

The Magazine of Alternative Education

# Education Revolution

Summer 2006 \* \$4.95 / \$5.95 CDN

Volume 18, Number 2

Issue Number Forty Five



## *We Are Outlaws* *A Charter School Fights for Democracy*

### Inside:

New Report on Student Empowerment in Large Schools  
A Brief History of Alternative Education by Ron Miller  
Mail & Communications from Around the World  
...and Much More!



# Education Revolution

The Magazine of Alternative Education

Summer 2006 - Issue Number Forty Five - [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org)

## Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO)

AERO, which produces this magazine quarterly, is firmly established as a leader in the field of educational alternatives. Founded in 1989 in an effort to promote learner-centered education and influence change in the education system, AERO is an arm of the School of Living, a non-profit organization. AERO provides information, resources and guidance to students, parents, schools and organizations regarding their educational choices.

The mission of *Education Revolution* magazine is based on that of the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO):

**“Building the critical mass for the education revolution by providing resources which support self-determination in learning and the natural genius in everyone.”**

Towards this end, this magazine includes the latest news and communications regarding the broad spectrum of educational alternatives: public alternatives, independent and private alternatives, home education, international alternatives, and more. The common feature in all these educational options is that they are *learner-centered*, focused on the interest of the child rather than on an arbitrary curriculum.

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*The Magazine of Alternative Education*

417 Roslyn Road, Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2620

ISSN#: 110679219

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# Invitation to the 3rd Annual AERO Conference

You are cordially invited to the Alternative Education Resource Organization's third annual AERO conference. For the third year in a row the AERO conference will bring together educators, students, parents, and many others interested and/or involved in educational alternatives. From Montessori to unschooling we will have a *many* educational alternatives represented.

This year's conference theme is "Educational Alternatives: Finding Our Commonalities & Celebrating Our Differences." Through panel discussions and workshops, we will have dialog on where the commonalities and differences lie between the different alternatives and how we can use that knowledge to our benefit. Even with the theme, the conference will in no way be limited to just that. Workshops and presentations will be made on a wide range of topics. In fact, there will be open workshop time throughout the conference where workshops, presentations, and special events will be entirely up to the attendees! Last year we had over fifty unique workshops and presentations presented by the attendees. This year we have set aside enough time for over seventy-five to take place! A complete listing of some of these workshops that have already been scheduled can be found at [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org).

This year we have seven wonderful keynote speakers: John Taylor Gatto, Mimsy Sadofsky, Ron Miller, Susan Ohanian, Pat Farenga, Jerry Mintz, and Tim Seldin. We will also have a number of special events including documentaries, keynote panel discussions, five-part new schools starter workshop series, and much, much more! All keynote talks and presentations will take place in the beautiful Julia Howard Bush Memorial Center at Russell Sage College in Troy, New York which is adorned with Tiffany stained glass windows!

Simply put, with the success of last year's second annual conference and the dire need for change in the education system, the stage has been set for this year's conference to have quite a far-reaching effect. Here's what some attendees from last year had to say about the experience:

*"The open workshops allowed for the kind of spontaneous discussions that felt important and authentic."* - GM, Montana

*"Compared to all other conferences I have been to this was the one I found the most useful and interesting."* - SC, South Africa

*"I was a new attendee and I'm so thankful that I had this opportunity, as a new father. Of course, my dilemma now is choosing what alternative to "traditional" schooling will I choose...I look forward to next year's!"* - MS, New York

*"I learned a lot about Education but much more about myself. Thanks :)"* - OR, Pennsylvania

*"Thanks so much for a wonderful conference. We could tell you all had worked so hard to make it a great experience for everyone. We learned a lot and we were inspired!"* - MM, Maine

*"I thought the conference was very informative. As a new attendee to alternative and independent education conferences, I was surprised and impressed by the divergence in alternative education thinking. Hearing the keynotes, with a smattering of workshops in between was highly enlightening."* - BG, New York

*"I'm starting a school this year!"* - CE, Pennsylvania

I invite you to visit [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org) to find out more and contact me at with any and all questions you may have about the conference!

