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CEDU: (1967-2005)

History/Background Information

CEDU (pronounced see-do) Educational Services, Inc. was founded in 1967 by Mel and Brigitte Wasserman as an offshoot of [Synanon](#). Mel Wasserman was a devoted follower of the notorious Synanon cult. He was not an addict but joined Synanon as a "Square", someone who was not addicted to drugs but wanted to join Synanon for the alternative lifestyle it offered. The acronym "CEDU" has been widely recognized as standing for Charles E. Dederich Universities- Dederich being the founder of Synanon. CEDU's founders have stated that the name is based on the school's motto, "See yourself for who you truly are and *do* something to become that person." However, based on the fact that the name is spelled nothing like "See-Do" it is likely that this was an attempt to cover up the school's connections to Charles Dederich and Synanon after it began devolve from a rehab program towards a cult.

Mel Wasserman opened the first CEDU program in his home in Palm Springs, CA in 1967. The program was initially marketed as a drug rehabilitation program for teenagers and young adults (16-25). Around Easter of 1967, Wasserman relocated the program to a 6-acre ranch in [Reche Canyon, CA](#) and began marketing it under the name CEDU Ranch. There was reportedly much tension between CEDU Ranch and the surrounding

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taking in teenagers by the dozens. Wasserman and his wife [took] the role of parents for their 'family.'" Only a year after opening, CEDU Ranch received a citation from Riverside County's Land Use Department for operating a boarding home in an improper zone. After being notified, Wasserman applied to the county Planning Department for a public use permit to allow the ranch to continue in operation and expand upwards to 200 students on a 6.5 acre site. However, in October of 1968 County supervisors filed a report from the county Planning Commission which denied the application by Wasserman for a public use permit to operate the controversial school. The program received an eviction notice from Riverside County and was forced to relocate to the former estate of Waltor Huston at [3500 Seymour Rd, Running Springs, CA](#) in January of 1969. This school eventually became known as [CEDU High School](#).

CEDU continued to operate in Running Springs as a Therapeutic Boarding School despite having no psychologists or psychiatrists on staff. In fact, all of the staff members who worked at CEDU around this time were young former drug addicts who had previously been residents of the school. A newspaper [advertisement](#) from 1971 shows that CEDU was actually very proud of this fact. They even proclaimed that none of these staff members were paid, the program claimed, not even the director. This advertisement also states that CEDU had, at this point, ran out of space and needed \$70,000 in order to expand. Indeed, CEDU had been advertising their program heavily in newspapers and local news stations and had attracted a fair amount of publicity. The program was even [endorsed](#) by *Little House on the Prairie* star Michael Landon in 1979, who had sent his daughter there. With this attention, CEDU had reached its maximum capacity. Inevitably, Wasserman was looking to expand. CEDU spent much of the 1970's holding various fundraisers to finance their expansion, including a Warehouse Clearance Sale and a raffle for a car giveaway.

In 1982, a small group of staff split off from CEDU High School and created [Rocky Mountain Academy](#) in Bonner's Ferry, ID. RMA's philosophy & curriculum was identical to CEDU High School. Students were even sometimes transferred between schools. CEDU's Rocky Mountain Academy is the subject of the memoir [Dead, Insane, or in Jail](#) by Zack Bonnie (2015) and [Dead, Insane, or in Jail: Overwritten \(Book 2\)](#), both written by Zack Bonnie who was there in the late 80's.

CEDU went on to open 6 more CEDU Schools/Programs between 1984 and 1994. These schools followed an identical curriculum and were located throughout California and Idaho. In 1998, when CEDU was at the peak of it's success, it was sold to the [Brown Schools](#). Brown Schools was an organization similar to CEDU, run by the entrepreneur John Harcourt Jr. However, only two years after Brown Schools acquired CEDU, the schools began to go down-hill and staff turnover was extremely high. Brown Schools/CEDU filed for bankruptcy in 2005.

CEDU closed its last program in 2005 for "financial problems". Several CEDU employees reported that pending litigation against CEDU for abuse and violation of rights as well as citations against the schools contributed to its downfall.

However, in 2005, [Universal Health Services](#) (UHS) re-opened multiple CEDU programs after their closure, [Boulder Creek Academy](#), [Northwest Academy](#), and [Ascent Wilderness Program](#). UHS also purchased the property of Rocky Mountain Academy. According to an [article from 2005](#) regarding UHS's role in taking over the programs, "the core management team plans to maintain the original quality and structure of the program as designed by CEDU founder Mel Wasserman." It is clear from this that these programs that were bought by UHS

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CEDU is widely regarded as being the birthplace of the Troubled Teen Industry as we know it today. It is reported by many that [Aspen Education Group](#) was created as a clone of CEDU. In fact, one of the first Aspen Education Group programs, [Mount Bachelor Academy](#) was founded by CEDU's Linda Houghton who, together with a group of other former CEDU employees (Steve Houghton, Bill Hoffman, and Greg Andrick, and several others) who oversaw the beginning of the school, which was essentially a clone of the CEDU model.

