flexible in order to meet the needs of the students. He suggested a basic curriculum that included 80 minutes of Mathematics per day and 80 minutes of English. Any other courses would be decided with the parents of the student. They could also access the trade classes at Senator Gershaw School on Friday afternoon with the Burdett students who are bussed in for that occasion, as this group had a high percentage of Mennonite students. The number of days the classroom operated would be decided with the parents. After some quick calculations, he suggested the classroom could run with ten registered students, provided they were registered prior to the funding cutoff date at the end of September. Senator Gershaw School volunteered to provide desks for the students. Regular school busses could be used. The Prairie Rose Division would pay for the teacher.

We requested a written proposal to present to the parents. When the proposal arrived, we were pleasantly surprised to see that it also included students to the age of nineteen. The proposal is included as Appendix 5.

We spoke about the proposal to the people, and scheduled a coffee meeting for September 3 to deal with this one item. Eighteen adults attended this meeting, along with numerous children who were drawn to the toys in the child care facilities. We now had trained babysitters among them, so they were able to practise their skills. The MCC settlement worker also attended this meeting, as well as Coreen, Maria and I. Prairie Rose was represented by the

Superintendent and the Senator Gershaw School principal. It was a warm fall evening, but the men left the fields to come to this meeting.

Copies of the proposal were available on request, but the MCC settlement worker was the only one who asked for a copy. (I had recommended not handing them out to all present, but rather only to make them available as I was aware that few, if any, could read this document.) The District Superintendent explained the proposal, pausing to define words and to have explanations made in German.

The Mennonite people asked few questions at this time, but those of us from the Hope Centre asked several based on questions the people had previously asked us. The superintendent explained that students could return to this school even if they had not attended for a few years. Students could attend until the age of nineteen. During the coffee time, some parents approached me with their questions. I accompanied them to the Superintendent for him to hear their concern, and them to hear his response. One mother wondered about her children who are presently home-schooled, registered under the private Christian School. They are very happy in their present arrangement, and have no desire to change. Still, she wondered if her children could come to the Hope Centre one day a week for socialization with other Mennonite children. He hesitated, and then responded, "Yes, and maybe they could bring their work to school. The teacher could help them, too."

After coffee they attended a tour of the home economics room and the shop. The men thoroughly enjoyed looking at the array of tools in both the woodworking and mechanics' department.

Two new families had joined our coffee meeting this evening, even though they did not have school-age children. They were very conversant, and excited about their first visit to the

Hope Centre and the opportunities for the children. They also enjoyed looking at the pictures taken at previous participation events. At the close of the evening one of the men expressed how happy he was that he didn't have to work that night. He wouldn't have wanted to miss this evening. Although the topic of the evening had not pertained to his family, the opportunity to socialize was very meaningful.

We asked the school personnel to be patient with the Mennonite people. Change takes time. Even if we did not get enough students registered this year, maybe next year they would be more ready. "Please do not be discouraged if we cannot get the numbers together for this year. Maybe by next year we will have sufficient numbers," I said to the superintendent.

Personal reflections on the planning for students education

This is one aspect of the program that has astounded me the most. When I attended the first agency meeting, I expressed my concern for the number of youth on the street corners, or tucked away in the homes who were not attending school. I can recall saying that if I had a dream for these people, it would be to get these children into a special school where they would feel comfortable, and learn at their own pace.

I was also surprised and overwhelmed at the willingness of the school district to work with these families in the participatory approach that we had used. They had responded to a request by the Mennonite people. They had listened to their concerns, and were seeking appropriate ways to participate for the education of the children.

DISCUSSION ON THE STUDY

In this section of the paper I will try to outline some recurring themes of this research activity, derived through what I have observed and experienced, what the Mennonite people told me, what other agency people have said and done, and what the literature explains, or fails to explain. I have learned a lot about working with the Mennonite people, and almost as much about working with other agencies in matters concerning the Mennonites.

1. The local community setting

In this community the Mennonites are considered to be hard-working people, working diligently over long hours for the local farmers. They are not demanding of their employers, or their landlords. They do not actively seek to develop relationships with their neighbours, but are polite, friendly, and peace-seeking.

The community and schools have been very supportive in wanting to help people in need. School letters have encouraged the donation of warm winter clothing for Mennonite and other children. The leaders in the larger community have been good role models, and the community people have responded to these opportunities for charity. As an observer, and participant, I would say that, generally, an attitude of acceptance of Mennonites has prevailed. It may be possible that some Mennonite people were not so well received by the local residents and, because of that, have moved on.

Another characteristic of our region is the presence of options for education. If parents are not comfortable with one school, they may choose to send their children to a different school, even though there is a cost involved. Some children attend the Tween Valley Mennonite School south of Purple Springs, and others attend Cherry Coulee Christian Academy in Bow Island. In

the fall of 1997, 73 Mennonite children attended Tween Valley and 26 attended Cherry Coulee. The remainder attended the public school system, or were registered in home-schooling.

The reputation I gained with the Mennonite people in this community in the years prior to this project helped prepare a foundation upon which we were able to build together. Even before this project was considered I had coordinated the community projects of providing warm winter clothing for Mennonite families in need, located beds so that no Bow Island children would need to sleep on the floor in the winter, and submitted names for Christmas hampers. among many activities designed to help in their individual times of need. The 'relationship-forming stage' Rothman (1974) wrote about had commenced long before this project began. Rothman also wrote about the necessity of a 'linking-person' when the target group is distrustful or suspicious of agencies. Although I was an agency person, I was also able to become a linking person because of my history with them. I was able to link them with others in my agency, and other organizations. When Maria joined the project, she was also able to become a linking person because of her common links through her Mennonite heritage.

2. Participating in decision making

One of the first things I learned was that we were not going to be able to work with the Mennonite people using the familiar method of boards and committees. This was a new experience that confronted them. Their background teaches separation from other people, so that they not be drawn away, making their caution more understandable. Redekop (1969) states that they have a view of a "common enemy without" which has been propagated to sustain their solidarity. He also states that their custom of separation means no interaction with worldly people. They had never before been confronted with an offer from people from the outside to work with them in ways that were in accordance with their religion and customs. The Mennonite

people were wary about where this might lead them. When we acknowledged that this was new to all of us, it may have made it possible for them to accept the potential value for them and us that lay in learning about working together.

The coffee meeting system of participation for reflecting and planning was well received. More than sixteen adults attended most meetings. This format was recommended to us by the MCC worker, as well as a local minister. McTaggart (1991) advises that regular checks must be incorporated to ensure that the agenda of the least powerful remains the focus. Although I chaired these meetings, I regularly asked about the appropriate ways of doing things, and stressed the importance of Mennonites' input in order that the plans made would be acceptable within their culture and religion.

