

# **TAMARIKI SCHOOL**

**An Essay covering its beginnings, its aims and its development**

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Tamariki School exists as a result of the attempt by a small group of parents to provide an optimum school experience for their children. The name of the founding proprietary body, Creative Education Incorporated, (changed in 1975 to Tamariki School Incorporated) indicates their pioneering courage in stepping away from the traditional New Zealand State system. Both original parents and succeeding ones shared an above average awareness of the diversity of children's developmental patterns and the inter-relatedness of human needs. While the State system is also undoubtedly progressing, its bureaucratic nature in itself inhibits the pace of change. Tamariki parents felt therefore that any really significant progress in educational reform was unlikely to occur in time to benefit their children. An innovative alternative form of schooling was felt to be an acceptable and viable option to what Montagu describes as a 'dedication to the extinction of individuality and creativity in the child by treating him, among other things, as if he were a mere anonymous unit in an agglutinated mass of similar units'.

Tamariki is a small private primary school situated currently at 83 Rutherford Street, Christchurch which was originally established in 1967 by a group of parents seeking an alternative to the State education system. The origins of the founding group are found in casual meetings of three women - Catherine Ascott, Joan Smith and Colleen Byfield - who were friends and had a common interest in discussing their children's education two years previously. Eventually they decided to place a small advertisement calling a public meeting and this resulted in an overwhelming response with an initial attendance of fifty to sixty people. The decade was a time noted for wide-spread questioning and increased awareness of the need to critically evaluate educational goals and methods. Many of the newcomers had themselves been in small groups discussing these matters in general. Others came individually because of particular problems their own children had been experiencing at school. The three originators were not disaffected teachers but saw themselves as a spontaneous grass-roots working class group. Over 1966 and 1967 many meetings were held to discuss human growth and development - both adult and child. Since any parent contemplating an alternative to an established education system is by that very fact, more likely to have strong opinions, these early meetings were frequently stormy as people struggled to thrash out consensual definitions of the objectives of a new school, principles, aims and methods. Numerous people attended one or two meetings, then decided things were not what they themselves wanted and drifted off. A small hard core of families battled on with exhausting fund-raising schemes and formulating policy decisions. Among the various schemes to raise money were making place-mats (at one stage there was a committal to making over 300 a week), stalls, making puzzles and other items for sale, progressive dinners etc. The minutes of the time bear vivid witness to the desperate struggle it must have been. All the original parents formed a de facto committee with a chairman elected to facilitate proceedings. They formed an incorporated society - Creative Education Incorporated - to act as proprietors which had a subscription fee of one dollar and to which all parents then and now belong as shareholders. As an incorporated society, all the parents are shareholders. Should the school be closed, then all the assets and liability for debts would be shared out equally. A soundly constructed constitution (Appendix A) was later drawn up and proved invaluable for stability and guidance.

A major difficulty was foreseen in attracting a suitable teacher since the strong influence of A. S. Neil of Summerhill on the philosophical basis of Tamariki meant academic qualifications were not the sole criterion or even the most important. Nor was lengthy teaching experience. Discussions were held among the parents to try to identify and list what characteristics were deemed desirable in a teacher for this particular situation. These were held to be that the teacher was non-authoritarian, possessed warmth and outgoingness, a high degree of mental health, and extensive knowledge of children's emotional needs, fears and anxieties. Personal qualifications were regarded as more important than actual experience. Indeed formal training it was felt, could possibly suppress the empathy required. Eventually Miss June Higginbottom was appointed for the position as it was felt that her previous record of teaching at Summerhill and other alternative schools indicated a person of rare and valuable experience. A major concern was that the teacher should be allowed freedom to act in ways that he/she considered appropriate i.e. that there be room for professional expertise to operate. Defining what was required in a teacher was a long and difficult evolutionary process in such a diverse group of parents who were aware that overseas experience had shown that alternative type schools tended to fall apart on academic standards. A large unknown was what effect transition from a State school to Tamariki would have. Since no method of education can guarantee equal success, parents sought to ensure the maximum optimisation of skills.

