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## The Canuck Connection: AERO's Relationship to Canadian Educators La connexion canadienne : l'AERO et les éducateurs canadiens La conexión canadiense: la relación de AERO con los educadores canadienses

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### Article abstract

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# The Canuck Connection: AERO's Relationship to Canadian Educators

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## Abstract

AERO, the Alternative Education Resources Organization, is a network of alternative educators and institutions that emphasize learner-centred education, particularly that which increases learner autonomy such as free schools. This paper investigates the relationship between AERO and Canadian educators. Based in New York City, AERO's reach was international. The network raised funds for struggling alternative schools, advocated against policies designed to standardize education, and supported reforms to increase school choice. Canadians, particularly Indigenous groups in Canada, were instrumental in shaping AERO. Educators from Ontario's alternative education sector, as well as the free schools of British Columbia, developed deep connections with AERO over the course of its rise from 1989 to 2003. This historical analysis investigates these entanglements by analyzing *The AERO-Gramme Newsletter* and *The Education Revolution* as primary sources documents.

**Keywords:** alternative education, AERO, Jerry Mintz, indigenous influence

## La conexión canadiense: la relación de AERO con los educadores canadienses

### Resumen

Este artículo investiga la relación entre AERO (Alternative Education Resources Organization), Organización de Recursos Educativos Alternativos, y los educadores canadienses. AERO es una red de educadores e instituciones alternativas que enfatizan la educación centrada en el alumno, particularmente aquella que aumenta la autonomía del alumno, como las escuelas libres. Con sede en la ciudad de Nueva York, el alcance de AERO es internacional. La red recaudó fondos para escuelas alternativas en dificultades, abogó contra las políticas diseñadas para estandarizar la educación y apoyó reformas para aumentar las opciones escolares. Los canadienses, en particular los grupos indígenas de Canadá, desempeñaron un papel decisivo en la configuración de AERO. Los educadores del sector de educación alternativa de Ontario, así como de las escuelas gratuitas de Columbia Británica, desarrollaron conexiones profundas con AERO durante su ascenso de 1989 a 2003. Este análisis histórico investiga estas relaciones y redes mediante el análisis de las publicaciones *The AERO-Gramme Newsletter* y *The Education* como documentos de fuentes primarias.

**Palabras clave:** educación alternativa, AERO, Jerry Mintz, influencia indígena

## La connexion canadienne : L'AERO et les éducateurs canadiens

### Résumé

Cet article étudie la relation entre l'AERO (Alternative Education Resources Organization), ou l'organisation des ressources éducatives alternatives, et les éducateurs canadiens. L'AERO est un réseau d'éducateurs et d'institutions alternatifs qui mettent l'accent sur l'éducation centrée sur l'apprenant, en particulier une éducation qui augmente l'autonomie de l'apprenant, tel que dans les écoles gratuites. Basée à New York, la portée de l'AERO était internationale. Le réseau a collecté des fonds pour les écoles alternatives en difficulté, a plaidé contre les politiques visant à normaliser l'éducation et a soutenu des réformes ayant pour but d'élargir les choix scolaires. Les Canadiens, en particulier les groupes autochtones du Canada, ont joué un rôle déterminant dans la formation de l'AERO. Les éducateurs du secteur de l'éducation alternative de l'Ontario, ainsi que les écoles gratuites de la Colombie-Britannique, ont développé des liens profonds avec l'AERO au cours de son essor de 1989 à 2003. Cette analyse historique examine ces

enchevêtrements en analysant *The AERO-Gramme Newsletter* (un bulletin d'information) et *The Education Revolution* (La Révolution de l'éducation) en tant que sources primaires.

**Mots clés :** éducation alternative, AERO, Jerry Mintz, influence indigène

## Introduction

This paper investigates the relationship between the Alternative Education Resources Organization (AERO), considered to be the “primary hub of communications and support for educational alternatives around the world,” and Canadian educators.<sup>1</sup> As it turns out, Canadians, particularly Indigenous groups in Canada, were instrumental in shaping AERO. Educators from Ontario's alternative education sector, as well as the free schools of British Columbia, developed deep connections with AERO over the course of its rise from 1989 to 2003.

AERO is a network of alternative educators and institutions that emphasize learner-centered education, particularly that which increases learner autonomy, such as free schools. The network's membership ranges across the private- and public-school sectors, encompassing homeschoolers, specialty public programs, at-risk programs, and schools with unique pedagogical approaches like Waldorf and Montessori. Based in New York City, many of the organization's members from 1989 to 2003 were alternative educators from the United States and Canada. Although it was highly decentralized, the network raised funds for struggling alternative schools, advocated against policies designed to standardize education, and supported reforms to increase school choice. AERO's reach was international; it worked with the governments of Russia, Israel, and Japan to expand educational alternatives around the world. Furthermore, AERO played a pivotal role in facilitating the rise of the International Democratic Education Conference, one of the largest annual conferences focused on global promotion of democratic education.

## Methodology

A historical analysis was used to understand the influence of Canadians on AERO during the organization's rise in the 1990s and early 2000s. This form of analysis works to reconstruct the past through the examination of primary source material so that we may learn from the past and better understand the forces that shaped it.

For its source material, this inquiry drew from the primary source documents released on AERO's online archive. This archive contains copies of AERO's publications from 1989 to 2011, such as *AERO-Gramme*, the organization's

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Muir, *Research Brief - Alternative Schools*. United States: Education Partners Inc., November 22, 2004. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED538252.pdf>.

newsletter, and its successor, *The Education Revolution* magazine. The chronological scope of this work encapsulates AERO's rise from 1989 to 2003. By 2003, the organization had solidified many of its ties to major institutions in the field of alternative education, often integrating itself as the communication arm of these organizations. In focusing this analysis on AERO's fledgling years, we can see how Canadians shaped the values of the organization before it took flight with those ideas. There are limitations associated with using these source materials. First and foremost, they are hosted by AERO as online sources, meaning they may be more susceptible to being edited, redacted, doctored, or deleted. To help maintain the authenticity of the documents, The WayBack Machine was used for verification to identify any changes to the AERO website.<sup>2</sup>

## Overview of AERO's Relationship to Canadian Alternative Educators

Before moving forward with the relationships that had the greatest impact on AERO, this paper will first provide a broad overview of the role Canadians played in the network. Individually, these historical connections seem minor, but in aggregate they establish the more meaningful connection between AERO and Canada's education sector.

