

**Though I do not believe
that a plant will spring up
where no seed has been,
I have great faith in a seed.
Convince me that you have a seed there,
and I am prepared to expect wonders.**
Henry D. Thoreau

In January of 1999, a group of educators and parents began brainstorming their vision of education. Influenced by the research into and practice of developmentally-appropriate education, as well as by their own children's educative experiences, the group came up with what remain key Attic tenets: developmentally-appropriate education, no rewards or punishments, multiage classrooms, child-centered curriculum, and time for childhood. The Attic's founding members (Pat Orrell, Shelley Maurer, Tracy Ruef, Anna Boyd, and Liz Hunter), honed these ideas into The Attic's Mission: *Nurturing in children a sense of self and a passion for learning, community, and childhood.*

August 23, 1999 - Established Board of Directors & Advisory Board

The Attic Learning Community was established as a non-membership Corporation in the State of Washington, governed by a Board of Directors consisting of parents, teachers, and advisory members from the greater educational community. A non-membership organization was intentionally chosen to preserve and protect the mission and vision of The Attic over time.

In addition to the Board of Directors, an Advisory Board was created consisting of members of community with expertise beyond that of the founders: Marlene Nelsen, M.A., master primary teacher and reading specialist; Cecile Culp Mielenz, Ph.D., early childhood educator, licensed mental health counselor, and parent coach; Katie Johnson, M.A., master primary teacher, author, and reading/writing specialist; and Grace Dublin, master upper-elementary teacher and social science specialist. All served for many years, as highly-valued advisors to the founders.



September of 1999 - It all started in an attic with research guiding practice

The Attic began its first year in Dave and Shelley Maurers' Woodinville attic, with 16 students aged 5-10. Pat Orrell served as our lead teacher, with Liz Hunter and Shelley Maurer supporting mathematics teaching, and many Attic parents helping out the classroom at least one half-day per week. Many Attic traditions were created and celebrated that first year: Flowing Lake picnic; a Halloween haunted house, built by kids, for kids; a winter Writer's Night celebration, and spring Interest Project event; an All-Attic family camping trip; a spring play, (*Joan of Arc* that first year) produced and directed entirely by the kids; and our first Attic Yearbook (in which each child designed and created their own page!).

Research-Guided Practice: Determined to create a developmental and constructivist learning environment, The Attic founders and parents, committed themselves to ongoing study and research, hosting parent-teacher book groups and workshops for the broader community. *The Art of Teaching Writing*, by Lucy Calkins (facilitated by Katie Johnson, author, teacher, and literacy specialist); *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, by James Loewen (facilitated by Grace Dublin, passionate

educator and social science specialist); *Mentor Parent Mentor Manager*, by Cecile Culp Meilenz (facilitated by the author); *Developing Logical Thinkers: The Developmental Activities Program (d.a.p.) Mathematics Course*, taught by Michelle Watts and Rita DeVries from Portland, OR. We also traveled to participate in *Visual Mathematics* classes offered by the Math Learning Center. This passion for study and for putting research into practice in their classrooms and homes continues to be a common characteristic of teachers and parents who are drawn to The Attic.

May 30, 2000 – Blythe Park End-of-Picnic

Celebrated the end of our first year with an all-Attic picnic at Blythe Park in Bothell. We played a rousing game of capture the flag, teams were the kids vs. the parents and teachers.

All-Attic Spring 2000



Back Row: Marisa Maurer, Sarah Maurer, Dylan Ruef, Letta (Exchange student from Quebec), Jasmine Boyd, James Orrell, Laura Hunter, Katy Cleveland, Gavin Boyd, Sam Blacketer, Christian Leverage, Front Row: Morgan Maurer, John Orrell, Emma Hunter, Connor McCaw.

January of 2001 – Outgrew the original attic space

Having grown to 23 children (ages 5-11), The Attic outgrew the Maurers' attic (and septic system) and was forced to move mid-year. We spent winter break of 2001 moving into a 3000-square foot house that we leased in Lake Forest Park, WA.