I feel another key point was never pressing people to engage beyond their level of comfort. When they couldn't sit on a committee, or allow children's programming, I accepted it. For example, early in the trust building stage (and I assert that we must remain in this stage), they told us that their children had no needs. So, at the outset they were only willing to participate for themselves, as adults, with their understanding that their children would benefit through their gains. We were all hopeful and reasonably confident that benefits would trickle down to the children. The written plan states in part that "we will know our plan is a success if the people continue to participate." The people have continued to participate.

3. The family-centred approach

Participants in the project learned the importance of a family-centred approach in trying to address the broader scope of the needs of the Mennonite people and the broader determinants of health as they are commonly described in health circles. Initially our work was only with the adults. English literacy classes were held first. Then we held the nutrition classes with the

mothers and, immediately, we had to accommodate some children. During nutrition classes we tried to provide the children with stimulating toys or activities, taking into consideration both their socialization needs and the importance of this opportunity to expand the usefulness of the Hope Centre project further into the Mennonite community. When the English classes moved to the Hope Centre, we were then able to provide childcare for the parents while in class.

The home visits by Maria addressed a broad range of concerns, including basic physical health, dental care, employment, translation, literacy, safety, and psychological needs. She helped with the needs of people from infancy to old age. In our society we tend to compartmentalize needs according to age categories. However, in the Mennonite families there seem to be stronger ties binding all ages together. For example, we had arranged for babysitting in the day camp, but they did not need it. Older sisters took the younger children into class with them, even though the mothers were also present and there was babysitting available. The girls aged nine years and older took the babysitting course very seriously but they could laugh at being taught simple things such as changing a baby's diaper.

We learned that when our plans included the whole family, the parents were able to participate in coffee meetings and ESL classes together. Babysitting was arranged during classes, and during coffee meetings the older girls spontaneously took over the care of the younger children to free the parents. I am of the opinion that including the mothers and children of all ages in the children's Bible classes and Day Camp activities contributed to the acceptance and success of these activities as well.

I feel that the proposal by the Prairie Rose School District for a junior/senior highschool alternate classroom at the Hope Centre may have been well received because it recognized the family's expectations of the teen-agers to contribute to the household, whether

through helping the mother in her work in the home, or assisting the father provide support and livelihood for the family. The children who are taken out of school after grade six generally start to work immediately alongside their parents, the boys in agriculture and the girls at home. Perhaps having the teenagers in school on the same site where parents are learning ESL could help to normalize the continuing education of their children by placing it in a family setting, rather than in a regular secondary school setting. I have not observed the transitional adolescent stage that we are accustomed to in the dominant society among these Mennonite people. Rather, they desire to separate or shield their young people from mainstream youth culture. Some parents have indicated a desire for their children to complete high school, but not in the public school setting. The continuation of this part of the project will generate useful information about how the Mennonite people can participate with the public school system to bring about a culturally appropriate classroom, as well as determine the quantity and scope of education the Mennonite youth will receive in a family centred-setting.

4. Shielding the family

When we started to participate with the Mennonite people, they told us their children had no unmet needs. This may have been because their own needs were so great they could not see the needs of their children, or it could have been because they wanted to shield their vulnerable children from the outside world, fearing they might lose their faith. As well, it is possible that by admitting their children had needs, they would have been admitting that they were not providing well for their children. However, as trust grew, we were able to work increasingly with the children. As a first step, the parents shared their children's dental needs with us. Next, they talked about their children's needs to be with other children outside their own homes.

We were able to establish programs for the children by helping in the already established

Bible and craft classes that had been offered since 1995 by some local elderly church women. One grandmother had befriended the Mennonite children in her neighbourhood. Gradually the class outgrew her home, and she moved the class into the church basement. About five Mennonite mothers regularly accompanied their children to class, and sat in on the German class that was provided for the younger children who did not yet speak English. The class became more formal as it progressed. Other local women from the church attended to lead singing, or help with storytelling, and crafts. An attendance register was kept. The families seemed to become quite comfortable with the classes over time. The enrollment increased. When Maria offered her help as well, they readily accepted. When the leader's health failed, they were relieved to have Maria willing to take the leadership role, and later move the class to the Hope Centre. Partnering with this existing children's Bible class was probably a key to the success of the children's programming we commenced, with the parents approval, in the Hope Centre in August 1997. The day camp was a natural extension of the children's classes, and some of the women who had originally worked with the church group volunteered their help in the camp as well.

Shielding their children has been important to the Mennonites throughout their history. Redekop (1969), Sawatzky (1971), and Ens (1980) have written about the struggles and persecution they have undergone to protect their children against secular influence. Ens (1980) writes about the pressures placed upon them prior to leaving Canada.

The responsibility which the government felt toward its heterogenous population was to make "one Canadian speaking and thinking people" by assimilating non-English groups as quickly and thoroughly as possible and inculcating them with "Canadian standards and ideals." It was not expected that the older people could

become “true Canadians” but the government should see that the children were given “every opportunity to receive proper citizenship. ”

In this process the public school was the key institution. (p. 74)

Ens (1980) writes that some men were imprisoned, and many had to pay fines for not sending their children to public schools as recently as the 1930s.

Hamm (1987) also writes about family solidarity, that still exists after fifty years, among the families who did not leave Canada. He credits this to the Biblical view of the family. Initially the family served as a “shock-breaker” for recent immigrants, retarding their social integration. In later years it continues to serve as a haven in an “uncertain and secular world” (p. 83).

In retrospect I can see that the steps we followed did not threaten their desire to shield their children from the uncertain. We honoured their view, and did not rush to initiate programs for the children in order to meet needs we may have perceived them to have. We first entered into a program that had already met with their approval, the children’s Bible class. When Maria took over the leadership of the program, they were given opportunity to participate in the decisions made pertaining that program. Although we had previously suggested a babysitting class to address the safety needs of siblings attending younger children in their home, they did not agree. However, when we made their priority, Bible classes, our program, they were then able to consider and approve the babysitting class. They did not even question our request for the inclusion of reading groups in preparation for their return to school in the fall.

Even though all the parents did not attend the Bible classes or the day camp, they still knew they were welcome to be there, and there would be some parents present observing the activities. Requests for input from the mothers concerning such things as programming also

reduced their anxiety. They came to know we were genuinely committed to what was acceptable to them. I asked questions such as, "Was there anything in the babysitting class that you did not want your children to know?" "Is it all right if we watch the movie *Homeward Bound*? It is about a family and their pets". "Now that you have seen the movie, do you still feel it was suitable?" When the children's class was preparing to close down for winter, they put on a demonstration program for the parents. They retold some of the stories they had heard, sang some of their songs, and recited some of their verses.

I wanted the parents to understand that I was sincerely interested in understanding what was acceptable to them, and committed to assisting them in shielding their children against unacceptable outside influences. Such understanding and cooperation in their need to shield their children from negative influence was probably another key to the success of the project.

5. Valuing the German Language

The German language is a very strong part of the Mennonite heritage, and a feared loss of the mother tongue threatens the bond within the family. Loewen (1980) refers to an article by Paul Pauls which is a collection of writings by Mennonite poets about the search for identity.