### *The Canadians Active Within the AERO Membership*

Canadian alternative educators were active members of the AERO network throughout its rise. Canadians posted messages to AERO's electronic bulletin board, inquiring about democratic education and the best way to promote it in Canada<sup>3</sup> and sharing personal stories and thoughts related to their experiences with alternative education. Some of the Canadian members were educators who sought to start their own alternative schools, often based on a free school model, and appealed to the network for guidance.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Canadian alternative schools and programs were also active on the network, sharing updates about their initiatives and commenting on issues raised by network members.<sup>5</sup> Canadian AERO members also offered to run summer programs—often with an emphasis on environmentalism—at alternative

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<sup>2</sup> The WayBack Machine is a digital archive of the World Wide Web, archiving publicly accessible parts of the internet so they may be retrieved at a later date. <https://archive.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> See "International News and Communications," *The Education Revolution*, Winter 1999, 15-16, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev26.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev26.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> "Mail and Communications," *Aero-Gramme*, Spring 1993, 12, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev10.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev10.pdf); "Mail and Communications," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1994, 14, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev12.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev12.pdf); and "International News and Communications," *The Education Revolution*, Winter 1999, 15-16, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev26.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev26.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1997, 31. [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev20.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev20.pdf).

schools in the AERO network.<sup>6</sup> To assist in staffing these programs and to help alternative educators find work, AERO featured a job advertisement section in its magazine, where employers posted openings and prospective employees posted short bios in the hopes of being hired. Canadian job seekers and recruiters posted messages in this section.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to being active members of the network, Canadians played a key role in the financial and organizational development of AERO. Two Canadians stand out when analyzing the organizational growth of AERO in its early years, Molly Phibbs and Gabe Prost. The former was a Canadian based near Edmonton who made a sizable donation to the fledgling organization when it was desperate for funds in its early years,<sup>8</sup> the latter was a Canadian homeschooler who interned for AERO when it was very small and could not afford to hire many full-time staff.<sup>9</sup>

### *Canadians and Conferences*

Being an international network of alternative educators, AERO made considerable efforts to attend and inform its membership about alternative education conferences in the USA and abroad. In its early years, AERO informed its members about some of the conferences being held in Canada, such as the 1995 International Education Conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba, hosted by the Network of Progressive Educators, the 1995 Canadian Charter Schools Project in Vancouver, British Columbia, and notably the 2000 Manitoba Alternative Education Association Conference at the University of Winnipeg, where AERO's founder Jerry Mintz was a keynote speaker.<sup>10</sup>

When traveling overseas, AERO staff often organized a contingent of alternative educators and students to accompany them. For example, when traveling to Israel's Hadera Democratic School for the 4<sup>th</sup> International Democratic Education Conference, Jim Hoepfner of the Alternative School in Calgary, Alberta joined as

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<sup>6</sup> See "Canada," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1994, 24, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev12.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev12.pdf); and "Canada," *Aero-Gramme*, Summer 1996, 16, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev12.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev12.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> See "Home Education News," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1994, 10, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev12.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev12.pdf); "Teachers Looking for Jobs in Alternative Schools," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1998, 51, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev12.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev12.pdf); "Teachers Looking for Jobs in Alternative Schools," *Aero-Gramme*, Spring 1998, 31, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev24.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev24.pdf); and "Alternative Education Internships," *The Education Revolution*, Fall 1999, 38, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev28.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev28.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> "AERO Fundraising Drive," *Aero-Gramme*, Fall 1992, 11, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev9.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev9.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> "Alternative Teacher Education Seminar in Estonia," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1992, 11, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev8.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev8.pdf); "Gabe's Journal of the NHA Tript to California," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1992, 14-16, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev8.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev8.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> "Mail and Communications," *Aero-Gramme*, Fall 1994, 5, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev13.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev13.pdf); "Public Alternatives," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1996, 14, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev17.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev17.pdf); and "Jerry Mintz Keynotes Manitoba Alternative Education Association Conference," *The Education Revolution*, Spring 2000, 43, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO\\_EdRev29.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO_EdRev29.pdf).

part of the AERO contingent.<sup>11</sup> At these conferences, AERO frequently conducted workshops on democratic education, the history of alternative education, and ways to empower learners through increased autonomy. These workshops and consultations were also privately offered to Canadian schools and associations. For example, in 1999 Mintz had a consulting engagement with homeschoolers in Quebec on how to facilitate the "Organic Curriculum," where the course of study revolved around the interests of the learners as opposed to being predetermined before the start of the class.<sup>12</sup>

## AERO and the Indigenous of Canada

Before AERO's formal establishment in the 1960's, Akwesasne and Kahnawake educators actively communicated with Mintz in the early years of the Indigenous Survival school movement. Indigenous educators played a leading role throughout the history of AERO's development in Canada. As an organization, AERO was born out of a project to support the Keewaywin, a band of Ojibwe Cree in northern Ontario. Shortly after AERO's genesis, Mintz made a formative trip to the Oneida of the Thames River by London Ontario. These experiences reinforced the values behind Mintz's philosophy of education: self-directed inquiry, respecting learner-autonomy, and an organic understanding of the curriculum.

### *Before AERO: Jerry Mintz and "Iroquois Democracy"*

The 1960's was a period in which many educators questioned previous assumptions about morality, self, race, gender, and school structure.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it witnessed the dramatic rise of the free school movement in North America. Inspired by A.S. Neil's *Summerhill*, educators opened democratic schools where children were empowered to make decisions regarding school policy, rules, disciplinary action, curriculum, and their teachers' employment.<sup>14</sup> At the time, Mintz went to Antioch College where he studied under Arthur Ernest Morgan and assisted in starting local school and community programs. After finishing his master's degree and inspired by Neil's writings, Mintz started Shaker Mountain School in 1968, a free school in Vermont.<sup>15</sup> Over the following decades, Mintz's interest and involvement with decentralist pedagogies increased. He would eventually support Summerhill School by raising

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<sup>11</sup> "In Israel," *Aero-Gramme*, Summer 1996, 17, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev18.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev18.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> "Consultation with Homeschool Group in Quebec," *Education Revolution*, Summer 1999, 51-54, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev18.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev18.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Rosa Bruno-Jofré, "The «Long 1960s» in a Global Arena of Contention: Re-Defining Assumptions of Self, Morality, Race, Gender and Justice, and Questioning Education," *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 5–27, <https://doi.org/10.14516/ete.256>.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander S. Neill, *Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood* (Macmillan, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Jerry Mintz, *No Homework and Recess All Day* (USA: Alternative Education Resources Organization, 2013), 35.

awareness of its fight against the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), and regularly attend Modern School alumni reunions.

Shortly after its opening, Mintz and his four students listened to a song by Canadian-Indigenous artist Buffy St. Marie titled, "My Country, 'Tis of Thy People You're Dying." The song charges Americans with being ignorant of their censored past, of "the genocide basic to this country's birth."<sup>16</sup> Among the hardships faced by the Indigenous in the song's lyrics, St. Marie also sings about the abuse of Indigenous children in residential schools and the Sixties Scoop.