Spring of 2001 – First family trip, to Newport, Oregon

After a year of reading about and exploring the Oregon Trail, and taking a full-day covered-wagon ride together in the fall, we 'hit the trail' and journeyed as families to Newport Oregon where we went yurt camping and whale watching, visited the Lewis & Clark Museum, Tillamook cheese factory, and the Newport Aquarium. In the evening, we put on skits, recited poetry, sang songs, and danced to the kids favorite music. They loved watching their parents try to do the limbo! Future family trips would take our community to Four Winds Camp, Orcas Island, Chelan, Vashon Island, and Bowman Bay.

Fall of 2001 – Hired our first non-founder teacher

We shifted our expectations of parent volunteers so that we had more consistency from day-to-day in the classroom, and we welcomed Jessica Murphy, M.A. in Constructivist Education, and our first non-founder teacher, to our Attic team.

May of 2002 – Received non-profit status

The Attic received its federal non-profit status, 501(c)3.

Fall of 2002 - Started the search for a larger site

As The Attic continued to expand the age of children being served, 30 students (ages 5-13) were enrolled, and the search for a larger site consumed much volunteer parent and founder energy.

January of 2003 – Crystalized our mission and vision

An off-site retreat culminated the Board of Directors' work with Deb Mowat, a gifted consultant, to crystalize our mission and vision for The Attic. With Deb leading us to look deeply at our values and our work with children, the gems of our mission became clear and led to further visioning of our dreams for The Attic's future as a model learning community. Annual leadership/teaching team retreats became an important Attic tradition from this point forward.

Spring of 2003 – Staged a child's adaptation of The Mikado

Over the summer one of the children saw Gilbert & Sullivan's Mikado on stage in London, he returned to the Attic in the fall passionate about sharing his experience and love for theater. Through a series of all-Attic meetings, Max convinced all the Attic kids that they should produce an adaptation of the Mikado as their spring play. The kids had raised money, growing pumpkins in their own pumpkin patch on the Cleveland's farm, the year before, and used it to hire a Director, Marsha Stuekle. Together she and Max co-directed The Attic's adaptation of Gilbert & Sullivan's Mikado.



Max directs the Mikado



Harvesting pumpkins at the Cleveland's farm

Attic Class Picture Spring 2003 - Lake Forest Park Site



May of 2003 – Acquired Little Bear Creek site

With the financial backing of a newly created LLC , ‘The Friends of the Attic’, and the vision, commitment, and sweat-equity of many Attic parents, The Attic purchased a 5-acre site with over 500-feet of streambank on Little Bear Creek, a beautiful Salmon-bearing stream in Woodinville. The site included a home built in the 1950s and a large outbuilding.

Fall of 2003 – Moved to our new home which allowed for growth

In our new site we were able to increase enrollment to 42 students (ages 5-14) that first fall. September 1, 2003, Woodinville Weekly publishes article *“The Attic: giving children a sense of self.”*

**May of 2004 – First Annual Fundraising Auction**

Our first Annual Fundraising Auction cleared \$26K and let us know that with the support of our “Friends and Families of the Attic”, the future of The Attic would be bright!

Fall of 2004 – Launched high school program

When we founded The Attic, we had no intention of serving kids through high school, yet as our own kids reached middle school, we began to experience the potential of this approach and became determined that we wanted them to truly own their education as young adults right through the high school years. We believed that nothing could better prepare them for adulthood than to craft their own high school education and continue learning for the sake of learning, rather than succumbing to the game of grades and hoops and stickers. In the fall of 2004, we launched a rigorous high school program, with autonomy and self-knowledge being key tenets of our program. Teachers with passion for their subject area were attracted to The Attic’s educational philosophy.

As our high schoolers demanded more rigorous writing and social science classes, and more foreign language and science options, we also expanded our course catalog.

This same year we expanded our Board of Directors to include members of the community beyond the founders.