Principles of the school as formulated by founding members were as follows:

1. The school is to provide the best possible environment for the emotional, mental, academic and physical growth of the child.
2. The teacher is to be a professional, positive person, sensitive to the children's needs.
3. It is certain that feelings of co-operation, rather than competition in work and play, will evolve in this school community. Competition in scholarly attainment will not be encouraged or used as a means of gaining comparative praise or recognition among the children. Prize giving is a negative spur to learning.
4. The school is to be a place where the optimum of spontaneity and individuality is to be looked for in so far as it does not interfere with the needs of others. Thus it will be seen that children will be helped towards self-government and self-discipline as far as possible.
5. Corporal punishment has no place in this school. Problems are to be freely discussed with the parents. Discipline and order will be achieved, not by fear of punishment but by mutual respect for the needs of children and adults within the school.
6. Parents are expected to take both an active and co-operative interest in the school and are encouraged to seek assistance within the school to further understand their child's nature and needs.
7. Questions on all subjects arising will be answered by the teacher as naturally as she is able. Religion will not be formally taught.
8. The children's individual needs to food and rest are to be studied and catered for.

The three original founding members had virtually dropped out by the time the school opened on September 6th 1967 due to personal differences. One had her child enrolled for one term and then withdrew while another did not enrol her child for several years. The core group of organizing parents came from all walks of life, but there was an above average incidence of educational qualifications and awareness. In retrospect several now agree that they felt themselves to be innovators, possibly idealists and certainly dissatisfied consumers. All shared a conviction that discipline based on fear of authority is not good and recognised that anxiety and learning are incompatible. Several parents had considerable Play Centre experience.

Prior to the school's opening most, if not all the parents, had read widely and shared a basic philosophy which supported human mental health. A few parents had not really had very much secondary education and felt very strongly that vital areas of personal growth had been achieved after and perhaps in spite of school experiences. Much support was given by people connected with the clinic of Dr. Maurice Bevan Brown as they perceived almost immediately that this type of schooling supported the findings which had come out in Dr. Bevan Brown's practice about children's mental health. Cognitive theorists such as Piaget were found useful only in supporting the theory that there is a developmental sequence in cognitive growth; that there is no point, in fact one can do damage, in trying to push cognitions onto children before they have achieved a base onto which to attach them. The primary notions of Harry Stack-Sullivan of validation and authentication of children were felt to be important. Other theorists studied were J. A. Hadfield, A. Suttie, H. V. Dicks, Ashley Montagu - many of the then current British innovators in mental health research and above all A. S. Neill of Summerhill whose ideas many of the parents had read, discussed and supported. *Neill seemed to recognize the role of the adult in providing a model, in being there to keep the child safe, and providing security for the child to explore its world. Factors of sound mental health such as internalised self-discipline and self-awareness were considered to be a primary seed-bed for mechanisms of learning.*

The initial group had to cope with personality clashes and problems due to the dynamics of the group. It was a most difficult group to try and prevent self-destruction caused by the diversity of opinion. Since radical thinkers are not always the most compromising, there was growth for the parents in the establishment of such a totally different environment.

Tamariki School was given its name by Sylvia Ashton-Warner with whom the group corresponded, although she felt unable to be its patron. The first premises were rented - Derry's Band Hall in England Street., Linwood. This was a typically small suburban hall with minimal outside grounds so that the children had to go to a nearby park in Cashel Street to use recreational equipment there. The commencing roll was 10 - seven girls and three boys which may have indicated that parents were more prepared to take a risk with female children's education rather than their sons'. (Over recent years the proportion of boys has been reversed with at times there being a desperate shortage of girls to maintain a reasonable balance). Various parents who had expressed interest earlier fell by the way as they had wanted a school which was more structured and authoritarian. This has been a continuing pressure from succeeding parents who have wanted the children's learning to be

taken over more. With hindsight, some founding parents felt that initially the capacity of Tamariki to cope with children with special needs was overestimated. There were some seriously disturbed children enrolled in the early years. Later an autistic child and a child with Down's syndrome attended. No child would be turned down because of a handicap but the possible effects on the entire school body would be taken into consideration. Several large families (Edwards, Croll and Price) which had four or five children gave long term continuity and stability as their association with the school spanned twelve to fifteen years. Their experience and reassurance was a tremendous help to new parents.