Sincerely,



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The Alternative Education Resource Organization's 3rd Annual  
**AERO CONFERENCE**

June 29th - July 2nd, 2006 \* Russell Sage College \* Troy, New York

“THEME: *Educational Alternatives:* **E-mail isaacgraves@gmail.com for more info!**  
**Finding Our Commonalities**  
**& Celebrating Our Differences**”

Keynote Speakers

**\*\*\* John Taylor Gatto**

Former New York State Teacher of the Year & Celebrated Author of *The Underground History of American Education* & *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*

**\*\*\* Mimsy Sadofsky**

Co-Founder Sudbury Valley School & Author of *Kingdom of Childhood*, & *The Pursuit of Happiness*

**\*\*\* Ron Miller**

Author, *Free Schools, Free People, What Are Schools For?* & Editor of *Creating Learning Communities*

**\*\*\* Susan Ohanian**

George Orwell Award Winner, Author of 25, Articles have Appeared in *The Nation* & *USA Today*

**\*\*\* Jerry Mintz**

Director of the Alternative Education Resource Organization & Author, *No Homework & Recess All Day*

**\*\*\* Tim Seldin**

President of The Montessori Foundation, Chair of Int'l Montessori Council & Author of *The Montessori Way*

**\*\*\* Pat Farenga**

President of Holt Associates & Author of *Teach Your Own: The John Holt Book of Homeschooling*

Conference Highlights

\*\*\*New School / Program Starters Workshop Series

\*\*\*Exclusive Education Documentaries & Films

\*\*\*Huge Alternative Education Bookstore!

\*\*\*Free Child Care Throughout Entire Conference!

\*\*\*Open Workshop Space

(attendee controlled workshop time)

\*\*\*Educational Alternatives Panel Discussion  
(experts from 15 different alternatives!)

\*\*\*Live Musical Performances

\*\*\*Featured Student Panel Discussion

\*\*\*Wide variety of workshops for Teachers,  
Parents, Students, & Everyone!

Some of the educational alternatives involved include: Homeschooling, Unschooling, Democratic Education, Montessori, Waldorf, Progressive & Holistic Education among many, many others!

Featuring

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# Being There

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*with Jerry Mintz*

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## Workshops in India on School Democratization

I recently came back from my fourth trip to India, in early April, to do a keynote at a Quality in Education conference, and to do consultations with several large schools which wanted to democratize. They are part of the DAV group of 700 schools. I'd like to give you a glimpse of what happened there from my notes at the time. I think it's important to note that if we are successful, no large school anywhere can claim that they are too big to empower students! The students and teachers from the four schools I worked with have continued to communicate with me by e mail, as you will see by the quote at the end.

### April 3, 2006, Day One

After flying all night, all day, and all night across ten times zones, I finally arrived in Mumbai, India. It's a complex and imprecise mathematical problem to figure out how much you should try to sleep in the flights in order to be able to sleep upon arrival in India. Communication was not optimal. But I was met at the airport and brought to the hotel. We got to the Days Inn in New Mumbai at 3 AM Monday morning. I had left New York at 7 PM Saturday. So I was able to sleep until 6:30 AM. I didn't know exactly what I was scheduled to do this week. I did know that I would be consulting with some large schools about democratic process during the first few days, and speaking at a conference the next weekend.

I had breakfast at 7, got a call from Jose (pronounced Joz, rhyming with those) at 8 PM from the lobby, I knew him from my first trip to India more than three years ago. He's the principal of a 3000 student DAV school in Nerul. He's a pioneering educator and had worked for many years with Dr. Kushal who is the innovative DAV Schools administrator who first invited me to India in 2002.

I had a short meeting with Jose in my hotel room's meeting room (yes, my hotel room has a meeting room) to figure out what the plan was for the week. Jose told me that I would be going to his school for three days to demonstrate democratic process, as I had done with the New Panvel DAV last October. The conference would start Friday. He said I could take it easy today.

But I wanted to meet with Dr. Kushal and follow up with the New Panvel school. We headed toward it, stopping on the way at Jose's



*Jerry Mintz with student committee from Thane DAV School*

school. We also stopped at a special hospital for AIDS patients run by Catholic nuns and had a quick tour of the facility.

Jose is a Catholic Christian, which makes him an anomaly in the primarily Hindu DAV Schools, and we had a long talk about his efforts to broaden the organization's perspective. Most likely because of his work the DAV schools now have Christians and Muslim students attending.