Fall 2005 - Grandpa Les joined the Attic

Beginning in the Fall of 2005 Pat's dad, Grandpa Les, became our first 'senior' primary classroom aid. His gift was allowing the children to lead their special one-on-one time with him. They might play a card or board game, read a book together, or just spend the time chatting or telling stories. He used to say that his greatest source of joy was being "Grandpa Les" to the youngest Attic students and spending time with them. He worked at the Attic until the spring of 2010. A Grandpa Les Memorial Endowment Fund was set up in his honor to support need-based tuition assistance scholarships for kids.

**Fall of 2006 – Inspired by experiences, teens created their own class.**

Our enrollment expanded to 52 students (ages 5-17). Inspired by attending the Northwest Association for Biomedical Research's Student BioTech Expo, three young Attic teens decided to create their own class focused on independent BioTech projects.

May of 2007 – Teens first participated in NW Student BioTech Expo

Three young Attic teens entered the 2007 Northwest Association for Biomedical Research's Student BioTech Expo and, not realizing that awards were given, brought home a second place and honorable mention in the Art category, second place in the Research category, and second place in prestigious Genomics prize category. Thus started a new Attic tradition with Attic teens entering the BioExpo every year and placing in the small group of award winners year after year.

October 27, 2007 – Hosted first Pacific NW Homeschool College Fair

The Attic hosted the first Pacific NW Homeschool College Fair, held at Cascadia Community College, with over 200 homeschoolers in attendance and over 30 colleges represented.

May 27, 2008 - First Attic High School graduation

Our first High School Graduation set in place traditions that continue today, we honor the graduates and involve the entire community in celebrating their launch. At our first graduation the younger children sang Flight, by Red Grammer; wrote their advice and wishes for the graduate on ribbons tying them onto roses and created a tunnel of love bidding

her farewell. Graduations are steeped with tradition- short slide shows per graduate, their own speakers, community involvement - and yet graduates, as a class, create the details of their own ceremony – be it a county band, a cheesecake potluck, or a class overnight after the ceremony.

May 2008 – First Attic graduation



Marisa Maurer, Laura Hunter, Sarah Maurer (first Attic graduate!)

January of 2009 – Board continued to professionalize organization

With a commitment to making The Attic *accessible and sustainable*, the Board of Directors moved to professionalize the Attic's fee structure and employment practices. This involved securing better benefit coverage for employees and raising tuition to cover the *actual costs* of educating a child. This adjustment meant that from this time forward, monies raised in our Annual Fund could be dedicated to *need-based* tuition assistance rather than being spread evenly across the program to keep tuition arbitrarily low for all, regardless of need. The number of families (including teacher-families) receiving need-based tuition assistance increased dramatically with this move. By increasing fundraising each year, and enhancing programs to better serve working families, the Board of Directors and the Executive Director remain committed to The Attic being accessible to all children, regardless of need.

March 2010 – Annual Fundraiser breaks \$100K

7th Annual Fundraising Auction grossed \$121K.

Attic Class of 2010



Lexi Menth, Paul Yasny, Katy Cleveland, Dylan Ruef, Marisa Maurer, Tessa Blacketer, Laura Hunter, Henry Kaye

Attic graduates soar Each year Attic seniors are accepted into the colleges of their choice and most are offered generous merit scholarship awards. For example, the eight graduates of the Class of 2010 were accepted to over 30 colleges and universities and were offered nearly \$600,000 in merit-based scholarships.

Fall of 2011 - Inspired by their interests, teens created Model UN class.

A group of 12 Attic middle and high schoolers drafted the Attic Model United Nations charter. In its 8 years of existence, this class and club has included the participation of over 50 learners and attended over 20 conferences throughout Washington and British Columbia.

