

## The Garden Road

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Kindergarten, it's the first year of school, and your five year old is excited for his or her first time in school. However, this could be a problem. Kindergarten is supposed to be a nurturing and loving environment, but nowadays, that's hard to come by. With all of the problems going on in the world, it changes places and people's attitudes. This leads to putting too much pressure on our children. However, a solution has been made: alternative schooling.

At the Garden Road, school is like a home. Because it is inside the home of two teachers, it has the loving and caring feel of a home, with the exciting and knowledgeable environment of a school. The classes are small (around 8 – 10 children). Teaching is done through acting, stories, music, and dance. The children even teach each other. Some of the teachers have started a band, "Teatro Imperfecto," which sets stories to music, that teach the children life's lessons and have morals. History is taught through the town's elders, they share their stories from their lives. This allows children to get a hands-on experience with the town's history, while teaching them to respect the elders for their wisdom and knowledge, which our society is lacking. One of the fun ways math is taught is through baking. Children use measurements which teaches them fractions. Science (living environment) is done through nature itself and by taking many field trips, the children expel energy while learning. Reading is taught by a game using t-shirts bearing letters and roller skates. The children then skate together to create a word. This teaching allows children to express themselves easily, learn quickly, and ensure that they are raised in a healthy way. The school focuses on showing children the ways of nature, and the proper treatment of animals, and a healthy lifestyle. Also, since there are no "tests" the children are at ease and don't have the same stressors as typical public school students. The school offers "specials" (art, music, and gym) although they are incorporated in all the subjects, which again makes the children most eager to attend the school and learn.

Many people (in the town of Croton where the school is located) disagree with the school's teaching. Mostly because it is in some one's house, but also because the teaching is "insufficient" due to the school's location and small class sizes. Most teachers are criticized, and are stereotyped as "hippies" because of the "free learning" process practiced at the school. However, at the Garden Road, you will find that the children are valued for their individuality and uniqueness and that the teachers do not specialize only in just one teaching, they go beyond the borders of standard academics.

The only *negative* that could be criticized is the fact that the classes are small (due to the location) and that "outsiders" see this as a negative, affecting the child's social skills. But once you're a part of the Garden Road family, you realize that there is a large amount of socialization offered through the school's many programs including: youth groups, the Blue Star movement (for the homeschooled which involves a huge amount of community service). Other than that, the only *problem* is that the school only teaches K-3 (4 and up are done through a homeschooling program, again due to location and size of the school at this time).

Clearly, alternative schools (such as the Garden Road) have their advantages and “disadvantages.” However, in this type of alternative school, the children are never left behind and they interact with the community and environment. This one school focuses on the whole child and truly is (in my opinion) a stronger, more nurturing environment for our future leaders than that of public schools.