We found out that Dr. Kushal had gone to Pune for the day and would not be at his office in the New Panvel school. But they said I could come there and follow up with the core group I had originally met with on my last visit.

I was recognized immediately upon arrival, and we went into Dr. Kushal's office to meet with the school coordinators and the principal. The coordinator then went out to round up the students and teachers from the core group for a meeting in the conference room.

I had been somewhat discouraged from the little feedback I had received about the October consultation. There had not been a subsequent meeting of the parliament we had created during that visit. I wondered what, if any, impact the work had made.



*Conference Opening Ceremony: Left: Dr. Kushal, Right: DAV Chairman Dr. Chopra*

Jose was going to go back to his school where I would meet him later, but I suddenly realized that it might jump start things if he met at least briefly with the core group, so he came in the meeting with me.

I had no idea what the students or teachers would say, but either way I wanted Jose witness it.

So I asked them bluntly, whether the first consultation had changed anything. We shortly discovered that Smita, the coordinator, had taken very careful notes of the first session, had recorded all of the decisions made by the demonstration democratic meetings in the fall, and had brought them to the teacher's meetings for action. The students noted that many of their suggestions and the proposals they had passed had been put into place.

As a result of that process several significant changes had been made, including limiting homework with a "timetable" so that students would only get homework in three of their six subjects any night. They were also reducing all of the periods a few minutes to create an extra period for elective activities. In fact, there were many other areas in which proposals passed by the student groups had been acted on by the staff meeting.

I instantly realized that we had stumbled onto a new system. The process was acting like a bicameral legislature, with the students acting as the House of

Representatives and the teachers and administrators acting as the Senate. Here we had a system in which the fear of loss of power by some teachers was automatically addressed. The key was to institutionalize it, including a regular schedule of the parliament.

We had a discussion about how many representatives from each class of 40 should go to the parliament. Some thought 4 was too many. It was eventually decided that the students would go to each class to have a vote taken solely about the number of representatives to be elected, 2, 3, or 4. After that was determined there would be an election for representatives for a new parliament.

Smita said she had typed up her notes and given them to the office to send to me, but I had never received them so she will email them to me. I got the email addresses of several of the students and teachers, and we agreed to keep in good communication.

I'm happy that I went to New Panvel today and encouraged by the progress that has been made, despite my previous doubts. Some of them may even try to go to the International Democratic education Conference in Australia in July, and Jose said he'd definitely try to get a group from his school over there.

#### **April 4, 2006, Day 2**

In the late afternoon Jose came over from his school and took me to a local school of

5000 that has a top-notch table tennis program. We went to their table tennis room. I played a few games with Jose, with the gym teacher, and with a student who had arrived to practice, about 7 PM. But I met my match with their top student who is very well coached and practices 4-5 hours a day. I lost many games to him as I slowly brought my game up in level until I could beat him in a game. It was a great workout.

We again struggled with the Internet last night. I finally bought a wi fi card and got out a single message to the office. I had some supper at the hotel restaurant and went to sleep at 11. I woke up at 5 and couldn't get back to sleep. I looked for the NCAA basketball final on the hotel satellite TV, but didn't find it. In fact this biggest of sports events was not only not on TV, there was no report about it in the English language paper's sports section. It was all about cricket, soccer and some tennis. It underlines the difference in perspectives around the world. I still don't know who won.

After again failing to reach the Internet from my room with an AOL number I had found, I had breakfast. The driver then took me to the Nerul school. I met Jose in his office. He said there was a power failure, but that the staff/student focus group was ready to meet with me.

The students were all 9<sup>th</sup> graders (they call the grades "standards"). There were 15: 4 teachers, all women, 8 girls and three boys.

I first gave them an overview of democratic education and a description of the process we had developed in New Panvel, including the work of yesterday's group there. This lasted about an hour. Because of the exam period, this was the only group I would be able to meet with, so we departed sharply from the approach of the New Panvel focus group and decided to continue with this group using democratic process. They were keen to do it.

The first thing we had to decide was what the group was and what it could decide. We formalized the group and concluded that it would be a core advisory group for the Nerul School's development of



democracy, and that the items that would be passed by the group would be recommendations to the school.