The first two days after opening were quite chaotic as children had obviously been told this was a do-it-yourself school where one could do anything one liked. The teacher took no authority role in this situation at all but comforted children who were made miserable. After a day and a half the children began to question her as to what went on at her previous schools. The teacher then explained that meetings were held to sort out problems and the children of Tamariki themselves decided to try this system. It was felt important that the children be encouraged, even pushed to take some kind of authority for themselves. The first meeting was held at which it was decided that if one said 'Stop it', then the other person had to stop (interfering, annoying, etc.). If they did not, another meeting was held. This basic experience of active democratic organisation and involvement worked moderately well and was a source of great interest and experimentation for the children. After about 1&1/2 years they developed the formula 'I request you' (to stop etc.) which has worked so well it, has remained an integral part of the school ever since.

Derry's hall itself has been described as a nightmare by the first parents. It had to be cleaned up by 3pm in readiness for a private dance class. Parents were asked to come in to help at 2.30pm and a frenzy of cleaning and tidying up began with whoever was available. All the equipment had to be stored away in little side rooms and it was an exhausting task. It had been a hard struggle to provide equipment to commence with. Funds were about \$1,000 which was just enough to pay for the lease and the initial salary for the teacher. Parents made some equipment - large wooden boxes and puzzles. The Education Department provided some valuable maths books and later some ready-to-read books which were less useful. Otherwise parents were forced to solicit materials and funds wherever possible to provide essentials such as paint, paper, dress-up clothing, items for imaginative and manipulative play and books. Very little was spent on books initially although parents were constantly scavenging for them. Donations were used and from the start, Tamariki was able to make great use of both the National Library service and the Country Library service. The National Library service allowed 100 books for 6 months and the Country Library service had a system whereby an applicant could get 30 books per class each month. Because of the age range at Tamariki (5 to 11 years) it was feasible to claim the school had two classes and thereby obtain 60 books per month.

The school was opened with 'provisional' status as regards registration - a category not actually allowed for in the Education Act. There was to be a long drawn out campaign until full registration was granted in 1975. The founding parents felt very vulnerable to department criticism although it appeared that the school could not be closed without good

reason. Health Department regulations were much more mandatory. The inspectorate appeared uncertain as to what to make of Tamariki and obviously desired to grant full registration as without it, the school was an anomalous nuisance. The steering committee of the school however slowly gained respect as it became obvious it would co-operate but not be coerced. While the parents were uncompromising on philosophical grounds, both they and the department worked hard to modify their demands and achieve an acceptable middle ground.

The school was moved to new premises at 83 Rutherford Street in February 1969. This consisted of a large weather board old house set in half an acre with fruit trees, hedges and 'wilderness' areas. There were a teachers room, a large class-room (designated the Quiet Room as most of the academic work takes place here), a large art and craft room, woodwork room, sewing room and kitchen as well as two other rooms generally used for imaginative play, science etc.