Additional Information: [CEDU - A Timeline](#)

Founders & Notable Employees

Mel Wasserman (1930-2002) was the founder of CEDU. He was also a devoted follower of the [Synanon](#) cult. He was not a drug addict, but was what was considered in Synanon a "Square", meaning he had joined Synanon to be part of its alternative lifestyle, not its drug-rehabilitation program. Additional Information: '[Who is Mel Wasserman?](#)'

Brigitte Wasserman was Mel Wasserman's wife and co-founder of CEDU. She is reported to feel no remorse for the children whom CEDU abused ([source](#)).

William (Bill) F. Lane was a former drug-addict and member of [Synanon](#), which is where he met Mel Wasserman. He assisted Mel Wasserman in creating CEDU, and functioned as a transporter. He served as the President of CEDU. After CEDU, he went on to become the Founder and Owner of [Bill Lane & Associates Transport](#), a teen "escort" company. Lane passed away on March 4, 2019 of esophageal cancer. Bill Lane & Associates Transports filed for chapter 7 bankruptcy in February, 2020.

Lon Woodbury worked as the the Admissions Director of [Rocky Mountain Academy](#) from 1984 until 1989. He then went on to create [The Woodbury Reports Inc.](#), which is a website dedicated to promoting behavior-modification programs.

CEDU Programs

Program Name	Years Active	Location	HEAL Information
Ascent Wilderness Program	1994-2005	Naples, ID	N/A
Boulder Creek Academy	1993-2022	Bonnors Ferry, ID	HEAL
Cascade School	1984-2003	Whitmore, CA	N/A
CEDU High School	1967-2005	Running Springs, CA	HEAL
CEDU Middle School	1991-2003	Running Springs, CA	HEAL
Milestones Transitional Program	unknown-2005	West Valley City, UT	N/A
Northwest Academy	1994-2005/ 2019	Bonnors Ferry/Naples, ID	HEAL

[Skip to main content](#)[+ Create](#)[Rocky Mountain Academy.](#)

1982-2003

Bonners Ferry/Naples, ID

[HEAL](#)

CEDU Spin-off Programs

Program Name	Years Active	Location	HEAL Information
Academy at Swift River	1997-2013	Cummington, MA	HEAL
Benchmark Transitions	1993-present	Redlands, CA	N/A
Carlbrook School	2002-2015	Halifax, VA	HEAL
Cherokee Creek Boys School	2003-present	Westminster, SC	HEAL
Hidden Lake Academy.	1994-2011	Dahlonega, GA	HEAL
Innercept	2004-present	Coeur d'Alene, ID	HEAL
King George School	1998-2011	Sutton, VT	HEAL
Monarch School	2000-2017	Heron, MT	HEAL
Mount Bachelor Academy.	1988-2009	Prineville, OR	HEAL
New Horizons for Young Women	2001-2008	Springfield/Orrington, ME	-
Northwoods	1993-present	Bonners Ferry/ Sagle, ID	HEAL
Shortridge Academy.	2002-present	Milson, NH	HEAL
Turning Winds Academic Institute	2002-present	Troy, MT	HEAL

Groups/Workshops

"[Raps](#)" were pseudo-psychology group sessions led by untrained staff. Raps were developed based around the principles of "The Game" at Synanon. These groups were, in reality, intense sessions of [Attack Therapy](#), which has been proven to be extremely harmful to children. Raps were held 3 days a week, for around 4 hours at a time. Students and staff were encouraged to confront students for minor rule infractions in the name of emotional growth. Yelling was appropriate and expected.

"[Propheets](#)" were 20 - 24+ hour workshops were loosely based around the teachings from the book "The Prophet" by Khalil Gibran. Examples of this is Gibran's passage about Joy and Sorrow, which is used in the Truth Propheet, or his prose about children, which was used for the Childrens' propheet. These Propheets relied heavily on restricting food and sleep, as well as other elements, to elicit highly emotionally-charged responses from clients. CEDU students were not supposed to share what happens at the Propheet with other students who had not been to the workshop, adding to a level of secrecy and isolation. A heavy emphasis was placed on any

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and some staff. These Propheets often involved the use of forced stress positions while the CEDU Staff screamed at the students.

In addition, there was also a 3-day I & Me Workshop. "I" was supposed to represent your thinking, which stifled your true self. "Me" were your feelings, which was being oppressed by "I". All exercises in the workshop are geared towards this single idea, and each one depicted the internal struggle between I and Me in a different way. During the I & Me reunion, it is explained that ideally, I & Me should work together, but Me should be in charge of I.