In your school propaganda,  
They starve in their splendor,  
You've asked for our comment,  
I simply will render,  
My country 'tis of thy people you're dying,  
Now that the longhouses breed superstition,  
You force us to send our toddlers away,  
To your schools where they're taught to despise their traditions<sup>17</sup>

Unfamiliar with some of the grievances in the song, Mintz and his students "wondered if it could really be true—that white Europeans had so mistreated the natives of this continent."<sup>18</sup>

Their curiosity towards Indigenous issues was reignited in 1969 after watching a TV program about a recent border crossing dispute between the Akwesasne First Nation in New York state and the Canadian city of Cornwall.<sup>19</sup> After visiting the TV station in Plattsburgh, NY, Mintz was in contact with a public-school teacher near Akwesasne. The unnamed teacher introduced them to clan mother Ann Jock and activist Tom Porter.<sup>20</sup> During their meeting at the Long House, Tom Porter taught Mintz about the Iroquois Confederacy, a collection of tribes bound by the Great Law.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Historic Films Stock Footage Archive. "Pete Seeger's Rainbow Quest w/ Buffy St. Marie. Show #13N." YouTube video, 49:54. September 1966, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DbJLCZeXVTQ>

<sup>17</sup> Historic Films, 15:00-22:00.

<sup>18</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 35.

<sup>19</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> After serving as an educator at both the Akwesasne Freedom School and Kahnawake Survival School, Sakokwenionkwaw (Tom Porter) received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Trent University for his contributions as an Indigenous cultural educator, elder, and spiritual leader. "Tom Porter," *Seeds of Wisdom*, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.seedsofwisdom.earth/elder/tom-porter/>; "Tom's Corner," Kanatsiohareke Mohawk Community, accessed February 12, 2023, <http://www.mohawkcommunity.com/tomscorner.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Mintz expressed an interest in how the founding Fathers took interest in the Iroquois Confederacy as a political model for the US. According to Mintz, "The Great Law was a method by which people could live together in peace, not a racial concept but a spiritual one." See Mintz, *No Homework*, 36.



Tom Porter had a major impact on Mintz's philosophy of democratic education, with special attention paid to the minority vote. Explaining how the Iroquois made decisions in his book, Mintz wrote:

They did not make decisions entirely by pure democracy—meaning majority rule. They would vote on proposals, but then would ask those in the minority to explain why they voted the way [they] did. Then the whole group would continue to try to find a proposal that met everyone's need. The onus was on the minority to come up with a better proposal. Only when that was pursued as far as they could go would a final decision be made.<sup>22</sup>

This explanation initiated a paradigm shift in Mintz's understanding of democratic education. Shaker Mountain School adopted this model of democratic process for their whole-school meetings henceforth. And over the course of AERO's rise, Mintz traveled the world promoting the system as a means to empower learners and run a democratic classroom.<sup>23</sup>

That evening, the contingent from Shaker Mountain School was invited to the Indian Social Dance. Expecting to sit in the audience, the group was caught off guard when they were expected to join the dance. And so they danced; shaking the building up and down as they did so.<sup>24</sup> In the subsequent years, a contingent from Shaker Mountain returned to take part in social dances of the Akwesasne.<sup>25</sup>

### *Starting The Indian Way School*

At these dances, Mintz claimed that he suggested to the Akwesasne that they start their own school. Then one day in 1971 Mintz received a phone call from Ann Jock at 1:00 a.m.<sup>26</sup> She told Mintz that seventy Mohawk children had been kicked out of their school for speaking their mother tongue.<sup>27</sup> According to Mintz, "Anne asked us if we could come to the reservation the next day, bring some of our students, bring slides, talk about our school and tell them how they could go about starting a school."<sup>28</sup> After a two-hour trip, the Shaker Mountain School contingent arrived at Ann's house, which was packed with parents and children. They finished delivering their presentation and had a discussion on how to finance the school.<sup>29</sup> A week later, the Indian Way School was built in Ann Jock's backyard.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 36–37.

<sup>23</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 37.

<sup>25</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 37.

<sup>28</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 37–38.

<sup>29</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 38.

<sup>30</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 38.

Mintz also claims that Shaker Mountain School also established fundraisers to help finance Jock's ambitions during the early days of the school.<sup>31</sup> Near Montreal, the Kahnawake Mohawks had started their own school, Indian Way School, shortly after their Akwesasne Mohawk cousins. In the years that followed, Shaker Mountain School continued to have regular exchanges with the Mohawks of Akwesasne and Kahnawake, sending students to visit one another to continue ties.<sup>32</sup>

### *Quebec Separatism and the Kahnawake Survival School*

In 1977, the Quebec government released Bill 101, or The Quebec French Preference Law, whereby the Indigenous of Kahnawake needed a license to teach English in schools.<sup>33</sup> Understanding the law as a breach of their sovereignty, the Mohawks protested and refused, instead establishing the Kahnawake Survival School.<sup>34</sup> According to Mintz, Rita Phillips, a long-time teacher at the original Indian Way School of Akwesasne, was recruited to the Survival School to help develop their new curriculum.<sup>35</sup> The lesson Mintz took from The Indian Way School was that the rippling effects of a small alternative school could change a whole community.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, this relationship helped Mintz network and assist other Indigenous bands in their mission to establish their own schools. In the early 1990's, Dianne

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<sup>31</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 39.

<sup>32</sup> After the closure of the Indian Way School of the Akwesasne, six years after its creation, Mintz's Shaker Mountain School continued to visit the Akwesasne Freedom School via whole-school field trips. In 1979, the Akwesasne Freedom school opened after a year-long standoff between "traditionalist" Akwesasne and the New York State Police and elected tribal council. See Mintz, *No Homework*, 38; "The History of AFS," accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.freedom-school.org/index.php/about-us/the-history-of-afs>; Peter Matthiessen, "The Siege of the Mohawks," *Washington Post*, September 14, 1980, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1980/09/14/the-siege-of-the-mohawks/dc8afb36-fc06-473d-a7c2-fa5be6821cbc/>.

<sup>33</sup> Ka'nhehsí:io Deer, "Kahnawake Survival School Marks 40 Years since Student Walkout over Bill 101," CBC News, September 6, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/kahnawake-survival-school-40-anniversary-1.4810023>.