The first inspection was held on the 11th November 1969 by two inspectors who expressed concern about the lack of adequate toilet facilities. (The standard formula of X no. of toilets for Y no. of children as used for State schools is irrelevant to the situation at Tamariki where children are able to go and use these facilities as their bodily functions demand instead of a concerted rush at bell-times. There are therefore no large numbers of pupils at any one time requiring these facilities). It appeared difficult for the inspectors to grasp this reality. Another major area of concern was the lack of evidence of any planning and control over the direction studies might take. Also neglected, they considered, were the regulations covering the regular assessment of pupil attainment and progress. Section 186 of the Education Act 1964 stresses the "efficiency of curriculum". No-one has yet been able to adequately define and demonstrate this term and it was felt to emphasize a quantitative mechanistic view of education instead of the qualitative perspective held by Tamariki parents. The inspectors did support the philosophy that children should develop when they feel the need and at their own rate. Their report concluded by saying that until teaching methods were modified or until the work of pupils using existing methods could be objectively assessed to show all round progress was being made full registration could not be recommended. A later inspection on 6th November 1971 again was critical of the interior environment which was rated neither attractive nor stimulating, untidy and sub-standard. The lack of visible short term plans and a systematic progressive approach in lessons was further criticised. The parent body and the head teacher (by now there were two assistants) endeavoured to improve these matters in an effort to gain full registration which was felt to be beneficial in providing funding for greater facilities, equipment and staff salaries without necessarily relinquishing control. The teaching staff at this time consisted of Mrs. June Bent (nee Higginbottom) L.T.C.L. - Head Teacher, Mrs. Patricia Edwards, B.A. - Uncertificated teacher and Mr. Brian Lilburn, M.A. - part time certificated teacher. All teachers were rated able to take all "tool" subjects but with Mrs. Edwards taking Science and much of Social Studies, Mrs. Bent most of Maths, Language, Music, Art and Craft. Mr. Lilburn was gradually taking more of Maths, Art, Crafts and Applied Science.

Upon registration Tamariki was advised it would be eligible to receive the following grants:

Grant "A"	- \$4.59 for each pupil enrolled as at 1st March.
Library	- minimum school grant \$36.00.
Telephones	- basic annual rental divided by number of extensions + telephone.
Swimming pool grant	- \$30 to \$90 depending on capacity.
Grant "B"	- \$4.85 for each pupil enrolled as at 1st March.
Grant "C"	- per capita grant towards the cost of teachers' salaries.
Free Textbooks	- 38c for each pupil enrolled as at 1st March.

During the protracted negotiations prior to registration, Tamariki was undoubtedly fortunate to have as its chairman Mr. H. E. Harris, who possessed extensive knowledge of human development and considerable negotiating skills as well as other very articulate and highly qualified members. A statement of the aims of the school was drawn up by Mr. Harris to explain several aspects of the school's operation and to answer the inspectors' criticisms. The aims were *'to provide a school where individual attention is available to the children by virtue of a low teacher-pupil ratio, ideally twenty to one. The children may progress at their own pace in the learning process in which social, intellectual and emotional growth are considered to be of equal importance. Parental participation is expected in the school'*. The statement claimed that Tamariki can be considered to provide progressive education as it is generally defined i.e. *the development of an experimental and enquiring attitude in its pupils rather than their indoctrination*. The subject matter was accepted as a means rather than an end in human development. *The unique individuality of each child was to be recognised with the development of every aspect of his/her personality, the goal of education*. The school system of self-government by meetings with a rotational chairman drawn from the more senior pupils was claimed to be superior to either laissez-faire or rigid control and tending to support Piaget's dictum of education from heteronomy to autonomy - from behaviour regulations from outside authority *towards self-regulation in a responsible manner within a group of equals*.

Since registration in 1975 there have been several staff changes. Mrs. Bent left that year due to personal and health problems and the school continued under the guidance of Mr. Tony Webster and Mrs. Edwards who although officially uncertificated were skilled, highly aware, sensitive and responsive teachers. Over the next few years Misses Sue Dick, Clare Petrie, and Robin Stanley-Joblin were on the staff for short periods. In 1984 Ms. Jane Buxton was employed part-time and also Ms. Ruth Evans as a teacher's aide under the V.O.T.P. scheme. Departmental concern over the positions of Mrs. Edwards (Head Teacher) and Mr. Webster has been assuaged as both are working towards obtaining registration through correspondence courses from Palmerston North Training College.