Poet David Waltner-Toews wrote:

He says Low German is a pile of manure

Listen here, my boy.

I will surround you with Low German

I will speak piles of it to you.

Then you will know what Low German is!

Then you will remember -

a mother's anger is a willow switch. (p. 250)

Sawatzky (1971) says "any diminution of the German being taught would seriously threaten the continued functioning of the church, based as it was on the use of the German language" (p. 15-16). Their Mennonite Church services continue to be held in the German language. Therefore, the German language had to be retained to enable the children to understand the teachings in the church.

I feel that our acknowledgement of their priority for teaching German as a subject in the school, and our willingness to advocate for it, has also been a key to continued participation. For example, we paid for German instruction by a Mennonite minister in the Burdett School, during regular school hours. I believe our valuing the German language enough to pay for his instruction helped to gain his confidence, and, in return, I received valuable insights to help me guide the project. From him I also received encouragement that we will make mistakes, because we all do, but we should not be discouraged and give up. Rather we should acknowledge them, learn from them, and move ahead.

We balanced our preschool programming by providing the Bible instruction portion in the German language and other activities in English to encourage them to start learning the language prior to school entry. Preschoolers with schoolage siblings were more likely to understand English as the other children spoke it in the home.

I was never given the impression that the families desired to preserve German only in an effort to shield the family, but rather to preserve communication with the older generations, and other family members who remain in Mexico, thus retaining the family bond and heritage.

6. Education

Through my literature review prepared in the early stages of this work, I was led to believe by some authors that the Mennonite people did not value more than a minimal education.

At the conclusion of this report, I find myself saying, "T`aint necessarily so." It may be that there is actually a difference in their public and private views. In private "many confess their ignorance and desire for more education" (Redekop, 1969, p. 78). Terichow`s (1995) writings concur with this. Harold confirmed this in saying that his church believed very much in education, but apart from the secular school system. My observations in English classes revealed that they were eager to learn and be knowledgeable about the world around them.

How much education they value seems to vary appreciably. Some support only six grades in school, as was their custom in Mexico. This seems to be more so among the Old Colony Group. Two families requesting to register their children in the proposed school at the Hope Centre were interested in their children continuing to grade twelve, but not in the public system.

It would appear that how much education is not the problem for some, but the type and location of the educational experience are more important factors. Ens (1980) writes that the Mennonites were paying for their private education in the 1920s. They are still willing to sacrifice for private education, apparently. The Tween Valley and Cherry Coulee schools each charge tuition. I think of Jake saying the cost was worth it, even if he had to go away to find work for the winter.

Fretz (1989) writes about the Mennonites in Ontario. He quotes Douglas Snyder`s presentation to the Ontario government regarding education of the Mennonite children. "We believe that the early teen years are a valuable time for teaching religion, apprenticeship in agriculture, and responsibility to the brotherhood and family" (p. 150). Bargaen (1953) writes that the preservation of their faith is fundamental to all of their social, religious and educational activities. There is a fear that if the modern world with its humanism, evolution, and

sanction of all religions is allowed to poison the minds of their children, without an antidote being administered, the extinction of Mennonitism would be a matter of only a short time (p. 102).

Outside of the very conservative Mennonite element (Altkolonier), the Mennonites have always been enthusiastic advocates of education. Contrary to public opinion that the Mennonites have sought escape from knowledge, they have rather tried to use it as a means to educate young people in harmony with their faith (p. 104).

Has the Canadian educational and multicultural climate changed sufficiently that partnerships can be formed with the public school districts to enable the Mennonites to receive a culturally sensitive education? Would the children be allowed to attend school longer if it were not such a financial strain to the family's budget? What would be considered "culturally-appropriate" education? Would it include participating in choosing the teacher and the curriculum, along with the inclusion of Bible and German? The recent proposal of the Prairie Rose District has been a promising sign that this type of participation may be possible.

The key ingredients of the Prairie Regional Division No. 8 Community Outreach Draft Proposal (Appendix 5) that appear to meet the needs of the Mennonite people in our region are:

1. The program will work in partnership with the Hope Centre, providing them a body to advocate for their needs. It also will offer regular meetings with the parents to involve them in decision making.
2. The individual needs of the students will be the focus.
3. The focus of the curriculum will be a practical program in mathematics, language arts and vocational training. There is no mention of human sexuality education, which is a concern many

of them have when they think about public schools.

4. There will be provision for religious studies and use of the German language in these studies.
5. Mennonite students nineteen years or younger may re-enter school, and plan their individual programs. They will not experience difficulty finding a class level to fit into, or need to be placed into special education classes, or be placed with much younger students.
6. To be successful, the program will be flexible to meet the changing needs of the students and families.
7. The cost of this education will be covered through public education funds. Therefore, this education will be affordable to all the families.
8. Joining with the Burdett students for Career and Technology studies will allow the Mennonite students from the Hope Centre opportunity to spend some time in the public high school, but in a safe environment. It may also help them to feel safe to attend other specific classes there. The Burdett students completing grade nine may also see the value of continuing their education at the Hope Centre, rather than dropping out of school.
9. Not mentioned specifically in the draft, but spoken about in conjunction with meeting individual needs, is the aspect of the number of days the students will attend per week, or absences at specific times of the year. This recognizes the balance that must be achieved between the expectations to attend and the duty students have to family.

I think it would also be beneficial to find out why it is that children attend to grade nine in one school in the district, but not in others. Are there special attributes of this school that are not present in other schools? Is this a pocket of children from one church that is more tolerant of their children attending public schools? Is it simply because the majority of the children in this school are from Mennonite homes?

It would appear that Alberta's educational climate has evolved sufficiently to allow the Mennonite's children to receive a public education that will be agreeable to the parents and the church and prepare the students for satisfying and productive lives in Canada. This process must be allowed to evolve in a manner that is not threatening, or suspicion-creating, to the Mennonite people. I can think of no better way to allow this to happen than through the utilization of the PAR. Although the Hope Centre can be one model for others, each area must realize its own unique pathway of trust building and participating.

Support for the success of this kind of participation must be available at all levels, from provincial bodies right down to the local school districts. The support required should include legislation to recognize cultural schools and finances to fund them, as well as respect for the Mennonite people and their cultural rights in our society. There has never been a time in Alberta's history when there has been such an opportunity for alternate educational programs. For example, in our province we now have cyber high schools, virtual high schools, store front schools, and charter schools, as well as home schooling.

7. Participatory Action Research Approach

Fals-Borda (1991) says the purpose of PAR is to interrupt and transform the present power monopoly to enable deep social and economic change. Through this project we were trying to open doors for the Mennonite people to enter into those aspects of Canadian living that allow them to experience the kind of power that gives them control in their lives, their incomes and, ultimately, their destinies. Deschler and Ewert (1995) state that PAR includes engaging with a community in a manner that generates knowledge to initiate change on the part of the participants. McTaggart (1991) narrows this by stating that the focus of knowledge gained is on the improvement from the target group's perspective. The power imbalance this project has

addressed, in part, resulted from the Mennonite's limitations in language, education, skills, and familiarity with the realities of life in Canada.