<sup>34</sup> According to the Kahnawake Education Center: "After many years of inadequate funding and Indian Affairs bureaucracy, the [Protestant and Catholic] committees combined and established the first non-denominational school in Canada—offering religious studies, ethics, and traditional teachings. The Joint Unification Agreement (JUA) of 1968 united all three factions of the community (Catholic, Protestant, and Longhouse) to work together for a common cause: to strengthen the services for their children's education. The JUA established parental control and gave rise to the Kahnawà:ke Combined Schools Committee. To this day, the KCSC guides itself with the same sentiment that united the parents of 1968." It was this new school board that oversaw the creation of the Kahnawake Survival School in 1978. See "History of Kahnawà:Ke Education," Kahnawà:Ke Education Centre, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.kecedu.ca/kahnaw-ke-combined-schools-committee/history-of-kahnaw-ke-education> and "About the Kahanwake Survival School," Kahnawà:Ke Education Centre, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.kecedu.ca/schools/kahnawake-survival-school/about>.

<sup>35</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 40.

<sup>36</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 40.

Delaronde of the Kahnawake Indian Way School hosted Mintz on his way to assist another Indigenous band, the Keewaywin of Northern Ontario.<sup>37</sup>

## Origins of AERO: The Story of the Keewaywin

In 1989, Mintz traveled to Toronto to attend the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Fourth World Conference. At the event, Mintz witnessed a speech by the decentralist economist Leopold Kohr and met Ivan Illich.<sup>38</sup> While in Toronto, Mintz encountered an article in the *Toronto Star* about an Indigenous community called the Keewaywin, which needed aid to build a school.<sup>39</sup> Their leader, Chief Geordi Kakepetum, explained that their attempts to secure funds from the Canadian government for the creation of a school had wound up in "bureaucratic limbo."<sup>40</sup> Feeling that he could put his talents for creating schools to good use, Mintz answered the band's call for help.

The two contacted one another, with Chief Kakepetum tuning in via his microwave telephone due to his remote location and its lack of proper telecommunication infrastructure. The chief presented Mintz's offer to the band council, and with their approval, accepted Mintz's offer. Not wasting any time, Mintz then "wrote [to] 200 schools and individuals around the country and locally to enlist their help" in aiding the Keewaywin.<sup>41</sup> In the end, many offered to help.<sup>42</sup> Notably, the Josephine Bay and C. Michael Paul Foundation offered a \$2,700 matching grant in support of the effort.

On December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1989, Mintz traveled to the far reaches of northeastern Ontario, "Indian Land,"<sup>43</sup> to meet with the Keewaywin.<sup>44</sup> To get there, he took a train

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<sup>37</sup> Mintz later contacted Delaronde over the course of the 1990 Oka crisis and subsequent blockade of the Mercier bridge by the Kahnawake Mohawk. See "Report from the Kahnawake Mohawks," *Aero-gramme*, Fall 1990, 10–11, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev4.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev4.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> See "England," *The Alternative Education Resource Organization Newsletter*, Fall 1992, 30, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev9.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev9.pdf). A few years later, in 1992, Illich subscribed to the AERO network. See also "Ivan Illich Letter," AERO, <https://www.educationrevolution.org/store/aero-museum/ivan-illich-letter/>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> "Kee Way Win Project," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1990, 1-7, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev2.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev2.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> For example, students at Lawrence Academy organized the Native American Relief Movement, raising \$500 and twenty boxes of books supposedly valued at \$2,135, Joshua Mailman of the Threshold Foundation pledged \$1,500, Clarie Castello of Germany contributed \$500, twelve individuals donated \$450, books on wind generation and electricity were donated by the Grassroots School of Florida, four larger Cuisenaire rods were sent by Education Resource Center of Rhode Island, and the Bay Foundation of New York City created a matching grant of \$2,700 for the project. Jerry Mintz, "Kee Way Win Project," *Aero-Gramme*, Fall 1989, 1-2, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev1.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev1.pdf); "Kee Way Win Project," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1990, 6, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev2.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev2.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> "Kee Way Win Project," *Aero-Gramme*, Fall 1989, 1-2, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev1.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev1.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 1-2.

to Sioux Lookout, which was “as far north as the trains went in Ontario at the time,” and flew Bearskin Air to the Sandy Lake Reserve. Upon his arrival, Chief Kakepetum and the council explained why the Canadian federal government did not recognize the settlement of the Keewaywin as an official reservation, leaving them without housing and educational services and forcing them to be dependent on the neighboring Sandy Lake Reserve. According to the Keewaywin council, the Keewaywin were in the process of resettling their ancestral lands on the other side of Sandy Lake, but the government was slow to recognize this change.<sup>45</sup>

The band was in a poor situation. In 1985, at the start of the band's resettlement, most of the children under the age of twelve were unable to read. The Chief explained to Mintz that the band had withdrawn their children from a religious boarding school, “because the school had used corporal punishment on the children.”<sup>46</sup> He was likely referring historically to one of the infamous Canadian residential schools for Indigenous children, notorious for their abusive and assimilative practices.

During the meeting with the Keewaywin band council at Sandy Lake Reserve, Mintz showed them two video tapes. One was a video that he had made of a person named Donald Cardinal, a Cree from Alberta living in Roslyn, NY. Cardinal was on a personal mission to reclaim his tribe's artifacts from New York's Museum of Natural History. In the video, Cardinal explained why the government was obligated to pay for the Keewaywin's school according to Canadian treaties and law. The second video shown was made by Jerry on his way to Keewaywin when he stopped in at Kahnawake, the Mohawk reserve in Montreal. Dianne Delaronde, the director of the

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<sup>45</sup> According to Mintz, the Council of the Keewaywin told him the following story as to why the band was not officially recognized by the Canadian government. Mintz writes: “The Keewaywin were once called the Sandy Lakers and were here originally, settling all around the lake. Then another Chief, from Deer Lake, came here with his band over a hundred years ago. His name was Fiddler. When it came time to establish a recognized reserve, the Fiddler Band did the negotiating, and the government made their site of several square miles the official Reserve, telling the other Indians that if they wanted government services, they had to move to that site. Gradually, the original Sandy Lakers moved to the site, but it was an uneasy relationship. They felt they were being treated as second class citizens. There were cultural and religious differences between the groups, centering around different forms of Christianity. In Cree the words ‘Kee Way Win’ means to ‘return home,’ and that's what the group longed to do. Like the early Israeli settlers, some of them began to return to settle their original land, at the other end of Sandy Lake, between it and Niska Lake. Finally, they got the ear of an official of the Canadian government and they were granted separate band status. Many of the original settlers rushed to sign on to the new band. They expected that the band status would be followed by awarding reserve status at Kee Way Win. In 1985, hundreds of them left to pioneer at Kee Way Win. but the official who had helped them (David Crombie, then Indian Affairs Minister) was “transferred,” and they were left in limbo. Therefore, they have had no services, no electricity, water, sewage, roads, etc, since that time, and no school. Because of the extreme hardships that winter still presents at Kee Way Win, many people retreat to the Sandy Lake Reserve in the winter. The Kee Way Wins are allowed to stay there, but the Sandy Lake tribal council has forbidden the Kee Way Wins to have official meetings there. So, when I met with the Kee Way Win education committee at a house at the Sandy Lake Reserve, it was an illegal meeting. In fact, they were supposed to have reported my presence to authorities. I was warned that if they found out, I would ‘be on the next plane out of here.’ Suddenly I felt like I was in Eastern Europe before the 80s. I could understand why the Kee Way Wins wanted to return to their own land.” Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> “Kee Way Win Project,” 2.