Another distinctive feature of Tamariki school is that while attendance at school is compulsory, attendance at formal lessons is not, the children being encouraged to participate in these lessons and working out a time-table to suit themselves. During these lessons the normal curriculum is covered and standard text books used. Classes are available

in mathematics and language in the morning with history and geography in the afternoon. Science is most commonly taught in blocks around particular areas of interest. Teaching practices at Tamariki have proved difficult to assess because they were so different. The situation has become more modified as similar things are now being done in State schools. Many traditional customs in teaching were felt to be supporting the need of educators to be assured that they were actually achieving something i.e. assessments and tests are used to demonstrate the teacher's function. Curriculum, texts, lessons, periods marked by bells, teachers, examinations and graded promotions were claimed by McGrath to be the invention of some Irish monks who wished to bring Roman dogma to illiterate wild shepherds. This old monkish invention of formal schooling is now used as universal social engineering. *The aim of Tamariki is to provide an environment in which children could most fully be themselves following their own rhythms of growth and patterns of learning.* A. S. Neill says that 'the State school carries on the tradition of keeping the child down and quiet, respectful and castrated. It trains him to be obedient to all the petty dictators and bosses of life'. John Koyal writing in Ramparts 1972 says that 'schools exist to turn out manageable workers, obedient consumers, manipulative voters and if need be willing killers'.

The voluntary nature of lessons is frequently viewed with horror by visitors to the school and other outsiders who fail to perceive the immense learning experience that 'play' involves. They also confuse freedom with licence. As at Summerhill, a child is free to go to lessons or stay away because that is his own affair, but he is not free to interfere without permission with another's work or game. There are in fact more rules at Tamariki than a traditional school but because the children have been actively involved in their formulation, they can see how their application facilitates the general good and that it is not a case of authority for authority's sake.

The whole school meeting is the highest court of appeal and held as often as needed with teachers retaining the supreme veto in matters of health and safety. After discussion, motions are moved, seconded and voted on. At these meetings teachers themselves may come in for quite heated criticism and be expected to explain their actions. This is one of several areas where a traditionally trained teacher would possibly be unsuited at Tamariki in that he/she must provide a positive role model in submitting to the discipline of the democratic decision and not shelter behind an authoritarian position. In this way a teacher is seen to practice democracy, not merely preach it.

Being a teacher at Tamariki is most stressful as he/she is expected to be totally accessible and is subject at times to combined and undiluted pressure from parents. Since *this type of education is concerned not only with academic and physical but also emotional and social development i.e. the total child*, a Tamariki teacher is very much a surrogate parent with bonding relationships developing as the children learn to know, like and trust themselves. All forms of behaviour are confronted in the exploration of hidden dynamics with a view to each taking responsibility for themselves. Not only socially acceptable forces are explored i.e. the dark side of human nature is not ignored. Since the teacher does not erect facades, the child does not learn to fear authority. The teacher's role is above all to *allow the child to move towards self-determination - the ability to foresee consequences, the ability to*

*consider circumstances and the ability to take responsibility for the effects of one's own behaviour.* A teacher at Tamariki is sometimes expected to handle parents' problems. These may range from purely personal matters of marital discord, divorce, serious illness etc., to philosophical debate. The accepting nature of the environment means that these problems have a propensity to surface. Because of the parents' close association with the school there is a sense of an extended family type of support network, which for many parents is an unexpected bonus and one which leads to much personal growth of their own. A further great problem for a Tamariki teacher is the abysmally low salary. The school is literally run on a shoe-string to keep fees as low as possible, so as to not provide a barrier to any entrant. (Initial fees were \$40 per term, currently [1985] \$235 per quarter). Operating costs e.g. electricity are irreducible and although parents contribute much in terms of voluntary working bees and obtaining cheap materials for necessary renovations etc., advertisements for teaching positions always stress that salary is not an incentive. Only recently in fact was the level of the minimum award wage reached. A position at Tamariki is not seen to be of use for career promotion later either.