Agency employees, such as myself, generally find it easier to plan and present programs to people. We also have a tendency to think we know what is best for people, because we perceive ourselves as educated and experienced. Was this not the type of thinking that was responsible for the Mennonites moving away from Canada in the 1920s? We started this project not wishing to repeat the mistakes of the past. Rather, we sought to learn new and productive ways to empower the people to achieve positive sustainable changes that would help them lead productive and satisfying lives in our community.

They became accustomed to me frequently asking them, "Please tell me if I am doing something wrong." I believe this genuine desire to learn, and not offend, was an essential component in the progress achieved, and especially so in the trust building phase. McTaggart (1991) cautions that special attention needs to be paid to "reciprocity and symmetry of relations" so that the community remains in control of the project. I paid special heed to the literature I reviewed, and took every effort to apply the principles of PAR and Community Development. New insights gained from the review of literature on the Mennonites was validated frequently when I asked people if what I read was also their way of life. I am convinced it was this special attention to the process that enabled me to be a catalyst in helping key outcomes be achieved. I was able to permit a process to develop that I did not personally control (Greenwood et al., 1993), one that probably would not have evolved on its own.

For me, learning to work together with the Mennonite people in this project meant giving up most of my preconceptions and agendas, and walking with the people through each step with 'empty hands' and 'full heart'. I found the people to be very helpful in guiding me. I needed to

always be sensitive and trusting of the people, trusting especially that the decisions they made were rational from their point of view. I desired to discover their point of view so that I could be understanding and supportive of their values in their presence as well as when I represented them in their absence.

I took every opportunity to reinforce my commitment to them. I did not assume that we knew what was best or acceptable for them. I asked them, "What would things be like if they were good?" I kept on asking what we should do in the program, and how we should do it. McTaggart (1991) advises that regular checks must be incorporated to ensure that the agenda of the least powerful remains the focus. I did not assume that what was acceptable for a few would be acceptable for all, as they represented different church backgrounds with different expectations. I searched for common ground upon which all could agree. The evaluations done in English classes, and the requests for feedback in the coffee meetings were done as Dick and Swepson (1994) suggested, to validate that what is being done is having the desired effect, or if the desired direction has changed in any way.

When people exhibited leadership in a particular area, we stepped back to allow them to lead as little or as much as they felt comfortable doing. When they felt uncomfortable after being elected to a planning committee, the committee was allowed to fall by the way, and we met rather with groups who were willing to come together for that purpose. When the men showed signs of readiness to take over the election process, I stepped aside and allowed that process to take place. When the men showed readiness to make decisions in buying project furnishings, I supported their decisions. Dick (1995c) outlines four different levels of participation, and the Mennonite people participated at each level at some time and to some degree. In our project, we saw people participate as informants, providing the data. They also interpreted, or explained, the

data to us. They participated in being planners and decision-makers. On occasions, a few participated in the implementation. Dick also states that different people may be involved at different levels, and we found that to be true. We encouraged their participation at the level at which they felt most comfort.

Our first meeting together with the Mennonite group was to listen to the realities of their life and ask what they thought would make life better for them. Coreen and I continued to listen at each encounter. We listened without judgement. We continued to listen to their stories to help us understand their way of life, and we explained Canadian ways to help them understand ours. From the very first meeting we asked them to make decisions. They chose the date, time and place for meetings. They continued to participate in the decision-making. As agency people, neither Coreen nor I ever cast votes.

We were patient when there seemed to be no opportunity to come together for planning. We postponed decisions when they seemed hard to make. Most often, we were content with the portion of the population that chose to become involved. Rothman (1974) recommends partialization, or beginning with part of an innovation on part of the population. Once, when we were not as patient as we might have been, the agency committee started to form the responses to the questions on the funding proposal because 'the men were too busy in the fields.' In retrospect, I would not do that again. It may have contributed to the reluctance on the part of the Old Colony Mennonite group that we encountered at the outset. We were fortunate that the people were forgiving, and we regained their confidence.

I was sensitive to what may have been offensive to them, or made the people seem at a disadvantage. For example, at the first meeting I requested the facilitators not display the agendas we had provided, but only to have a blank paper on which to jot down notes to help them recall

relevant points. As another example, Maria and I did not distribute the draft of the Prairie Rose School District proposal for an alternate, but rather left copies near the back so that those who desired could pick one up. The proposal was read to the Mennonite people, with explanations in German.

Conclusion

I would like to stress that what has been achieved has been made possible by a combination of factors. I believe the key ingredients were a supportive community setting and constructive participation in decision making enabled by adherence to the principles of PAR. The knowledge and understanding derived from participation resulted in recognition of the importance of the utilization of a family-centred approach. Moreover, it made agency people much more sensitive to the Mennonite people's need to shield their family (especially in regards to schooling), and clarified for us their valuing of the German language.

Future of the Hope Centre

This documentation reports on the beginning stages of this participative project. The project continues to operate at the time of writing. The commitment of various agencies to work with the Mennonite people is not tied to the availability of grant money. We plan to continue to "do what we can with what we have". As new families continue to move into our community, we foresee that we will have a reason for existence until the Mennonite people feel they are prepared to carry on without external involvement.

The 'actions' of the program will continue to evolve, guided by participants' evolving needs and decisions. Listed below is an update of highlights from September 1997, when documentation concluded, to April 1998, the date of final writing.

- German is now taught at both the Hope Centre and Burdett School.

- As only 7 students were registered for school at the Hope Centre in the fall of 1997, another alternate proposal was made available as an option for the fall of 1998 requiring the registration of only 7 students.
- A larger number of Mennonite men and women attended the meeting with the EIP proposal approval committee to request continued funding.
- The women noted the need for regular cleaning at the Hope Centre and organized a volunteer cleaning schedule.
- Financial donations are received regularly from a Sunday School in a local church to help with the children's programs and incidentals around the Hope Centre
- ESL literacy classes continue at 2 locations, with an average of 20 students at the Hope Centre and 9 at Tween Valley.
- More community members are requesting to volunteer at the Hope Centre. As one example, a 4H Club for girls aged 17 to 18 has offered their club members for volunteer activities at the Hope Centre.
- A mother requested tutoring for her child in grade 3 Mathematics, and tutoring arrangements were made with the 4H girls coming to the Hope Centre during the evening ESL literacy class when the children are already there in Child Care.
- Maria's ever-increasing list of opportunities has included assisting individuals with preparation for citizenship and driver's examinations, organizing an Income Tax information class and helping students register for home-schooling.

Recommendations for practice

Participatory Action Research has many benefits for the beginning researcher. The forgiving nature of the repeated cycles of observation, planning, action, and reflection allows for

a continuing responsiveness to new insights and information as it arises. It is also a safe approach from the participants' perspective in the initial trust building stage as only small steps and plans are made at the outset, with the promise that if the current plan proves not to be suitable, a new plan can be formulated at any time. This provides the advantage that with positive participation, trust builds. As trust builds, deeper levels of participation can occur.