Indian Way School, was filmed explaining how the school was founded, including the school's acquisition of funds.<sup>47</sup>

After showing the videos to the council members, Mintz was brought to the Keewaywin settlement from Sandy Lake reserve, "traveling the longest 28 miles in [his] memory, over the frozen slush and snow of Sandy Lake."<sup>48</sup> A man named Barlow, an expert driver and woodsman, ferried Mintz over the lake in a "sled" (a four-sided box tethered to a snowmobile). Navigating across the ice, which was often cracked from the weight of the snow, Mintz arrived at the Keewaywin settlement with icicles hanging from his moustache.

Upon their arrival at the settlement, they entered an office building, which was "a small, spare, room with a barrel for a heater, and a telephone sitting on a desk. The telephone was powered by batteries, and the signal [was] sent to a mast on the roof and across the lake by microwave."<sup>49</sup> At \$10,000, it was an expensive purchase for the band. In the office, they spoke about how to structure their new school. Mintz stressed the idea of using the abilities of the community members and organizing a curriculum that combined the new with the old, including a tribal decision-making process for the school itself. A member of the Keewaywin council, David Thompson, asked what he could do personally.<sup>50</sup> When Mintz suggested that he could tutor kids individually in reading, he became very enthusiastic.

It was as if the idea had never occurred to him before, but now he was excited about it. He began furiously taking notes, as he realized the possibilities of the approach. The elders know such things as Syllabics, the Cree written language, traditional trapping techniques, tribal history crafts, etc.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to discussing how to integrate cultural elements into their framework over the course of his stay, Mintz spoke about fundraising ideas and potential names for the school. At the same time, he taught the kids table tennis and showed them how to organize their own tournaments.<sup>52</sup>

Before leaving, Mintz had asked David Thompson if he thought the school would start, to which he replied, "The school *has* started."<sup>53</sup> Thomson later became the Director of Education for Keewaywin, and now serves as their chief. The school, started by the community, carries on to this day.

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<sup>47</sup> This is the same Indian Way School that Mintz had helped establish in 1971.

<sup>48</sup> "Kee Way Win Project," 4.

<sup>49</sup> "Kee Way Win Project," 1.

<sup>50</sup> David Thompson's two-year-old nephew had suddenly died of an unexplained parasitic attack just a week before the meeting See Mintz, *No Homework*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Mintz, *No Homework*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Teaching table tennis was a hallmark of Mintz's adventures. Over the course of AERO's history, Mintz would go on to teach table tennis alternative education conferences and events across the globe.

<sup>53</sup> "Kee Way Win Project," 6.

This event in the remote wilderness of northern Ontario was foundational for the creation of AERO. The people Mintz rallied to raise funds and supplies for the Keewaywin band became the first members of the fledgling AERO network. Many of these members built a long history with Mintz and went on to play an active role over the course of AERO's future development.

## Visiting the Oneida of the Thames River

Two weeks after meeting Bruce Elijah, the principal of the Log School, in New York City, Mintz was invited to the Oneida reservation in southwestern Ontario to visit the school. The Log School was co-founded by two brothers, Howard and Bruce Elijah, who sought to create a program for the Oneida that would preserve their language and culture. Howard Elijah, who had agreed to help the school only for its first year in 1987, continues to administer the school into the 2020's.<sup>54</sup> Bruce Elijah would later become the first Elder-in-Residence at the Wampum Learning Lodge at Western University.<sup>55</sup>

On December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1990, Mintz traveled to the Oneida reservation. As was his common practice, he took a student with him, a 15-year-old Sudbury Valley student named Nathan.<sup>56</sup> Sudbury Valley School is a free school near Boston, MA born out of the Long Sixties. It stands as an icon of the American free school movement and democratic education around the world.<sup>57</sup> Mintz and Nathan were hosted by Grace Elijah, the brothers' mother. Bruce Elijah arrived at Oneida shortly after Mintz and Nathan with a friend he had met during the Oka Crisis. He had to dash to Brantford to host "a sweat lodge and sunrise ceremony at a drug treatment center," but he would return the following day.<sup>58</sup> This left Mintz and Howard time to chat about the police, education, and the issues faced by the Oneida. They spoke until 2:00 in the morning.<sup>59</sup>

The next day the brothers gave Mintz and Nathan a tour of their school. At the Log School, the brothers expressed their concerns that some of the Indigenous survival schools were just public schools taught in an Indigenous language. Therefore, they were making a concerted effort to implement a different pedagogical approach that contrasted contemporary public schooling. According to Mintz, "[they

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<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Sumida Huaman, "Small Indigenous Schools: Indigenous Resurgence and Education in the Americas," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (September 2020): 262–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12335>.

<sup>55</sup> Keri Ferguson, "Bruce Elijah named first Elder-in-Residence at Wampum Learning Lodge," *Western News*, March 31, 2023. <https://news.westernu.ca/2023/03/elijah-elder-in-residence-western/>

<sup>56</sup> "Notes on Trip to Oneida Reservation 12/13/90," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1991, 4, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev5.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev5.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Roza A. Valeeva and Ramilya Sh. Kasimova, "Alternative Educational System Sudbury Valley as a Model for Reforming School." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 182 (May 2015): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.766>.

<sup>58</sup> "Notes on Trip," 5.

<sup>59</sup> "Notes on Trip," 5.

didn't] use books at the school or teach the kids English reading or writing," but rather allowed them to pick up English at their own pace independently (like a free school).<sup>60</sup>

The fear that this approach to English language learning might be too extreme was not lost on Mintz or the brothers. Reporting on the visit, Mintz writes:

We had some questions as to whether the school was a little too anti-intellectual, or too much against the idea of teaching English reading and writing. Some people have been thinking that at some point they may want to teach this to the older kids, after they have a base in their own culture and language. They talked a lot about not wanting to teach language as "just" communication, but more as a living thing. They expressed the feeling that some of the survival schools were only public education translated into native American language. Howard pointed out that 85% of the Oneida language are verbs, so that a lot of it has to do with describing things by their function and origins.<sup>61</sup>

Learning the Oneida language took precedent over English, and it was used as the primary language of instruction. To the Elijah brothers, losing the Oneida language was only one of the many ways their culture had been slowly waning away. Hence, they sought to preserve the culture, not just the language. To this end, they created a curriculum with a more learner-centric approach, along with lessons to preserve traditional Oneida skill sets.<sup>62</sup>

Like their experiences in other alternative schools, Mintz and Nathan reported a high level of engagement and openness amongst the students of Log School. Moreover, the brothers claimed that their learners who chose to enter the public school system after attending the Log School did very well.<sup>63</sup>

The brothers and Mintz discussed setting up visits and exchanges with other alternative schools, as well as ways they could work together to set up alternative schools for Indigenous communities.<sup>64</sup> Reflecting on his visit, Mintz wrote:

It seemed quite helpful to Howard in particular to get a sense that there were other people who were not Indians that were moving in the same kind of direction that they were, and that there were commonalities between what they were doing and what we call alternative and holistic education.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> "Notes on Trip," 5.