The final workshop at CEDU was a 6-day Summit Workshop which was based around the Large Group Awareness Training seminar Lifespring. Wasserman purchased the rights to use the workshop at his own school, in addition to adding his own exercises.

CEDU Lingo/Terminology

Language was one method of control and coercion at the CEDU facilities, since it conditioned the detainees to perceive their world and environment within the context of the program. As such, the use of specialized language played a key role in creating a cohesive mini-culture, opaque and unintelligible to outsiders and outside scrutiny, and encouraged the students to feel as if they are part of something special and unique. When the lingo from a particular culture, group, profession, cult, behavior modification facility or any type of social structure which employs a specialized language is studied and the definitions are explained to outsiders, it often helps to demystify that particular group's way of life, work and behavior.

Agreements: CEDU's rules were disingenuously termed Agreements. The three major Agreements prohibited sex, drugs, and physical violence. Others required tucked-in shirts, no showers lasting more than five minutes, not listening to forbidden music, etc.

Bans: This meant that there was a specific student, or a group of students (normally from a family on down) that you could not speak with. (You were "on bans" from them.) This also meant that you could not have any eye contact, or engage in any other means of communication, such as passing notes. If there are a group of students which were having a conversation, and you were on bans from one of the students within that conversation, you could not be allowed to participate in that discussion, even if you don't speak directly with the person you are on bans from. Students could also be put on bans from the opposite sex.

Bioenergetics: A term referring to specific kinds of exercises in Propheets and workshops that resulted in physical and emotional exertion, and possible physical injury. Normally, it consisted of a repetitious act, such as pounding a pillow, having to fight physical restraint, laying on a mattress while kicking and punching, running in place until you scream and sob, or biting down on a towel while simultaneously trying to yank it out of your mouth. This was always accompanied by explosive, emotional venting. Bioenergetics were first introduced to the students in the "I Want to Live" propheet.

Dyads: (*pronounced dai-ad*) This is a Propheet and workshop exercise where two students face each other in chairs, and engage each other, while being coached by the staff. It normally involved a lot of screaming, repetitive chanting/shouting (Such as "Mommy made me ____ . Daddy made me ____.") and regression. Dyads were used primarily in the children's propheet, the Summit workshop, and during trust counseling.

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Independent Learning Exercise. (Need additional verification on this.) A student was to remain isolated at a booth in the dining room for x amount of days. While there, they were supposed to be completing writing assignments in their notebook, as well as complete a reading assignment given to them by the staff that ran their full time. During the day, they were on a work detail. Normally it was a very long project that would last the entirety of their full time, and the student could not complete the full-time until they completed that project.. On non-rap days, the student worked all day, on rap days, they worked half a day and then were in a rap. A full-time student would be on bans from most of the school, with the exception of upper school students. The only times they could speak with others was in raps. They could not leave their booth unless escorted by a staff or student. They were not allowed to smile, laugh, sing or hug. If you smoked, you were limited to four cigarettes per day. Your watch was also taken away for the duration of the full time. Staff and older students would occasionally sit down with the student and talk with them about their progress. Often, when a student got on a full-time, they would also have to move dorms. Once you were taken off of a full time, you were relieved, and sometimes felt that you had "learned something about yourself." The main objective of a full-time was to "break" a student's resistance down to its lowest possible level. Students at NWA, BCA and possibly RMA (conformation for RMA 2002, and no knowledge of such practices at RS) were sometimes given jumpsuits to wear during thier full-time. This lead to the closely related term Jumpsuit, which refered to a full-time or subset of full-time restrictions. The full-time was the only restriction used at the CEDU Ascent wilderness program. Students on a full-time at Ascent were given an orange vest, assigned a stump to dig out during work crews, made to eat alone during meals, and given writing assignments. The lifestyle at Ascent was harsh enough that a full-time was a small distinction from normal life.

Image: This referred to how you represented yourself before you came to CEDU. It implied that you were sporting a false and contrived persona, akin to a stereotype, that was contrary to who you truly were as a person. What CEDU neglected to mention, however, was that it perpetuated it's own "image" onto students: conformity under the guise of individuality. "You're an individual, just like everyone else." Images were, a lot of times, assigned to you by the staff (i.e. a staff member would accuse you of being a slut, or a druggie, or a junkie). Upper school students who came back from a home visit with new clothes that the staff believed "supported their image" had those clothes confiscated. In addition, from the moment of arrival, students are under constant scrutiny not to "fall back into their image". There are several exercises in propheetes where a student's identity prior to CEDU is demonized to the point of being labeled "their nightmare" or "their death."

Projecting: Occasionally this followed the common psychiatric term which meant that you were accusing someone else of a behavior, when in reality, you were the one guilty of that behavior. More often than that, projecting in CEDU was a rap exercise where one participant imagines that the person sitting across from them is either a negative representation of themselves, or a representation of someone in their past that they hate or have issues with. The end result is the target being screamed at by the person projecting.

