

## CHAPTER VII

### THE WINTER OF EVERYONE'S DISCONTENT:

#### Plans and Planning for 1973-76

A prized feature of Experimental Schools was its commitment to five-year "forwarding funding." The project would have long enough to give comprehensive change a fair try. Its managers did not have to re-justify its existence every year, and then live in uncertainty until an appropriations committee or a project officer said (probably at the last minute) they could continue work. The 1971 Minneapolis proposal, in fact, included a full five-year budget in considerable detail.

That budget was to be approved, however, in two stages. At the start only Years-1 and -2 were firm and finite. The second-stage figures, Years 3-5, were only an approximate projection. Before any final decision, there must be concrete planning, building on experience to date. Before the end of Year-2, Minneapolis and SEA would have to describe what they intended for 1973-76.

It took from November to May to do the job. During that time SEA and Experimental Schools communicated more and collaborated less than in any period before or since. A would-be partnership in reform became instead a relationship which one side could publicly say "appeared to border on enmity," and the other publicly deplore for its "debilitating effects." There is no intent now to retrace the details of this deterioration. It may be helpful to look with hindsight, though, at three general

aspects of what happened.

First, the major advantage of a forwarding funding concept, was never exploited. The five-year commitment, with mid-course review, inherently offered a negotiation framework, in which the issues were properly about planning, and precisely not about funding. There was no more need for grantor/grantee courtship games. In theory, that phase of the relationship was over. There was no question whether Minneapolis would go ahead with SEA, and there was equally no question whether Washington would fund it. In the approved original proposal, before everyone's eyes, there was even a starting-point projection of what the funding might look like -- slightly under \$3 million. Presumably the refunding task was negotiated planning of how best to allocate resources in more or less that amount. SEA would take the planning lead, to be sure, since SEA was responsible for execution. But Experimental Schools should influentially join in, since Experimental Schools was more than a minor partner. Where they disagreed, about substance or about budget, they could negotiate their differences. Presumably.

Yet what happened was little like this at all. Despite forward funding, both Washington and Minneapolis immediately reverted to old behavior. The work they did neither looked nor felt like negotiation of an agreement on how to carry forward the job they had already begun. It was much more like maneuvering for a new proposal, adding to and replacing the first. The forward-funded starting-point budget was quickly forgotten. Instead of planning, the mood on both sides was grantsmanship. Experimental Schools let it be known there was money, but was very coy about saying how much. SEA fell into the come-hither trap, and expansively set out to shoot the moon.

The result, in the last of four successively more massive drafts, was a 700-page proposal with an \$8.6 million price-tag. That was in April, by which time tempers were already strained. In the next month they became more so. Experimental Schools staff expressed great shock, and wondered how SEA could have ever imagined such a level of subsidy. Go back home, they told the Minneapolis delegation, and cut out \$5 million. SEA registered even greater indignation, and wondered what sort of people these were who kept changing the rules in the middle of the game.

Recriminations a-plenty followed, but so did the task-oriented work of coming back to earth. On May 11 a final negotiation produced a contract at last. Its bottom-line figure was slightly over \$3 million.

The second point worth attention is what happens to planning as such in a setting of grantor/grantee behavior. For most of a school year SEA's planning process was enormously profligate of time and energy. Pipedreams and falsely raised hopes -- since Experimental Schools would not discuss them piecemeal, and since there supposedly was no ceiling on what could be asked -- had to be fully explained in narrative and costed out in detail for a three year span. Much of this labor was almost totally in vain.

It was bad enough that it drew staff and parents away from primary concerns into a chase for the end of the rainbow. It was worse that it left them burned out and let down when they finished. But it was worst of all when it taught people that planning was the same as making a plan. For that was what the innumerable total of meetings first produced -- a 700-page book which few have ever consulted since.

Perhaps it was perversely fortunate that this product was so overblown, and except for the budget pages never rewritten. People could

ignore it safely, push it from memory as fast as possible, and swear never to do anything like that again. For reality-based work in that final month, and for the rest of 1973-76, all they needed to preserve was the one truly valuable aspect of this whole experience.

That was, third, the habit in all SEA schools and components of looking three, four, even five years ahead. The production of a 1973-76 plan, for all its costs and inadequacies, did at least require that. Every committee and task force had to consider how they wanted their component of a K-12 system to look after Experimental Schools went away. Even imaginary resources of people and money had to be allocated with an eye to their future impact. People got accustomed to thinking about schools in a stretched-out time frame which for most of them was new.

There is evidence that among many this kind of planning outlook -- as distinguished from mere proposal writing -- took root. In the winter-spring of 1976, there were active parent led groups in Southeast quite matter-of-factly at work extending present concerns about governance, buildings, enrollment, and the alternatives themselves into a 3-5 year future.

And perhaps the strongest evidence is negative -- like Sherlock Holmes' dog that didn't bark in the night. In June 1976, at the close-out of five years and \$7 million, no one thought to organize a big SEA end-of-the-project picnic or party. In a real sense, there was no end-of-the-project. That may be because instead of putting everything in a plan, the SEA participants had grown used to planning.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MANY A MICKLE MAKING A MUCKLE:

#### The Five Schools -- 1973-76

We turn now to a compressed look at the most distinctive developments in the schools during the remaining three years of federal involvement. The first two years had brought extremely rapid influx of resources and ideas. By the start of Year-3 all five schools had more than enough opportunities and issues to fill their agendas for 1973-76. There were still important new phases, breakthroughs, and dead-ends, but no major surprises in what the schools could undertake. Successfully or otherwise, they all dealt with matters which had already surfaced.

The context for dealing with them, however, was changed and changing. Above all, factors internal and external to SEA made the schools more interdependent. They were not now just five institutions embarked on innovation and self-improvement. They were a cluster, with structure, identity, survival needs, domestic relations, and foreign policies of its own. Each school's environment for development was intimately a part of each other's. Before looking at them individually, it is important to illustrate how this was so.

Two major factors have already been discussed: the integrative impetus of SEA's own K-12 services, and the toiling together for all components on 1973-76 proposals to Washington. Both increased each school's familiarity with the others, and multiplied occasions for people to work