<sup>61</sup> "Notes on Trip," 5.

<sup>62</sup> Mintz noted that the tribe "hadn't been able to find people to teach traditional hide tanning, something that Nathan [had] been studying in Sudbury Valley. They were pretty impressed by that." See "Notes on Trip," 6.

<sup>63</sup> "Notes on Trip," 6.

<sup>64</sup> "Notes on Trip," 7.

<sup>65</sup> "Notes on Trip," 7.

This encounter with the Oneida demonstrates a historic trend of Mintz traveling to Indigenous communities and finding within their education systems the same values of freedom and learner autonomy shared by the free schools he admired.

## Influential Canadians and Canadian Institutions in the AERO Network

Turning our attention to non-Indigenous communities, we notice Canadian educators who had a lasting impact on AERO, particularly those based in Ontario and British Columbia. These educators came from both the public and private alternative education space, promoted democratic education, and were inspired by the free schools of the Long 1960's.

### *Toronto District School Board's Alternative Schools*

Alternative educators of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB)'s official alternative school division played a key role in shaping AERO's growth. Over the organization's early development, Mintz engaged with these educators, and some of them ended up playing very vocal roles in AERO's publications.

The release of the *Hall-Dennis Report* in 1968 prompted a flurry of reforms by the Ontario Ministry of Education. The report advocated for experience over content, creativity and open inquiry over rote-learning, and the facilitation of individualized learning.<sup>66</sup> Yet the "radical" adoption of these reforms by the Ontario Ministry of Education should not be overstated. As educational historian Dr. Josh Cole notes, this report was a form of "elite damage control," and the government proceedings that lead to the report could be "meaningfully interpreted as a moment of 'passive revolution,' wherein the committee actively selected from the thousands of ideas sent to it those most easily accommodated by its pre-existing framework."<sup>67</sup>

Nonetheless this report would inspire the TDSB to adopt around ten innovative private schools over the course of the Long 1960's.<sup>68</sup> These "radical" schools encouraged educators to take risks to create learning environments that catered to the needs of their learners, including in-class and whole-school democratic decision-making, co-construction of the curriculum, Indigenous education, and a ramping up of placed-based learning and community outreach.<sup>69</sup> Their financing by, and

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<sup>66</sup> Harley Rothstein, "Private to Public: Alternative Schools in Ontario 1965–1975," in *Alternative Schooling and Student Engagement*, eds. Nina Bascia, Esther Sokolov Fine, and Malcolm Levin (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 82, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54259-1\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54259-1_6).

<sup>67</sup> Josh Cole, *Hall-Dennis and the Road to Utopia: Education and Modernity in Ontario*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021), 50, 75.

<sup>68</sup> Rothstein, "Private to Public," 81-86.

<sup>69</sup> Carol Nash, "From the Release of the Hall–Dennis Report to the Founding of Alpha II Alternative School—My Personal Journey," in *Alternative Schooling and Student Engagement*, ed. Nina Bascia, Esther Sokolov Fine, and Malcolm Levin (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 107–17, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54259-1\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54259-1_8); Sharon Berg, "The Name Unspoken: Wandering Spirit Survival School," in *Alternative Schooling and Student Engagement*, ed. Nina



adoption into, the Ontario public education system gave rise to the TDSB's fledgling alternative education sector.

Within the first two years of AERO's existence, Mintz had reached out to Maralyn Richards, the alternative school advisor of the Toronto Board of Education, to map out these schools in a new directory of educational alternatives across North America.<sup>70</sup> In 1990, he informed his subscribers:

In Toronto, there is a procedure in place by which any group of students, parents, or teachers can start an alternative program and have it funded by the board of education, if there is a demonstrated interest. SEED was the first such school back in 1970.<sup>71</sup>

The timing of this message is significant because it was before the rise of charter schools in the USA, a controversial movement which was later supported by a significant number of AERO's members.<sup>72</sup>

Later, in 1999, Mintz expressed mixed feelings regarding the TDSB's alternative schools. On the one hand, he was glad to see the expansion of educational alternatives in the public sector; on the other hand, he was concerned that although these educational alternatives were still unique, they were being reined in by "the bureaucracy" to become more mainstream. In other words, the TDSB had shifted from promoting educational risk-taking to creating alternatives that resembled remedial schools for at-risk youth.<sup>73</sup>

Perhaps the most active and vocal member of AERO's online chat forum, TDSB alternative educator Leonard Turton, shared Mintz's views. Turton was an educator for inner city youth in Toronto who utilized "clubhouse democracy"—a form of democratic education—to engage at-risk children.<sup>74</sup> Making his debut in the "Canada" section of *The Education Revolution's* spring 2000 issue, this anti-

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Bascia, Esther Sokolov Fine, and Malcolm Levin (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 189–202, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54259-1\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54259-1_15); Harry Smaller and Margaret Wells, "Contact—An Alternative School for Working-Class and Racialized Students," in *Alternative Schooling and Student Engagement*, ed. Nina Bascia, Esther Sokolov Fine, and Malcolm Levin (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 167–78, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54259-1\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54259-1_13).

<sup>70</sup> "Foreign Communications," *Aero-Gramme*, Spring 1990, 12–13, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev3.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev3.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> "Foreign Communications," *Aero-Gramme*, Spring 1990, 12, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev3.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev3.pdf).