We then made an agenda. There were six issues to be discussed.

- 1.) Leaving classes.
- 2.) Establishment of clubs
- 3.) Responsibilities of prefects
- 4.) Lengthening of recess
- 5.) Homework

We then voted on which ones to discuss first. The first item was the establishment of clubs, such as sports, chess, etc. It turns out that there are no clubs at the school. After much discussion it was passed that clubs would be established. The hottest issue was whether each club would have a head or coordinator. Finally it was passed that there would be a committee of 8: five students and three staff members, which would be applied to in order to establish a new club. The club would run democratically, electing a coordinator, but the coordinator could be removed by a democratic vote if necessary.

The next item to be discussed was the responsibilities of prefects. Prefects are students selected by teachers. The girl who brought it up felt that the honor was completely window dressing with no real responsibilities. After voting to continue having prefects it was decided that they would be elected by their houses and would be identified by a badge and given specific responsibilities.

I then stepped down as group chairperson and one of the boys was elected to chair the rest of the meeting. He did an excellent job of keeping order and was able to cut off his teachers and even his principal when they talked out of order. Recess was discussed next. It is only 20 minutes long, which was deemed to be too short to be of any use. It was passed that they should be lengthened and a committee would be established to work on the logistics of it.

The homework issue went in a different direction than it did in New Panvel. Two different proposals for a homework timetable were not passed. What were passed were two proposals: that homework

not be assigned to students 5<sup>th</sup> standard and under, and that a pilot program be established with one class in each standard not having homework. They would be voluntary as determined by the parents, and results for the homework and no homework group would be compared.

At the end of the session we tackled the question of how to move forward with the democratization of the school. It was decided that since the students in the core group were all 9<sup>th</sup> standard that they would first have a democratic meeting with all of that group. They would then have meetings with each of the other standards, leading



*Meghana, student at Thane DAV School*

to class elections for a parliament. We decided to stay in e mail contact with a possible establishment of a listserv for that purpose. The boy who was taking notes said he would type them up and e mail them to all the addresses he was given.

The session lasted three hours, longer than any of the ones at New Panvel. It will be interesting to see if this approach works effectively toward establishment a democracy at Nerul School.

Back in Jose's office we received a call from Dr. Kushal who asked if we could meet him at his office in the New Panvel School. We left at about 11:30 and arrived just after noon.

At New Panvel I finalized the topic of my talk after finally finding out how long I would be, where it would be and who would be attending. I decided to give an overview of the definition and philosophical background of democratic education and how it was being applied in India

We met with Dr. Kushal and updated him of what had happened so far. He thought it would be good if I could again meet with the New Panval Core group. He also arranged for me to go to Thane tomorrow, and the principal from Thane happened to be there in the office with Dr. Kushal. I had wanted to go there because a girl who had heard my workshop in Thane last October had been writing to me ever since by e mail, hoping I would be able to visit her school on this trip.

While waiting for the core group to assemble in the conference room I showed the Butterflies program video, first to the teachers who were then, and eventually to the whole group as they filed it. They were very taken by it and surprised as I was about how happy, confident, and competent the homeless working children were in the video. One of the teachers took contact information for the Butterflies program from me.

At first we were not sure why we were meeting again, as the previous day's session had seemed comprehensive and conclusive. We soon realized that we were not all on the same page and we really needed this session to organize the next steps.

I summarized what we had done in the group in Nerul this morning. We then decided to do the same, formalizing the group as a core coordinating group to democratize the New Panvel School.

We grappled with the idea of the two legislative bodies. The principal thought the parliament should be 50% students and 50% teachers. But it was pointed out by the students that this would give the teachers voting power in both bodies. It was also felt that the teachers might then dominate the parliament.

We heard that one of the boys had gone back to his class to get a decision on how many representatives there should be. The class had decided that there should be two representatives, and they had elected the two. This then created a complication, as the others had not been as successful at getting classes to decide how many would be elected from each class, as we had assigned them to do the previous day. We then concluded that it would be best if the core group simply determined that each class would elect two representatives, as part of a package of coordinating committee decisions.