The personality and approach of the lead researcher merits consideration, especially for those from a background in nursing. As nurses, our education has prepared us to utilize each teachable moment to dispense a body of information that promotes health. Recognition of our tendencies to think we know what is best for other people is essential if we are to set aside our own agenda and take time through participation to recognize the concerns of the community. Token participation will be recognized as such, and will stifle authentic participation.

When an opportunity presents for cross-cultural participatory activities, it is wise to be equipped with a broad knowledge of the history and culture of the group. This can increase sensitivity. However, it should not be overlooked that each person is an individual in an evolving state of adaptation to an ever-changing environment. Therefore, it is also helpful to bear in mind one short phrase, "T'aint necessarily so".

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9045 Saskatchewan Drive
Edmonton AB T6G 2B2
Phone 439-8132
Fax 433-4840

July 29, 1996

Dear Regional Health Authority;

The Alberta Public Health Association (APHA) has developed a *Partnership Project on Literacy and Health*. One purpose of the project is to promote awareness among health and literacy organizations that low literacy skills can have a serious impact on health. We believe this is a major concern because statistics show that nearly 480,000 Albertans do not have the necessary literacy skills to cope with their everyday lives.

Research studies have shown that indicators of health status such as mortality rates, time off work because of illness, self-rated health, accident rates, hypertension, some kinds of cardiovascular diseases, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes and some cancers are higher in those with low literacy skills.

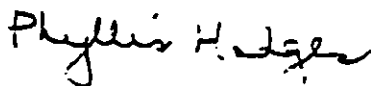
As one strategy of our project, the APHA prepared an information booklet on literacy and health. We have enclosed the booklet for your use. We urge you to photocopy and distribute it broadly. The inside pages can be displayed on bulletin boards as a poster. Excerpts from the booklet could be used in newsletters to present literacy and health information. Please consider doing some of the strategies on the back pages to address issues on literacy and health.

Regional Health Authorities could also consider creating guidelines for the production of written materials using the principles of plain language, or developing a policy on literacy. Literacy awareness training workshops could be included in regional professional development activities.

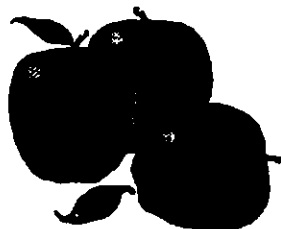
If you have any questions or would like more information about the APHA's *Partnership Project on Literacy and Health*, please contact me.

Thanking in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,



Phyllis Hodges
Executive Director



The Size of the Problem

1 in 3 Albertans have problems with literacy.

● *115,430 adults in Alberta have such low literacy skills that they may have trouble reading this sentence!*

● *82,450 Albertans cannot read or write at all!*



Health for All Albertans

● The Goal

The Alberta Public Health Association believes that all Albertans should have the chance to be healthy.

● The Problem

Things that help keep people healthy such as income, education, employment and working conditions depend on how well a person can read.

We are concerned that low literacy skills could make it impossible for hundreds of thousands of adults in Alberta to achieve maximum health.

● What is Literacy?

Functional literacy means being able to understand and to use all kinds of information, including numbers, in our daily lives. The ability to read well helps us reach our goals. It increases our knowledge and skills. Today more than ever, adults need strong literacy skills to be able to cope with a changing world.

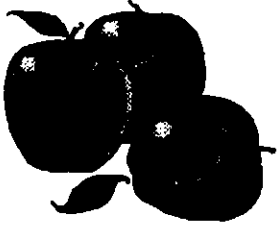
Literacy lets us get information about major health problems. It helps us learn how to deal with these problems.

Literacy gives us the skills to improve the state of our health and our quality of life.

Reading and understanding, for example:

- labels on food, baby formulae, prescription and over the counter drugs;
- prevention and promotion brochures;
- instructions for birth control;
- vaccination clinic announcements;
- instructions for personal medical care;
- safety warnings in the workplace

are major and often impossible challenges for 2 in 5 Canadians (nearly 42%)!



Literacy gives people the skills to use information that will help keep them healthy.



**Alberta
Public
Health
Association**

The Connections Between

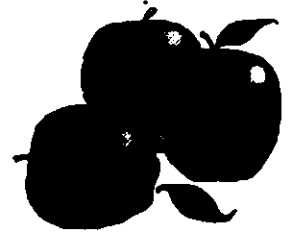
Literacy Facts:

- People with low literacy skills may not understand how to use the health system properly. This may result in the improper use of services.
- The poor, minorities, immigrants, the unemployed, people older than 60, and people who did not finish high school are most likely to have poor reading skills.
- In Canada, there are more males with low literacy skills than females but women make up 2/3 of the world's illiterate population.
- Literacy levels have a great effect on the lives of seniors, both on their quality of life and on their ability to take responsibility for their own health care.
- Low literacy levels make it difficult for people to make suitable choices about themselves, their families, and their environment.
- Grades completed in school are not the same as levels of literacy skills.
- One study showed that some patients read 4.6 grade levels below the last grade completed in school.
- 73.6% of Canadians with the lowest literacy skills have less than a high school education.
- There is a serious link between low literacy levels and poverty. 64% of people who earn less than \$10,000 per year do not have the literacy skills needed in their daily lives.
- Adults with low literacy skills are more likely to be unemployed or, if employed, to work in industries where job opportunities are disappearing.
- The 1988 Canadian Task Force on Business estimates the direct costs of low literacy skills to business is \$4 billion per year because of lost productivity, industrial accidents and training employees.
- Most people do not recognize that they have literacy problems that will make it difficult to read and understand written materials
or
they have become skilled at hiding the fact they have low literacy skills.

Literacy and Health

Impact on Health:

- People with low literacy skills have:
 - poorer survival rates;
 - more chronic illness;
 - more disabilities;
 - greater difficulties in getting health services;
 - added exposure to risk factors;
 - less choice of lifestyles;
 - more dangerous working conditions.
- Functional literacy in women is related to a low infant and child death rate, better family nutrition, and better child care practices.
- 12% of the population are seniors and they use up 50% of all hospital patient days.
- People with low literacy skills are more likely to smoke and less likely to exercise regularly. They may be unable to get or to understand information about their own health care.
- People who are less educated may be unable to clearly explain what their health care needs are.
- The lower a person's income, the shorter the person can expect to live.
- The death rate among infants in the lowest income neighbourhoods is 2 times the rate of that in the highest income neighbourhoods.
- Labourers die at a rate that is 4 times higher than the rate for administrators.
- Workplace injury and occupational illness rates are increasing. A person's state of health is related to one's sense of control in a work situation.
- Adults with low literacy skills manage to organize their daily lives so that they do not have to do any reading or writing.
- Often these people depend on others to help them cope with low literacy skills.