<sup>72</sup> Support for charter schools was not by any means a universal within the AERO network and was in fact a constant source of debate. It is a subject deserving own analysis but is currently beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>73</sup> Mintz saw the TDSB's alternative education sector as a warning of what was to come with the rise of charter schools in the USA. "Alternative Education and the Future," *Education Revolution*, Fall 1999, 5, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev28.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev28.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> "Leonard Turton," *Summerhill Democratics* (blog), August 5, 2020, <http://www.summerhilldemocratics.net>.

neoliberal evangelist wrote a critique of the corporatization transforming ministries of education in North America and Western Europe.<sup>75</sup>

Turton raged against the standardized testing movement, surveillance, and the increasing “audit culture” of schools.<sup>76</sup> With populist rhetoric, he called out the erosion of democratic education in schools: “THEY know that if they can control education they can go a long way to controlling the people, and can keep democracy on a leash. How come the last few generations of activists don't seem to know this??”<sup>77</sup> After being active on the AERO listserv, Turton eventually started publishing articles, notes, and posts in *The Education Revolution*. His writings told the story of his attempts to institute clubhouse democracy, a clubhouse classroom environment governed by democratic meetings, via “guerrilla teaching” tactics.<sup>78</sup>

What makes Leonard Turton an interesting figure in AERO's story, besides the discussions he generated with his posts, is that he crystalized the rhetoric of the many public-school teachers who visited, posted, or wrote to AERO. Many of the public alternative educators who wrote to AERO expressed frustrations with the public system. Trying to change the system from within, they railed against bureaucracy, the conservative practices of their peers and administrators, and the erosion of their local autonomy in wake of attempts to consolidate education.<sup>79</sup> Leonard Turton's writings addressed these complaints, reflecting the voices of these public educators, demonstrating the appeal AERO had for those concerned. His writings and posts both embodied and helped shape the AERO network.

## Wilma's Place

Wilma's Place is another element of the Ontario public alternative sector that stands out when examining Canada's impact on AERO. Part of Hamilton-Wentworth

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<sup>75</sup>The word evangelist is well suited in this context. In a discussion on the AERO listserv, later posted in the “Changing Schools” section of *Education Revolution*, Mintz thanked Turton for his “attempt to spread the Word,” and shared his sadness that alternative educators “stopped trying to proselytize” in the conservative 1980's. AERO, “Issue #29 Summerhill Court Victory,” 21; AERO, “Issue #32 Special Changing Schools Section,” Spring/Summer 2001, 46, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO\\_EdRev32.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO_EdRev32.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> “International News and Communications,” *Education Revolution*, Spring 2000, 21, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO\\_EdRev29.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO_EdRev29.pdf)

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Here are a few “Turtonisms” from the AERO listserv, which can be found at “Special Section: Changing Schools,” *The Education Revolution* (Winter, 2001), [https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO\\_EdRev31.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO_EdRev31.pdf) : “We try to deconstruct some of the mythology of teacher control and power. With [the grade 6's] I always play ‘mean teacher,’ which children love” (p. 32); “As a counter balance it is important that outrageous behavior be encouraged [in the classroom]” (p. 32); “You also have to know how to deconstruct the personalities of a wide range of administrative types. Know how to gain their friendship, know how to deliver the goods they want, so that they trust you. Then they will leave you alone and let you experiment” (p. 33).

<sup>79</sup> “From the AERO Website,” *The Education Revolution*, Winter 1999, 36, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev26.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev26.pdf); “Home Education News,” *Aero-Gramme*, Fall 1998, 37–38, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev25.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev25.pdf); “Feedback from Gatto Show on WBAI,” *The Education Revolution*, Fall 1999, 10, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev28.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev28.pdf).

Catholic District School Board and hosted by Cathedral High School, Wilma's Place caters to at-risk women, many of whom experience "family difficulties, learning difficulties, substance abuse, sexual and/or physical abuse, [are] living on their own, [or with] teen-pregnancies."<sup>80</sup>

In the winter of 1997, AERO published a vignette by Julie D'Angela about her thesis on the school's philosophy of education, as well as her experiences volunteering at the school.<sup>81</sup> The piece highlighted how alternative programs focused on helping learners with needs beyond achieving a higher-grade point average. For example, Wilma's Place provided necessities, such as food and toiletries, as well as employment opportunities and social services through its deep integration with other government programs.<sup>82</sup> The program was showcased as a model public at-risk alternative to the rest of the AERO network.

## British Columbia

Turning to British Columbia, two other educational alternatives stand out from the rest: Wondertree and Windsor House School. Both institutions were active in the early days of AERO's rise, and frequently appeared in *The Education Revolution*. This section will explore the connections between AERO and these organizations, both of which emphasized self-directed education as a means of achieving student success.

A wave of alternative schools blossomed in British Columbia in the 1960's after the release of the *Chant Report* in 1960, which recommended less attention be paid to the arts.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, these alternatives were inspired by a group of newly recruited American academics hired by the University of British Columbia.<sup>84</sup> Like the Toronto District School Board, the Vancouver School Board had adopted independent schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As historians Dr. Jason Ellis and Dr. Ee-Seul Yoon observed, the alternative schools and programs of Vancouver initially focused on serving at-risk students, and "were not at that time envisioned as nurturing neoliberalism."<sup>85</sup> The incorporation of these schools laid the groundwork for promoting choice within the public system. Over the course of the 1980s and 90s, these alternative programs were promoted as means by which schools could become more competitive and market-oriented, overtaking the number of

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<sup>80</sup> "Julie D'Angela Writes," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1997, 10, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev20.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev20.pdf); "Wilma's Place Helps Students Budget for Life," March 1, 2018, <https://educationnewscanada.com/article/education/level/k12/3/685312/wilma-s-place-helps-students-budget-for-life-.html>.

<sup>81</sup> "Julie D'Angela Writes," *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1997, 10, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev20.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev20.pdf).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>83</sup> Rothstein, "Private to Public," 5–6.

<sup>84</sup> Rothstein, "Private to Public," 5–6.

<sup>85</sup> Jason Ellis and Ee-Seul Yoon, "From Alternative Schools to School Choice in the Vancouver School District, 1960s to the Neoliberal Present," n.d., 99.

“rehabilitative alternatives” for at-risk youth. By the 1990s, public alternatives had pivoted towards more elitist “district specified alternatives,” which were much sought after programs that screened their applicants.<sup>86</sup> Both of the schools most closely connected to AERO, Windsor House School and Wondertree, emerged from Vancouver and were subject to these developments.

### *Windsor House School*

Windsor House School is a democratic alternative school in Vancouver founded by Helen Hughs in 1971.<sup>87</sup> Although it started as a private alternative, the school was incorporated into the North Vancouver's Public School District, and then the Gulf Islands School District in 2011, until its closure in 2019.<sup>88</sup> Its free school model eschewed coercive approaches in favor of student and parent participation. The school did not issue grades or report cards, and each community member cast a vote on school policy at weekly “resolution meetings.”<sup>89</sup>

Over the course of AERO's rise, Hughs was an active participant on AERO's publications and posts.<sup>90</sup> Her posts to the membership focused on the need to encourage and welcome parental involvement to create a culture of mutual support and participation to lessen bullying.<sup>91</sup> In 2001, AERO sought to establish Alternative Education Action Groups, in-person local-level associations that could advocate on behalf of alternative education. Answering Mintz's request for support from the network, Helen Hughes volunteered to speak publicly about democratic education in the Greater Vancouver Area.<sup>92</sup> In the same issue, AERO thanked Hughes for her financial support.<sup>93</sup>

AERO's connection to Windsor House school, and the school's subsequent incorporation into the public system, reflects the network's relationship to both private and public Canadian alternatives. Furthermore, the transnational readership of AERO's publications, which included into educators in former Soviet Union, Israel,

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<sup>86</sup> Ellis and Yoon, 99.