Beside using the school site, pupils participate in many activities elsewhere. These include horse-riding lessons, sailing (the school has owned its own Optimist sailing dinghy), roller and ice-skating, ski-ing, trips to a mountain hut at Kowai Bush near Springfield (managed in trust by a former parent), and visits to local industries, exhibitions, beaches etc. Whatever is of interest to the children, available and practicable, is organised by both children and adults. Within the school the outside playground is utilised to the utmost to foster creativity and cultivate the child's innate sense of the adventure of life. It is unconventional to the extent that there is no reliance on structured or adult constructed equipment. Instead there are huts, tree houses, a log maze and until recent vandalism proved them a liability with broken glass, old car bodies. Areas are developed as they are dictated by the children's needs. The same basic building materials can therefore be creatively used in fantasy construction of space-ships, boats or forts. The critical observer who feels that Tamariki is all play and no work has failed to appreciate that play is children's work. It is the means by which children shape their world and ideas. At Tamariki the children are in intimate contact with the basic elements of earth, fire and water. The numerous excavations carried out reveal graphically and texturally the various soil strata and the properties of each type. Pit fire-places are made and used under adult supervision - there is nearly always a few parents at hand for these duties. Water is freely available and the resulting dams etc. provide practical experience of the laws of physics etc. A long knotted rope swing has long been a favourite item at Tamariki with the children noticeably extending their take-off point from the supporting tree as their confidence and competence increases. Many a child under stress has found comfort in this soothing rhythm. Tamariki has also at times built its own pottery kiln. Since there is no arbitrary division into classes, all children who wish to take part, do so at their own level.

The sex role stereotyping which appears in other schools does not do so at Tamariki. It is accepted as a matter of course that girls can do woodwork, boys can do cooking and that all have a need for fantasy play. Other projects over the years have been photography (the entire process), printing (making own newspapers), dyeing, wine-making (allowed by the

Department as a scientific process if not consumed) and animal care. Children are free to bring pets to school if they are not disruptive. Over the years there have been numerous cats, rats, guinea pigs, rabbits, fish, birds, mice etc.

In all areas there is enormous input by the children. Science and drama are but two examples where there is much spontaneous activity. Over a child's eight years attendance at school there is enormous exposure to drama especially since the children largely conceive, write, produce, direct and act in productions as well as tackle technical aspects such as lighting, props, and sound effects. These skills are recognised by a long established tradition of school concerts which are hilarious performances by both children and parents. Tamariki makes exceptional use of parental resources as each parent upon enrolling his/her child lists their own skills and resources which are then available if needed. While not encroaching on the teacher's professional activities, parents who are able to function in the non-authoritarian style required by the school's philosophy, have been able to give guidance with art and craft subjects such as pottery, sewing, cooking. In these fields children explore other cultures. Education is viewed as a totality at Tamariki and therefore subjects are inter-related and not taught in isolation.

Tamariki owes an enormous amount to Summerhill although it differs in administrative detail and in being owned by an incorporated society rather than by an individual. It also differs in being solely primary and a day school only. Meetings at Summerhill are held on a weekly basis whereas at Tamariki they are held immediately to solve current problems. Many meetings do not involve calling the whole school in - minor matters are dealt with by the people immediately concerned with a teacher present as facilitator plus any witnesses necessary to illuminate the situation. What is owed to Summerhill is a great deal more to do with the spirit of the place. *Tamariki recognises that how experience appears to the child, what the child is making of his experience and supporting that child in developing self-determination are what is important.*