Functional literacy lets people learn about the causes of major health problems, how to deal with these problems and how to develop attitudes and skills that are necessary to improve health and quality of life.

How can we reduce the negative effects of low literacy on health?

1. Make information about health services available to everyone.

We need to be careful not to make it hard for people with low literacy skills to get health services and information. We can write health information in plain language. Different ways of giving information other than with printed materials need to be available.

2. Reduce unfairness.

Poverty, unemployment, education, occupation, ethnic background, age, gender and social and economic class must not decide the fate of 480,000 Albertans. We need to get involved with levels of welfare, affordable housing, and safety in the workplace.

3. Provide services in "literacy-friendly" settings.

Health organizations need to know how to deal with possible problems caused by low literacy skills. For example, helping to fill out forms, checking with clients that oral and written information has been understood, and not drawing attention to a person's low literacy skills are positive ways to deal with the literacy needs of clients.

4. Help people improve their health and quality of life.

We need to help people with low literacy skills increase their sense of control over their health. Suitable literacy training needs to be available for people with low literacy skills to help them increase their literacy skills. Your organization can support the need for these literacy programs.

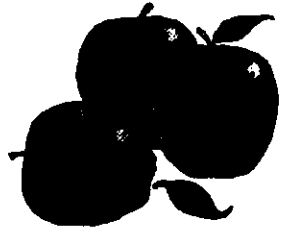
5. Develop guidelines to deal with literacy and health concerns.

Organizations including the government need to talk about how literacy affects health. Open discussion to talk about issues and to identify reachable health goals needs to take place throughout Alberta.

6. Build networks.

Organizations can work together to develop ways to reduce the impact of low literacy skills on health. The Alberta Public Health Association would like to work with health and literacy organizations and talk about how to meet the literacy and health needs of 480,000 Albertans.

7. Take action – get involved.



For more information,
contact:

Anne Scott
3205 - 4th Street S.W.
Calgary, AB
T2S 1Y1
Phone: (403) 243-9597
Fax: (403) 287-9086



This is to declare support of the Early Intervention Programsubmitted by GERMAN SPEAKING MENNONITE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

I have read the following documents:

- a) Letter of Intent;
- b) Proposal;
- c) Contract.

and understand clearly the roles and responsibilities we are committing to. Our contributions and ongoing support for this program are as follows:

Use of Palliser Health Authority facilities for as long as required.	Free
Finance and Supplies:	
Receipt and handling of funds	
Payroll functions	\$150 / month
Purchase of supplies / equipment	
Payment of accounts	
Production of monthly and annual financial statements	
Consultation and Travel:	
Consultation by PHA professional staff to the project 2.5 days / week until Coordinator hired	\$2,000 / month
2 days / month after Coordinator hired	\$400 / month
Travel	\$50 / month
Insurance:	\$120 / month

Name: Palliser Health Authority
 Address: 666 Fifth Street SW; Medicine Hat AB; T1A 4H6
 Phone: (403) 528-5621
 Authorized Person (please print): Janice M. Blair
 Position: Vice President, Community Development & Health Promotion
Palliser Health Authority

This signature below confirms the support outlined above.


 (AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE)

The Plan

The people from some local agencies and the Mennonite people plan to work together to make things happen that would make life better for the Mennonite people. (1)

Many of the Mennonites find it hard to get permanent (year round) work or have to take low paying jobs because they do not know how to speak or write English well or do not have special training in technical areas (like welding, mechanics). Because of this many do not earn enough to cover the needs of their family. Some move often to look for better jobs. These problems make worry pressures (stress) for the family. (2)

The family is not as happy as it might be because of many hardships and worries. Some children may not be able to go to school regularly, and because of this find school work hard, or do not like it. Sometimes people with many worries drink alcohol to try to forget their worries. This is hard on the family. Sometimes it is hard on the families because the neighbours do not seem to treat them well (prejudice). The teenagers are often not in school and do not have jobs.(3)

This plan would like to help the people with the problems they have living in Canada. Special help or classes could be found to make life easier for them. In Canada this is called life skills training. It could include English lessons, driver's education, welding, mechanics, working with animals, stress management (how to handle worries), or anything else the people decide on. These would help because men could get better regular jobs with more pay, they would not have to move so often, the children would feel more at home at school and do better, and the family would not be under such stress (worry pressure). The teenagers could learn how to do different kinds of work, and get jobs. As the people become settled the community people will come to know them better, and they will feel more accepted and welcome by their neighbours. (4)

The money for this plan is to help make life better for children. Children will have better lives when the families have enough money for their needs, and when they have training so that they can get good jobs when they grow up. This group would also like to help the Mennonite people work with the schools so that their children will be taught some of the things that are important to them, like German and religion, and not be taught some things like sex education. This would help the families be more comfortable with the schools. Plans could be made so that the teenagers could continue to learn how to prepare themselves for jobs.(5)

This program will be open to any or all Mennonites who live in the County of Forty mile, or live East of Taber. There are about 500 to 1000 Mennonites living here. An office will be opened in this region.(6,8, 15, 16.)

The Mennonite people told about their lives and some of their needs at meetings in the summer of 1996. Plans are being made by the Mennonites and agency representatives meeting and talking together. *A committee of agency personel will function to carry out the plans. Regular consultations will be held with the Mennonites to receive input and evaluation until some members may feel comfortable to joint the committee.* (7)

A place will be rented, and one full-time worker will be hired to find ways to make the plans work. (9)

People will find out about the program through their neighbours, schools, or posters. (10)

The whole program will be planned so that it will suit the Mennonite people, their religious beliefs, and their way of life. (11)

The Mennonite people who do things well can teach these things to others, or find a suitable person to teach what they would like to learn. They will be on the committee that makes all the plans and approves how the money is spent. Mennonite people may be contracted for special jobs. (12,13, 14)

If problems or difficult situations come up, people may bring the problem to *committee*. It is important that problems be handled in the ways of the Mennonite people. If there are problems with the agency people on the *committee*, they can be taken to an agency advisory *group*. (This includes the

people who sat down to make plans for the barbecue, and other agency people who joined later and are interested in helping with the project.)(17, 20)

Besides the Mennonite people, the community groups involved may include any or all groups that are interested in helping the Mennonite people. It may include Palliser Health Authority, Schools, Adult Learning, English as Second Language, Commissioner of Services to Children, Community Development, etc. Other groups and businesses may also help with special topics, like Alberta Agriculture, banks, RCMP, chemical companies, RCMP, Social Services. If many groups work with the people, more people in the community will come to know them and understand them better.(18)

How will the partners work together:

At the outset, decisions will be made by the committee. Input shall be requested from the people prior to major decision making.

Prior to hiring staff, the committee shall consult with key members of the community to determine their suitability and probable acceptance by the people. (19, 21)

Who shall be the staff or volunteers? A full-time person will be hired to bring together the work of the contracted staff and volunteers. Contracted staff will be hired to do a special job for a special length of time. A person who is contracted for a particular job may in the future become more permanent, *as it is desired that the Mennonite people will feel free to assume more areas of responsibility in the future.* Volunteers will be used from amongst the Mennonite people, or outsiders. Teachers may be contracted.