March 8-10, 2011 – We hosted an Attic hero: Dr. Constance Kamii



The Attic community was thrilled to host internationally acclaimed professor, researcher, and author, Dr. Constance Kazuko Kamii, Ph.D. Dr. Kamii visited Attic classrooms, chatted with Attic teachers and kids, and offered an evening lecture and all-day workshop entitled *Encouraging Thinking in Mathematics: A Constructivist Approach*. Her 10-hour workshop was attended by over 75 parents and teachers. Dr. Kamii's pioneering methods in teacher education grew out of her 15-year association with renowned Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, whose lectures she attended as a student at the University of Geneva.

Spring 2011 – Attic kids reach out to others

Over the years, Attic kids have come up with creative ways to raise contributions (monetary & donations) to aid organizations such as the Red Cross, Homeward Pets, Heifer International, Hopelink, WE, and Haiti Relief. In addition to these organizations, The Attic's teens developed a special relationship with our local Tent City, and by 2011 they had prepared and served over 850 homeless individuals dinner over a 7 year period.

Fall 2011 – The Attic's Field & Forest Outdoor Preschool opened

Our Field & Forest Outdoor preschool was based on the German Forest Kindergarten model with children spending all of their time outdoors regardless of the weather. Our classes offer a balance of freedom and structure that follow the energy of the children, and honor play-based, emergent learning. There is no set curriculum, rather an authentic, child-centric pace to each day. Children are encouraged and supported to construct their own knowledge and find their own comfort level in all activities.



May 14, 2012 – Hosted film Race to Nowhere

The Attic hosted a community screening of this important documentary at the University of Washington, Bothell Campus. The film calls into question current educational and parenting practices that push kids toward disengagement, depression, and stress-related illness by over-scheduling, over-testing and the relentless pressure to achieve. Nearly 200 parents and educators attended our screening.

May 27, 2012 - Attic graduates confident to navigate their own path

The six graduates of the Class of 2012 were accepted to over 22 colleges and universities and offered \$525,000 in merit-based scholarships. While these are great stats, the real celebration is that kids leave The Attic confident in navigating their own path, ready to contribute to their communities, and whole.



Attic Class of 2012: Delilah Blacketer, John Orrell, Morgan Maurer, Gavin Boyd, Emma Hunter, Emily Cooper

March 16, 2013 – Groundbreaking at 53rd Street property



Brian Bansenauer, John Orrell, Tracy Ruef, Anna Boyd, Blake Ilstup, Liz Hunter, Pat Orrell break ground

Spring of 2013 – High schoolers traveled to Spain

After spending the year doing all of their own planning, 14 Attic high schoolers traveled to Spain. The group spent 12 days touring Madrid, Cordoba, and Barcelona.

Fall of 2013 – Director hired to lead Field & Forest Outdoor preschool

Elise Valsquier moved from the primary classroom to become Director of the Field & Forest Outdoor Preschool. The Attic was now serving over 80 students, ages 5-18.

February 2014 – Community raised over \$1m to build phase 1 of our forever home

We launched the *Re-imagine Education* Campaign to fund construction of the new Attic site and launch our 20-year build-out of The Attic campus.

Spring of 2014 – High Schoolers traveled to Washington DC

A group of 16 Attic high schoolers spent the fall planning a trip to Washington, DC. The group spent nine days in the nation's capital visiting the White House, both houses of Congress, the Supreme Court, and all of the Smithsonian Museums.

September 23, 2014 – We hosted an Attic hero: Alfie Kohn

The Attic community co-hosted independent scholar, author, and researcher Alfie Kohn, who offered a lecture for parents and educators entitled *Unconditional Parenting: Beyond Bribes and Threats*. Kohn is a proponent of progressive education, challenging practices such as the use of competition, incentive programs, conventional discipline, standardized testing, grades, homework, and traditional schooling. In the early days of The Attic, when asked about their mission, Attic Founders used to quip “to meet and exceed Alfie Kohn’s dreams!”



