

John Johnson

Side 1:

The school was started in 1977 by his ex-wife who had an advanced degree in education from Harvard and had a "holistic" philosophy, which was a new concept at the time. This addresses the child on 5 levels - intellectual, mental, emotional, moral, physical, and spiritual. [Aostre Johnson]

[18] The Sunday School area of All Soul's was rented and two teachers joined, using three classrooms. [Ashrita Laird, Anne Craig]

[26] The approach was likened to Joseph Skelton Pierce's Magical Child. Cognitive skills are not pushed from ages 2-4. Emphasis is put on nurturing, creativity, dance, art, myths, and having a good time. [Joseph Shelton]

[35] The Montessori Method has a definite curriculum on a developmental basis. This school stimulates the child to unfold - operating as pre-literate humans did. [Maria Montessori]

[67] At age 4.5-5 the child's cognitive field develops and, as the vocabulary increases, problem solving is introduced.

[128] When the Newfound School closed (see Jane Craig tape), and Newton School closed (see John Shell tape), a private alternative school was needed. [Aycock School (see Mary Ellen Wolcott tape)- is the Accelerated Learning Center (not alternative) (see list of Citizen Time News index)]. More pupils wanted to attend Rainbow Mountain. All Soul's had limited space, so in early 1980's rooms were rented in the Allen Center (see Doris Brewer tape) and Trinity Church. When the church changed ministers (see Sallie Middleton tape), the Sufi group was asked to move.

[161] The school moved to the "Orr House" (see Rainbow Mountain tape). He was on the board.

[169] In 1985, while the school was still at Trinity, Aostre left to get her doctorate in education at Greensboro. Ashrita Laird became director. At that time there were several teachers and 70-80 children. [Aostre Johnson, Ashrita Laird]

[180] In 1989-1990 there was a lottery whereby parents could choose their public schools they wanted their children to attend and 3/4 of the students were pulled from Rainbow Mountain. This was a severe blow and the school almost closed its doors in 1991. Francine Delany was principal of Isaac Dickson School, the new "alternative" elementary school. [Francine Delany]

[203] He had a graduate degree in education and became the director. While following the original vision he was able to increase the staff to 20 teachers, enroll 100 students and add 3 more buildings. (photos enclosed)

[218] The school was opened to 2 year olds - prior to that the age was 3. In 1992 elementary classes were combined. Second and third, fourth and fifth. In 1994 a middle school - sixth and seventh - were added. He anticipates an 8th grade next year.

[233] Gardner, a researcher at the Harvard School of Education, devised a teaching plan. His is the only school in WNC using this plan which has proved very successful. No grades are given. There is no problem with students transferring to other schools. [Howard Gardner]

[329] Many students come from home schooling where parents have tried teaching their own children at home but gotten "burned out." Some, however, work well - those students don't come to him (see enclosure).

[391] Parents are drawn to the school because of its philosophy and student/teacher ratio (1 to 10, not 1 to 20). Almost all parents work - some are very wealthy and some children are federally funded. Tuition is worked out on a bartering basis for a few (i.e. maintenance).

[442] The operating cost is worked on a year-round basis. Preschool costs \$265 a month, and middle school costs \$365 a month.

[464] Last year a fund drive was successful and a foundation started. Property next to the school was purchased and two buildings constructed (see photos).

[496] There is racial, social and economic diversity. Ten percent of the preschool students are state funded but there are no vouchers or Federal funding for grade-school students. The upper middle classes are Caucasian.

[519] Almost all of the parents have had a college education. They own their own businesses or are professionals. They are in their 30's to mid 40's, and in the 60's and 70's were part of the "McGovern Counter Culture" people with a social cause. Learning through service is part of the curriculum.

[553] There are two big fund raisers - a spring raffle and this year the Festival of Lights. This is the highest profile the school has ever had. (see enclosure)

Side 2:

The future plans for the next 5 years are to purchase two buildings, have preschool on first floor, gym and auditorium on the second, enlarge the parking lot and play grounds, renovate the Orr house and have a maximum of 130 students. This would serve 500 people, including the parents. (The modular classrooms for pre and middle school in photos are temporary).

[2/20] Rainbow Mountain has always been child centered. It is envisioned that the programs will be community centered and in use all year. Parents have been surveyed and want to see programs offered in art, Spanish, etc.

[2/35] The original teachers gave the school the name Rainbow Mountain. Aostre was the first director. The younger children like it but the older children resent its being called a "children's school." This has been discussed but, as of now, there is no plan to drop it. [Aostre Johnson]

[2/56] He was director of a Sufi center in Miami and a friend invited him to come to Asheville and teach in the Newfound School gym in 1976. The event was well attended. In 1976-77 there was an active community (about 35 adults and children) living together in Sandy Mush.

[2/83] When he was in Italy studying architecture in an old church, he heard about a lecture on Sufism. He grew up as an Episcopalian and, when he was about 12, started to study for confirmation. He got into a "log jam" with the priest and could not accept that the only one real love was through the church. He remained in the church because of the ritual until high school.

[2/117] He started reading books on religion while in Italy and joined the Sufis when he was back in Boston.

[2/127] A Roman friend asked him to mail a letter when he reached the States. He decided to take it to Aostre, told her about his interests and they went to a meeting that night. [Aostre Johnson]

[2/150] He discusses teacher training and methods used to awaken one to know his identity and feel connectedness with all of life. Services have not been offered in Asheville in several years.

[2/170] Sufism is not a religion per se - rather it is a universal worship where candles are lit for all religions. The Bahai's have one text, the Sufis don't (see Herb Turner tape) - scriptures are read from different religions. There is an international order, a national chapter with a board of directors and he was, at one time, involved with it.

[2/186] The organization here is loose but has a mailing list of members and regular spiritual meetings are held - often in the school.

[2/212] The minority groups are represented locally or internationally. He does not know about the Muslim group in the city.

[2/226] His group has had no problems with the Religious Right. The Sufis do not advertise themselves or go out of their way to make statements. They have had a conference in the Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain. They, as a group, have no stand on abortion or the death penalty. The people speak for themselves.

[2/248] In the future he wants to be more involved with healing and less with the school. He has traveled around the world several times teaching and stimulating activities in the "Healing Order of Sufis." There were two conferences in Washington called "Healing in Our Time." Two thousand, five hundred people came each time - 60% of those were health professionals.

[2/282] He had an appointment and children were at the door.