The committee will not be considered staff, but will be entitled to receive a payment to cover their expenses *as approved by the agency group.*(22)

The hired coordinator shall

- be able to work with people of another culture
- be able to work with a team
- get along well with people
- listen and speak well with others
- be a leader
- able to organize things
- education to prepare them for the job, or very good experience
- understand about adult education, and *community development
- it would be good if the person could speak the same German. (23)

The contract staff will be suited for the special job they have to do, and have the right attitude to work with the people. (23)

Training will be given as needed to help the person do the job. This training may be done by agency people who understand the work, or the hired person.(24)

It is hard to say exactly what steps we will take to bring about this plan, as this will depend upon the decisions made by the Mennonite people and the committee. It is more important that we do things right, than we do things fast and fail, or have problems working together. But the steps may be:

- find money to help make the plan work
- organize the *committe members to carry out the necessary functions*
- hire a *co-ordinator*
- acquire a location, furniture*
- plan programs, teachers, costs, etc.
- start programs for the people
- as the money for the program will not always be there, other places to find the money will be important so the program can continue
- as the Mennonite people become more able to do these things, more of the responsibility will be given to them.

-the agency people will remain as a support when and how the Mennonite people choose.
(25)

We can say that the plan is working for the good of the people, if they continue to support the plan, and take part in the activities. Later we can tell that the plan is working if the Mennonite people are taking over more of the leadership. Still later we can know if it is working if people are getting better jobs, the children are learning things to help them get jobs and support their families in the future, and they feel they are being accepted in the community. If this plan can carry on after the grant money is no longer available, then we could say that is a great success.

What Words Mean (Definitions)

Culture: way of life a person is used to.
What you believe. (your religion)
How you live.
What is important to you. (Your values)

Community development: Working with a group of people to help them make life better for all.

Life skills: What people know helps them do well. It might help them in their work, or families.

EARLY INTERVENTION PROPOSAL

Name of program: **German Speaking Mennonite Community Development Proposal**

Agency to hold funding: Palliser Health Authority

Time Span: April 1, 1997 to March 31, 1998

a. ***Describe what you want to do in your program?***

We would like to have help from agency groups to learn about things that will help us in our lives and work in Canada, so that we would be able to better provide for our families. (Lifeskills training)

b. ***Describe why you want to do these activities?***

When we come to Canada we are not able to speak English well, read English, and do not have the certificates to allow us to get good jobs. We find it hard to find year round jobs, we have to move often, and have to settle for low paying jobs. We cannot afford good houses. Our children find it hard to go to school and make friends because we have to move around in search of good jobs. This is very stressful for our families. We feel we do not fit into this culture, and the community does not understand us. Because of the problems, a few of our people tend to drink too much.

c. ***What key risk factors does your program address?***

Those of us who have been here longer have concerns for our people with:
 poor school attendance
 low school achievement
 low income
 high stress in the family
 substance abuse in some families
 ethnic prejudice
 youth who are not in school, and not yet employable

d. ***Describe how you will reduce risks to children, youth and families you will serve.***

We feel as parents, we need help to provide good homes for our children. The following are some of the things we would like to learn that would help us: literacy, ESL, nutrition, driver's education, welding, mechanical skills, care of animals, budgeting, stress management, farm chemical safety.
 Our young people need lifeskills and education so that they can get good jobs, and support their future families.

e. ***Describe how you will promote the healthy development of competency in children and youth.***

We need to have strong homes. If our homes are strong our children will benefit. We came to Canada to give our children a chance to for a good future.

We want to want to be able to work with the schools, and make a difference for our children in our schools. There are some things about the schools that bother us, like sex education being taught, no religious training, and no German language being taught to our children.

Many of us don't feel the public schools are good for our teen children, and the teens don't feel accepted. But we know they need to learn things to get good jobs and feel at home in the community.

Sometimes we worry about our children being safe in certain situations. We need to learn how to handle these things.

f. ***How will you identify the children, youth, and families that may use your program?***

Many of our families already know about these plans.

New families will be contacted by word of mouth, and referrals from school, health unit, and doctors.

g. ***How was the community involved in identifying these needs? Explain how families will be involved in planning, service delivery, and evaluation on an on-going basis.***

Agency people arranged for a barbecue to tell us about the possibility of getting some money to help make life better for us. We told them about our needs at this meeting and some later meetings.

The schools and health professionals have also talked to us about the needs of our children. We agree that we could achieve more with outside help.

We have participated in the planning, and we want to be involved in the carrying out of this plan. We will continue to help them make the plan suitable and agreeable for us.

h. ***Describe who is eligible to receive services you will provide.***

Any members of the Mennonite community residing in the district who would benefit from the services provided. The region outlined includes the county of Forty Mile, and other areas east of Taber.

i. ***Describe how people will access your program.***

We would like to have someone to be available for us, who can speak with us in our own language, and understand us and our background.

We would like to have a building where we could meet with that person, have classes, and where our children could be babysat so we can attend class.

j. ***Describe how people will find out about your program.***

word of mouth

bi-lingual posters
schools
school letters translated into German

k. ***Describe how your program is sensitive to the cultures of children and families you intend to serve.***

We want the whole program to consider our cultural and religious background. This is important to us.

The plan was written from the hopes and ideas we shared with the agency people at our meetings.

l,m. ***i) If the program is primarily aboriginal children, describe how aboriginal people will be involved in the design, delivery, and on-going management of the program.***

n/a

ii) Please describe how you will have staff from the cultural group working directly with children.

The babysitters of our children would be Mennonite girls or ladies. We would welcome other people with special skills to come in to work with our children. under our supervision, so they could learn other things, eg. Crafts, mechanics, sewing, cooking, woodworking, or help them with reading, writing and arithmetic skills.

n. *N/a*

o. ***Please describe geographical areas served and locations where service is provided/ phone numbers and hours of service.***

The geographic area shall include the County of Forty Mile, and extend to include the area east of Taber, or as funding is allocated.

Until we can get our own permanent place, the Palliser Health Authority has offered us office space. The temporary office space offered to us is in the office of Community Health Services, a branch of the Palliser Health Authority. It is located in the Provincial Building in Bow Island. The phone number would be (403) 545-2296.

It is important that we find a place where we feel comfortable to come together.

p. ***Estimate number of clients who will be served based on work-plan.***

There are around 500 to 1000 Mennonites living in this area.. Any or all can be included.

q. ***Describe what strategies you will use to accommodate difficult situations and/or clients. This should include an appeal or grievance process.***

If we have problems with the persons that work with us, we will go to the person in charge of the project, or the agency advisors. We are a peaceful people. If we have problems that can't be resolved, we tend to ask someone like our minister to help solve it.