Running Your Anger: This was the term that CEDU used for primal scream therapy. This type of attack-therapy, also used by notoriously abusive programs like the Elan School, has been frequently criticized as lacking outcome studies to substantiate its effectiveness. It is regarded as one of the least creditable forms of psychotherapy, even being classified in a 2006 APA Delphi poll as "discredited".

Smooshing: This was the forced, no-boundaries, and often inappropriate affection that was considered expected behavior between same-sex students (or faculty and students, regardless of gender). During social and

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while walking as well. Normally, if a student was not participating in smooshing and spending time by themselves in the living room, they were pressured to join someone by the staff and/or older students. A more widely-used term by cult experts for this phenomenon is *love bombing*. Ironically, before the early 90s, CEDU was also incredibly homophobic, and held gay-identified kids up to double-standards regarding smooshing appropriateness, until the student converted to believing they were straight. They also had a strict no-hire policy for gays wanting to be staff. There is also believed to be some discrepancy over the severity of this as it pertains to the Running Springs campus versus the Idaho one.

Teams: Teams were a system of organization applied to staff and students, which coexisted with the peer group and phase systems (phases applied to students only). Teams were lead by a team leader and an assistant team leader, who were both senior staff members, and were composed of students and staff at different points of the program. Each team was therefor a cross section of the school. Teams were primarily used for dividing the school into large non - hierarchical units for purposes such as chores and activities. At [Northwest Academy](#) in the late 90s there were three teams which were named for stellar formations: Polaris, Phoenix, and Orion, which were male only, female only, and coed respectively (though staff could be on any team regardless of gender).

Unacceptable: This referred to musicians or bands that were not permitted to be mentioned at the school. Obviously, the music could also not be played, you could not sing it, and you could not listen to them on a home visit. What was deemed acceptable and unacceptable changed over the course of CEDU. Some bands that were unacceptable early on were later actually used in propheets and played as house music. Examples of how "unacceptable" was used within the context of the CEDU language would consist of statements like: "*Don't sing that, that's unacceptable.*" or "*Stop singing unacceptables.*"

Work Detail/Work Assignment: A form of punishment through manual labor. A student worked on their own on a particular project, such as digging up stumps, landscaping, building walls, etc. People on work details were on bans from the entire student body while working, and were not allowed a watch.

A more extensive list of CEDU terminology can be found [here](#).

Related Media

[CEDU Website Homepage](#) (archived, 2000)

[Running my Anger: The Legacy of the CEDU Cult](#) by *Anonymous* (June, 2018) (Medium.com)

[The Legacy of CEDU](#) (Cedulegacy.org)

[Lathrop Lybrook's Website](#)

[CEDU - A Timeline](#)

[Dead, Insane, or In Jail - Glossary of CEDU Terms](#) (Zack Bonnie)

[Fornits Wiki - CEDU Lingo](#) (archived).

[CEDU's Wikipedia Page](#) (Wikipedia.com)

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[CEDU explained](#)

News Articles

[CEDU Hassle to Continue](#) (Desert Sun, 8/30/1968)

[Curtains for CEDU Ranch? 'Disturbed Youth' Home Seen Doomed](#) (Desert Sun, 10/16/1968)

[CEDU Ranch To Seek San Bernardino Haven](#) (Desert Sun, 10/19/1968)

[Advertisement for CEDU](#) (3/19/1971)

[CEDU: See and Do](#) (San Bernardino Sun, 10/31/1971)

[There Isn't Much Choice](#) (San Bernardino Sun, 11/5/1971)

[Far From Home Extra: Perspective of a CEDU School Survivor](#) by *Dusty Rhodes* (2019) (NPRIllinois.org)

[California School For 'Troubled Teens' Had Roots In A Notorious, Militant Cult](#) by *Erik Hawkins* (2020) (Oxygen.com)

Photos

- [Bill Lane in a Synanon promotional video](#) (1962)
- [Mel Wasserman during a raid of CEDU](#) (1968)
- [Image of Mel and Brigitte Wasserman standing in front of CEDU High School](#) (1970)
- [CEDU Residents in a performance](#) (1970)
- [Image of CEDU residents during a Rap Session](#) (1970)
- [Mel Wasserman with CEDU residents](#) (1970)
- [CEDU literature from the 1970's](#) (1970's)
- [Mel Wasserman featured in unaired footage for KNBC](#) (1972)
- [Image of Mel Wasserman in a CEDU brochure](#) (1973)
- [A teen resident 'smooshing' with an adult counselor](#) (1989/1990)
- [CEDU postcard featuring the campus of Rocky Mountain Academy](#) (date unknown)
- [Image of Bill Lane acting in an early Synanon promotional video](#) (date unknown)
- [Image of CEDU Running Springs](#) (date unknown)

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