Attic Founders (Liz Hunter, Pat Orrell, Tracy Ruef, and Anna Boyd) were thrilled to co-host author and researcher, Alfie Kohn, whose research and ideas form many of the underpinnings of Attic practice. (Shelley Maurer - not pictured)

October 2014 – We began our North Campus construction



North Campus construction – Our long-term plan for The Attic's forever home is to have purpose built classrooms, community spaces, and a meeting area large enough for the community to gather to learn and play, to celebrate and share. A space where kids can put on a play, or present their work; where music, laughter, and good food can be enjoyed. We began with phase 1 a classroom space just big enough to house everyone in tight quarters until we can complete phase 2, our classroom building, and remove a few walls and convert phase 1, which is already plumbed and wired for this purpose, into our large community space with a full-size community kitchen and science and art classrooms.

March 2015 – Our 12th Annual Fundraising Auction grossed \$148K.

May 20, 2015 – Pioneer Day - The entire Attic – all kids and teachers and many parents – walked, or rode in a horse-drawn wagon, from South Campus to our **new North Campus!**



October 5, 2015 – Official Opening Day in our new North Campus!



March 2016 – Our 13th Annual Fundraising Auction grossed \$172K.

March 17-18, 2016 – Hosted workshop on protecting children in the Digital Age

The Attic co-hosted international speaker and consultant, Dr. Catherine Steiner-Adair, who offered an evening lecture and full-day workshop for educators and parents titled *The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age*.

February 2017 – Founding Director decided it was time for a new hat

After 18 years of leading the Attic, Founding Director, Pat Orrell took a much-deserved sabbatical, during which she decided it was time for her to step down as Executive Director and focus on The Attic as a model learning community reaching “beyond our four walls”.

May 2017 – New Executive Director hired

Acting Executive Director, John Anthony Bassett (formerly Director of Secondary Programs) was hired to serve as Executive Director.

Summer of 2017 – Catalyst Team created to focus on spreading the model

The original vision of The Attic founders was to be a model learning community. As The Attic approached the celebration of its 20th year, the Board of Directors formed a Catalyst Team to more fully leverage the Attic’s power and potential as a model learning community reimagining education. Two questions guide our Catalyst work: *How can the Attic best be a light reaching beyond our four walls to positively impact education? How can connections to people, programs, and ideas outside our four walls enhance our work for kids?*

Fall of 2017 – First Attic Alum returns as Teacher at the Attic

Dylan Ruef, Attic Class of 2010, became the first Attic Alum to join The Attic Teaching Team, offering classes in social science, and supporting the Model UN team.

November 2017

Catalyst Team members represented The Attic at the National PEN Conference in Boston. Parents and teachers formed Book Groups and attended local and National Conferences focused on Social Justice.



Teaching Team Retreat Winter 2018 – At our annual Teaching Team retreat (and every month, when we meet together as an entire Teaching Team), we celebrate our work for kids; and we focus on The Attic philosophy and values, and how those values are concretely put into practice in our classrooms.

Fall 2018

In an ongoing recognition of The Attic as a developing model learning community, we reached out to Seattle organization Kids and Race to bring to The Attic community a series of professional and parent education lectures on teaching with social responsibility and color consciousness in mind. We were privileged to begin a collaborative relationship as educators with Kids and Race founder Jasen Frelot through these lectures.

Attic teachers and Program Directors attended the national Race and Pedagogy Conference, hosted by the Institute for Race and Pedagogy and housed in 2018 at the University of Puget Sound. The conference offered an opportunity for

professional development as educators mindful of teaching with social responsibility and civic awareness in the 21st century world.

Summer 2019

Erika Wright was hired as Interim Executive Director and tasked with leading The Attic during a period of exciting new growth.

Today

Serving nearly 100 kids ages 5-18, and 50 preschoolers, we continue to live our mission, to nourish our vision of Attic campus expansion and outreach beyond our four-walls, and to inspire others to re-imagine education with us. In a changing world, The Attic is a source of light and inspiration, offering our learners, families, and teachers the same core values we've always held: *a sense of self and a passion for learning, community, and childhood.*