- r. ***Describe the groups, businesses, or individuals from your community who will be involved.***
Interested agencies will be represented on an advisory group, such as Social Services, all the schools, Community Adult Learning, Palliser Health Authority, ministers from the various Mennonite churches, Write Break Adult Literacy, Medicine Hat College. etc. Other groups and business may be involved for shorter period of times for specific tasks, eg. Alberta Agriculture, local chemical companies, financial advisors, bank personnel, Fire Department, Southern Alberta Victim's Assistance, etc.
- s. ***Describe how the partnership is involved in service delivery on an on-going basis.***
The agencies listed have offered their help us plan the projects we decide upon. They can help us find teachers, find learning materials, set up programs, giving us ideas. We want to meet with them regularly to discuss our programs in a casual setting.
- t. ***Describe how issues/conflicts with partners will be resolved.***
If we feel the partners are not listening to us, we would go to the person who is hired to be there for us (the coordinator), or to our ministers. They could represent our point of view.
- u. ***Show how your services will link with other community resources when required.***
The person who is hired to coordinate the project will work with the community to help us get the programs we need.
- v. ***Identify the number of staff and volunteers and their roles and responsibilities.***
One paid coordinator will be hired work in this project. The coordinator shall plan the programs, see that they are run well, and supervise other temporary workers (such as teachers or babysitters that are needed from time to time) and volunteers, and to address our concerns.
The coordinator will also be available to spend specified hours working with the schools as liason person for the Mennonite families.
- w. ***Describe the minimum qualifications of each staff person.***
The coordinator shall have:
Ability to speak the German dialect of the people would be desirable
Ability to work with people of another culture
Function as a team member
Good skills in working with people
Leadership abilities
Able to organizing activities
Understand concepts of education of children and adults

- x. ***Describe training or support programs needed for staff and volunteers.***
 Training will be planned according to the needs.
 Babysitting courses will be provided for the babysitters.
 Non Mennonite teachers or volunteers will receive help in understanding the Mennonite culture.
- y. ***If you are planning a new program, clearly show the steps along the way, your planning and start-up activities, equipment required for each stage, etc. How will you add staff as your program grows and budget accordingly?***
- When the proposal is accepted by the Office of the Commissioner for Children's Services, the first step will be advertising and hiring a coordinator.
 - The approved lists for equipment, supplies, and teaching materials will be purchased so winter programs can be started for better attendance by those Mennonite people not currently working. (See attachments)
 - A comfortable building will be rented that can house the office, classes and meetings so that the work can be commenced.
 - This location would also house the Nutrition Club that is planned by the project Best Babies for Mennonite mothers. (This is an 8 week nutrition class for young mothers. It was piloted in Grassy Lake Community Hall, and is highly recommended by mothers who were able to attend there.)
 - One of the first courses to be offered would be a babysitting course for Mennonite teen girls or ladies so that safe childcare would be available while mothers attend classes.
 - Babysitting will be provided so mother's may attend classes. This will provide the pre-school age children with English exposure and playschool like activities.
 - The coordinator will use the office equipment and phone to organize and gather information, to schedule teachers/volunteers as required to cover topics. Some of the first sessions would require a teachers of safeand stimulating babysitting, ESL teachers.
 - Sessions to involve the men and teen boys may involve bringing in instuctors in mechanics and welding and automobile driving.
 - A timeline will be developed that will be flexible to meet the evolving needs expressed by the Mennonite people in the meetings/groups. Additional contracts for the required teachers or services would be contracted as needed within budget limits.

- z. ***Describe how you will know the program is having a positive impact on program participants.***

The program will be successful if it serves our needs. If the people stay involved and participate, we will know it is working.

Knowing that the community wants to listen to us, and respect us. and help us has already encouraged us to speak out for the things we want.

3quest.mm

Project Name: _____
Journal Report by: _____ Date: _____

Are you reaching all of the persons you hoped to have participate in your project?

If no, why and how will you get these persons to participate in your project?

Time period for this report:

(day/month/year)
to

(day/month/year)

Estimated number of participants since the last report:

Estimated number of new participants:

Estimated number of participants who left the project:

Estimated number of the total participants who are Aboriginal:

What effect is the project having:
• on the participants (individually and/or group)?
• on the community?

What is working well and what is not working well?

What do you think is contributing to the success, and limiting the success of the project?

Factors or barriers such as:

Facilities

Staff

Board members

Partnerships

Finance and budget

Others

Continued on back...

What are you learning?

Consider:

Risk reduction

Building on strengths

Community based

*Strategies to
strengthen families*

Outcome focused

*Direct involvement by
people who seek help*

Cultural Sensitivity

*Improved services and
outcomes for Aboriginal
children, youth
and families
(where applicable)*

Partnerships/Integration

What changes need to occur?

General comments on this period

PRAIRIE ROSE REGIONAL DIVISION NO. 8

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM

DRAFT

September 2, 1997

Draft Proposal prepared by:

Mr. Wally Regehr

Mrs. JoAnne Cowie

Mr. Keith Jones

**PRAIRIE ROSE REGIONAL DIVISION NO. 8
COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM
DRAFT PROPOSAL**

DRAFT

PURPOSE

- The program would work in partnership with the Hope Center in Bow Island to meet the individual needs of Junior-Senior High aged English as a Second Language students currently not in school.
- The outcome of the program would be to encourage students to remain in school. The focus of the curriculum would be a practical program in mathematics, language arts and vocational training (CTS).
- Provide an opportunity for religious studies.
- A component of the program would include community involvement with regular meetings with the parents and Hope Center staff.
- The ultimate goal would be to provide an opportunity for students to re-enter junior and senior high school.
- The program would be for children currently not registered in school.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

- Every effort would be made to individualize the program to meet the students' needs.
1. **MATHEMATICS** - Mathematics would be taught for eighty (80) minutes each day. There would be an emphasis on skill development related to practical applications with emphasis on an agricultural component.
 2. **LANGUAGE ARTS** - The Language Arts program would be an integrated program with a strong emphasis on English as a Second Language. Language Arts would be taught for eighty (80) minutes each day with an emphasis on functional language which includes vocabulary, grammar and writing (sentences, paragraphs, letters).
 3. **CAREER AND TECHNOLOGY STUDIES** - Students would receive three (3) hours of instruction in Career and Technology Studies (cooking, sewing). Students would attend school with the Burdett students at Senator Gershaw School for three hours every Friday.
 4. **RELIGION** - Mrs. Maria Yates would assist with this component. The basis of the program would be readings in German from religious or bible stories.
 5. **RECREATION** - A recreational component could be added to the program. Input from parents would be an asset in planning this portion of the program.
 6. **WORK EXPERIENCE** - Depending on the age of the children, a work experience or job shadowing component could be included in the program.

GENERAL COMMENTS

To become a successful program, each concerned partner will have to understand that this is a flexible program that will have to change to meet the changing needs of the students and families. An enrollment of 10-12 students is needed to begin the program. The program would not be available to students currently enrolled in a school within the boundaries of the Prairie Rose Regional Division.

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