An early inspector remarked that he would like to see the children 8 years on. Now that it has been established 18 years, it has become obvious that children who have spent a significant period in this environment do in fact succeed in many areas of life. Reports from secondary schools indicate that Tamariki children are exceptionally socially mature and flexible. Their academic attainments vary as do those of entrants from any contributing school. However there are now ex-pupils in tertiary institutions and in the work-force who are noticeably non-aggressive but assertive and possess exceptional tolerance and understanding of human relationships. While the competitive system of schooling must produce plenty of losers lest the credentials of the winners diminish in value, the continuity of nurture provided at Tamariki protects the child's individuality and self esteem. Although the scope and purpose of education in the general sense is intellectual, emotional education is largely the effect of the teacher upon the children and also of the children on each other. It would appear that initial 'selection of state teachers for training on the basis of mental health or qualities of personality is not given as much scrutiny as is desirable'<sup>1</sup>. Despite support from the upper levels of the Education Department both in the past and as

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<sup>1</sup> Bevan Brown, M. : Mental Health and Education in Mental Health and Personality Disorder p55. LC Ayers 1985

indicated by the proposed visit of the Minister of Education, Mr. Marshall, to the school on November 12th 1985, the middle and lower hierarchy retain a conservative stance. At least two Tamariki parents who have applied for teacher training have been, they feel, unmistakably rejected because of prejudice.

In a rapidly changing society and world, *the full, harmonious and organised development of the individual as an integrated person as fostered by Tamariki provides a child with the security of self-awareness and the flexibility to respond to change without fear.* Regimented authoritarian schools using American methods and texts unmodified for New Zealand conditions were of more concern to the Department than Tamariki as it became apparent that this school is very much in the mainstream and ahead of the mainstream. While Tamariki is seen to be acceptable ideologically it is the practical methods which draw criticism. The negative findings always have to do with individual children's levels of work e.g. tidiness and the apparent lack of pressure from teachers. Tamariki does not claim to be the ultimate and only way of education. Some criticisms have been made by pupils e.g. that because of the small size of the school (usually between 36 and 41 in recent times) and the wide age range there are sometimes insufficient people to form a team for particular sports activities and at times children may not have an age peer.

Tamariki remains in the forefront as an innovative pioneer. Computer experience was available shortly after home/ school models were on the market in 1980. Children therefore have access to this equipment from the age of five. Also in 1981 Tamariki decided to implement a four term year – possibly the very first school in New Zealand to do so. This has proved to be definitely beneficial to both pupils and staff. Some difficulty was at first experienced due to the misfit of commercial attractions held during the standard May and August holidays. However Tamariki pupils organise a group outing to any of these attractions which they desire to attend. The parental network provides a support system for working parents - many of the children although coming from all areas of the city, spend time in each other's homes. The annual whole school camp is a much valued opportunity for intense discussions, socialisation and recreation for both parents and children.

Unlike most other private schools, Tamariki is most definitely not elitist. Parents come from all walks of life and all socio-economic groups. A survey undertaken by Mrs. Edwards in 1970 indicated that of the parents then, 2/5 were self-employed, 2/5 were on wages and 1/5 were professionals on wages. This pattern has changed in recent years reflecting changes in the wider society. There are now a number of solo parents and beneficiary parents. One parent whose child has been to three other alternative schools in New Zealand felt that Tamariki was by far the most political, meaning it in the old Greek sense that the school is very concerned with the dynamics of how people live together. The founding parents had been very aware of the kinds of political choices that had been made in education in New Zealand e.g. age-group promotion, size of classes, structure of classes. Whatever the stated function, the state system was operating to turn out group-biddable citizens who would accept being failures and slotted in here or there. At Tamariki, play, i.e. the creative manipulation of the environment physically and in fantasy, is a primary learning mode. The

imagination of the child is cherished and protected, not crushed by conformity for as Einstein said "Imagination is better than knowledge".

At Tamariki both children and teachers are unafraid to display feelings, to offer the support of touch and be on first name basis. The school system gives great importance to the development of oracy and its pupils are in general noticeably articulate. Like Summerhill, Tamariki is not just a school but a way of life. The children are full of life and zest with a light in their eyes and relaxed body posture, lacking shyness and self-consciousness. In a supportive environment where the strategies of life are learned, Tamariki school, after 18 years, has proven to encourage initiative, responsibility, integrity and humanity.

#### SOURCES

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