<sup>87</sup> Helen Hughs, “Public Alternatives,” *Aero-Gramme*, Spring 1997, 16, [http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev20.pdf](http://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev20.pdf).

<sup>88</sup> “North Vancouver Alternative School to Close after Unanimous Vote,” CBC News, May 14, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/windsor-house-school-closing-1.5134853>.

<sup>89</sup> Hughs, “Public Alternatives,” 16-17.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, “From the AERO Website,” *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1997, 15, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev20.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev20.pdf); Hughs, “Public Alternatives,” 16-17, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev21.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev21.pdf); Helen Hughs, “Parental Involvement in a Public Alternative School,” *Education Revolution*, Winter 1999, 50, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev26.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev26.pdf); and “A Message from Helen at Windsor House,” *The Education Revolution*, Spring/Summer 2001, 31, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev20.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev20.pdf).

<sup>91</sup> Hughs, “Parental Involvement,” 50-51; “A Message from Helen,” 30.

<sup>92</sup> See “From a Message from Helen,” *The Education Revolution*, Spring/Summer 2001, 46, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO\\_EdRev32.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO_EdRev32.pdf).

<sup>93</sup> See “Alternative Education Action Groups,” *Education Revolution*, Spring/Summer 2001, 7, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO\\_EdRev32.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO_EdRev32.pdf)

Japan, and India, underscores the communication and reach these Vancouver educators had with one another, other Canadian educators, and the international alternative education community.

## *Wondertree*

Wondertree was started by Brent Cameron after he was asked by his daughter, a kindergartener at the time, to leave school and “return to her learning environment of relationships within family and community.”<sup>94</sup> Honoring her request, in 1983 Cameron started the Wondertree Centre in Vancouver, which operated with a free school-like approach. Then, in 1993, Wondertree worked with Kathleen Forsythe, the executive director of the Knowledge Network, to establish VirtualHigh, an online educational program for high school students. Changing its name to SelfDesign Learning Foundation in 2010, the organization continues to promote the integration of technological advancement in achieving student success.<sup>95</sup>

The relationship between Wondertree and AERO starts early in the development of the network. Wondertree was one of the first schools to be listed on AERO's new website in 1996.<sup>96</sup> AERO's founder, Jerry Mintz, had taught classes online in the mid 1990's, reporting that one of his students was from Wondertree.<sup>97</sup> From the late 1990's to early 2000's, Wondertree's founder Brent Cameron made a series of posts to the AERO network, promoting his program and criticizing the public school system.<sup>98</sup> In the fall of 1998, Cameron wrote:

I am convinced that schooling is about a) maintaining the jobs of teachers as a vested interest group, and b) about keeping children busy so that their parents can keep working on the economic assembly line of society. All deference to "education" is but a smokescreen for the obedience to the politics of authority and social order. Real education begins at the moment of choice and personal design.<sup>99</sup>

This rebellious and “anti-system” rhetoric was pervasive within the AERO network and matched the ethos of *The Education Revolution*, demonstrating some of the ideological connection between AERO and Wondertree. Furthermore, it reflects

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<sup>94</sup> SelfDesign Learning Foundation. “The History and Innovative Path of SelfDesign Learning Foundation and Community.” Feb. 28, 2020. <https://www.selfdesign.org/the-history-and-innovative-path-of-selfdesign-learning-foundation-and-community/>.

<sup>95</sup> “Ibid.”

<sup>96</sup> “New AERO Website,” *Aero-Gramme*, Winter 1996, 3, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev17.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev17.pdf).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> See “Brent Cameron,” *Aero-Gramme*, Fall 1997, 29, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev22.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev22.pdf); “Canada,” *The Education Revolution*, Fall 1999, 25, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev22.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev22.pdf); and “Home Education News,” *The Education Revolution*, Winter 2001, 15, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO\\_EdRev31.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO_EdRev31.pdf).

<sup>99</sup> “Canada,” *The Education Revolution*, Fall 1999, 25, [https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO\\_EdRev28.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/AERO_EdRev28.pdf).

the institutionalization of some popular neoliberal tenants at the time of Wondertree's creation in the 1980's, such as the failure of traditional public education and the push towards choice-based individualized learning. These sentiments were a major force shaping public and private school alternatives at the time in Vancouver.<sup>100</sup>

Wondertree and AERO made efforts to assist one another, with Wondertree offering to design a virtual space for the network to enhance their communications, and AERO posting a job ad for an educator on behalf of Wondertree.<sup>101</sup> The mutually beneficial relationship between AERO and Wondertree, in addition to Windsor House School, establishes the historic connection between AERO and the free schools of B.C.

## Conclusion

Canadians had a significant impact on the Alternative Education Resource Organization's formation and praxis, particularly the Indigenous peoples of Canada. As mentioned above, AERO's formation grew out of the joint efforts of Jerry Mintz and Keewaywin Chief Geordi Kakepetum to start a school for the Keewaywin. Before founding AERO, Mintz recalled the profound impact Tom Porter's explanation of "Iroquois Democracy" had on his pedagogy. Little did Tom Porter or any of the members of the Akwesasne community know at the time that Mintz would travel around world sharing this idea. As a key organizer of the International Democratic Education Conference, Mintz would conduct workshops teaching educators about how they could integrate Iroquois Democracy into their classrooms. These conferences would be held in partnership with the governments of the USSR, Israel, and Japan. Mintz's collaboration with Indigenous educators would not only shape his own educational philosophy; he shared these experiences with AERO's global network of alternative educators.

Furthermore, public and private alternative educators, especially in Ontario and British Columbia, were active participants in the AERO network. Canadian educators and homeschoolers assisted AERO as interns, and even helped build and maintain AERO's website. Many were inspired by the Free School movement of the 1960's, publishing provocative articles in the network's official magazine, *The Education Revolution*. These articles often criticized the push to standardized education through neoliberal reforms and outcomes-based education. These educators helped form and reinforce the network's stand against "the standards movement," a stance which resonated amongst alternative educators across the world.

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<sup>100</sup> Ellis and Yoon, "From Alternative Schools"

<sup>101</sup> See "Home Education News," *The Education Revolution*, Winter 2001, 15. [https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO\\_EdRev31.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO_EdRev31.pdf); and "Teachers Jobs and Internships," *Education Revolution*, Spring/Summer 2001, 24. [https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO\\_EdRev32.pdf](https://www.educationrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AERO_EdRev32.pdf).

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