

Why some parents start schools like the one below



WINNIPEG: 7 DAYS OF SCHOOL

From Friday evening to Sunday night, after five days of normal public school, these boys live and work at St. John's Cathedral school near Selkirk, outside Winnipeg. Their week-end study program includes languages, poetry, public speaking, written argument and religion. They row navy cutters on the Red River and go on long snowshoe hikes. Above, left, the boys are trying to solve a problem in logic involving water volumes and odd-shaped containers. They failed and, above, they discuss why with their shirt-sleeved teacher. Below left, some of the youngsters work up an appetite before breakfast at seven a.m.

FOR PARENTS WHO don't like the education their children get in public schools, there is a way of escape. They can set up schools of their own. Parents of moderate means are proving this in four cities across Canada, from Halifax to Vancouver. In a fifth city, Victoria, B.C., a man who calls himself a "dissatisfied teacher" founded a similar school as a shoestring private enterprise; he now has about a hundred students and an annual budget of \$25,000.

Two of the five are "progressive" schools that accept, more or less, the educational philosophy of John

Dewey. The other three lay heavy stress on the traditional curriculum and regard Dewey, in the words of one teacher, as "the prophet of slackness in education." Despite this difference in theory, the four schools that are in actual operation (one hasn't opened yet) get remarkably similar results. The important thing, apparently, is not the theoretical blueprint, but simply to have competent, enthusiastic teachers working with small classes of bright children who are always challenged and never bored.

"Bright" doesn't need to mean highly intelligent. St. George's of

Montreal, a "progressive" school and the longest established of all, has among its old boys two Rhodes scholars, another who went through Oxford on a scholarship similar to the Rhodes, and half a dozen Ph.D.s, several of them teaching on university faculties; about ninety percent of all St. George's students go to university. But St. George's teachers look back with special pride not only on their brilliant scholars (who would have done pretty well at any school) but on what they were able to do for children with intellectual handicaps — children who couldn't learn to read,

children with severe emotional disturbances, occasionally children whose "problem" was that they were just plain stupid.

Inevitably, though, the students at most of these schools tend to come from the higher brackets of IQ (most of them are children of professional men, and especially of university professors). Also inevitably, they tend to come from families in the higher, or anyway not the lower, income brackets. Parent-owned co-operative schools are as cheap as a private school can be, but that's still a lot more costly than a free public school — fees range from a

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"If you ask the impossible of a child you'll often get it. They're tougher than our educators think"

Byfield, a newspaper reporter who left the Winnipeg Free Press staff to become unpaid principal of St. John's Cathedral School (he makes his living as a free lance), says: "Next fall we hope to begin on a full-time basis with about twenty boys. But in the meantime, working with our seventy boys only on week ends, we can do wonders with them."

Frank Wiens, who teaches five days a week in the public schools for pay and spends his week ends teaching for fun at St. John's, says, "If you ask the impossible of a child you'll often get it. They're tougher than most of our educators think they are."

Asking the impossible is a habit at St. John's. It started five years ago when Byfield, Wiens and some others in the congregation of St. John's agreed that their sons were getting too easy a ride in the public school system. They collected a class of half a dozen boys and launched them on a stiff course of evening and week-end study in Byfield's home.

A year later St. Andrew's Greek Orthodox Church lent them rooms for classes, and other parents of various denominations joined in. By 1959 they were able to buy an old three-story house in North Winnipeg, replaced this year by a set of rambling old buildings called Dynevor near Selkirk, a onetime reform school for girls which St. John's Cathedral School now rents from the federal government.

Fees cover little more than half the school's expenses. (The standard fee is \$20 a month for the nine-month year, but many boys pay less.) The rest is made up by donations, some regular and some casual. Father W. C. Turney, priest-in-charge of St. Michael and All Angels, recently got a legacy of \$1,000 and turned it all over to the school. He also donates his monthly \$200 stipend. The president of a western insurance company told his board of directors that the school needed help, said he was making out his own cheque for \$100 and invited them to do the same

—an appeal that brought in \$600. By these and similar methods the school gets by without a deficit.

Only two of the unpaid teachers have had teacher training. The rest include a housewife, a lawyer, a couple of journalists and some from other professions. It was one of these amateur pedagogues who remarked that "John Dewey, the prophet of slackness in education, would probably regard our school as a concentration camp."

But St. George's, Montreal, which accepts John Dewey's theory that children should "learn by doing," doesn't look like an example of slackness. Its children are not, as some critics suppose, allowed to do as they like, but they are induced to like what they do. The results are often spectacular. Three years ago for example, a method of teaching mathematics was introduced at St. George's which enables Grade Four children to do algebra and geometry. Students spend a lot of time at painting, carpentry, metalwork, and other such activities, but they also get through a great deal more than the normal work in the regular school curriculum: those who move from St. George's into public schools often find themselves two years ahead of their age group.

They also, as a rule, find public school a stifling bore. St. George's has good discipline, but it's informal—the children talk to each other and to the teachers in normal voices, move about at will without having to ask permission, and generally behave like adults. After this, the still and silent classrooms of conventional schools seem to St. George's children like prisons.

Like most of the parent-owned schools, St. George's takes a relaxed attitude toward sports—much interest in exercise and physical development, no interest at all in producing a winning team, though it sometimes produces one inadvertently. Some years ago a St. George's hockey team used to play seasonally against the juniors of a conventional private school for boys.

The boys' school discontinued the prac-