After much discussion there was a formal vote on all items. It was decided that

1.) The parliament will have two representatives from each class for the 6th standard up. The 5<sup>th</sup> standard would be added next year and younger representation could be added as the parliament wishes in the future. The teachers will be encouraged to attend and speak in the parliament, but only the students will have a vote.

2.) Decisions of the parliament will then be sent to the teacher's group. If they agree that the parliament's bill should be implemented it will then go to the administration committee for approval. Thus, in essence, we have two branches of the legislation passing bills that then go to the executive branch for approval in order to be implemented.

3.) It was stressed that as much as practically possible there should be discussion of the issues in each class with the issues either brought up in parliament or by the constituents in the classes and brought to parliament by the representative. Issues would then be sent back to all classes for vote, the totals added up again in parliament to see if the motion did or did not pass.

We adjourned the meeting with a strong feeling of agreement and accomplishment.

Notes were to be typed up and sent to the group.

I then managed to get some e mail done on the school computer. One of them was from Meghana from Thane, asking if I was yet in India. She will probably fall off her chair when she reads my reply telling her that I am meeting tomorrow in Thane with her and her principal!

When I arrived back to the hotel I was very tired. Jet lag had really kicked it. I decided to take a short nap at 5 PM. I was awakened by a phone call from Dr. Kushal at 9:30 PM, telling me about the plan for tomorrow. I will check out here in the morning, go to Thane, check into the hotel in Mumbai where the conference will be, and meet with Dr, Kushal there in the late afternoon.

I was disconcerted that I had slept for so long and hope that I will be able to get back to sleep later. In fact, when someone greeted me when I got out of the elevator on my way to supper I immediately cheerfully replied "good morning!" It was 9:45 at night! Talk about disorientation! So now it is 12:30 AM and I will try to get some more sleep.

#### **April 5, 2006, Day three**

I left with my driver to Thane at 9 AM, arriving a half hour later. Of course I recognized the school because this was the site of the huge science fair that I had keynoted in October. Following my talk then I had done two demonstration workshops on democratic process that some teachers and many students had attended.

After a brief talk over tea with the principal, we went to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor conference room, the same room where I had done my workshops. Inside there were about 20 students and two or three teachers waiting for me, later joined by about a dozen more. The group seemed somewhat familiar, and not only because Meghana was there. It turned out that virtually all of them had attended my two workshops on democratic process after my talk at the science fair! When they heard I was coming, they all wanted to be there for this session.

This totally changed the picture, as it would not be necessary to start at the beginning.

They had already heard about and experienced democratic process. In fact, they were fans!

I pointed out to the group that if they ever doubted the influence of one person, that I was there just because Meghana had followed up on my workshops there and had been writing to me. The arrangements had been made just the day before.

We had a general discussion about what they wanted to happen. I filled them in on the previous three school consultations this week. They did want to actually do something similar, becoming a coordinating committee and running democratically, with the aim of democratizing the Thane school. Someone suggested that after the session those wanting to continue being on the committee should sign up and commit themselves to it. This was agreed to by the group.

We established a log keeper and began to make an agenda. It got longer and longer. Again we agreed that one purpose of the group would be to make recommendations to the parliament which was to be established, as well as to see through its establishment.

I don't have benefit of the log keeper's notes and I don't think I can remember all of the agenda items. It was decided that they will be typed up and sent to all who have e mail addresses, and that those addresses would be made into a listserve.

Some of the agenda items were:

- Homework
- Length of break
- Quality of relations between students and teachers
- Conflicts between teachers and the effect on students
- Quantity of tests and exams
- Sports coaching
- Several items relating to innovative teaching including field trips: experiential learning, use of computer, etc.
- Corporal punishment
- School democratization.

We voted on the order to consider these items.



We were able to discuss, student/teacher relations, quantity of exams.

Several proposals were made and not passed in the discussion of student/teacher relations. It was generally agreed that teachers needed feedback on how their behavior and mood affected students, but a proposal to set up a committee of 6 students and three teachers didn't pass, and neither did the one to bring in an outside counselor. They will continue to think about solutions to this problem.

They felt there were too many tests and that this increased the stress level of students. It was passed that a schedule of all tests should be made in advance of the term so that students could anticipate them. But it was felt that the area of testing needed to be explored further because there was too much "teaching to the test."

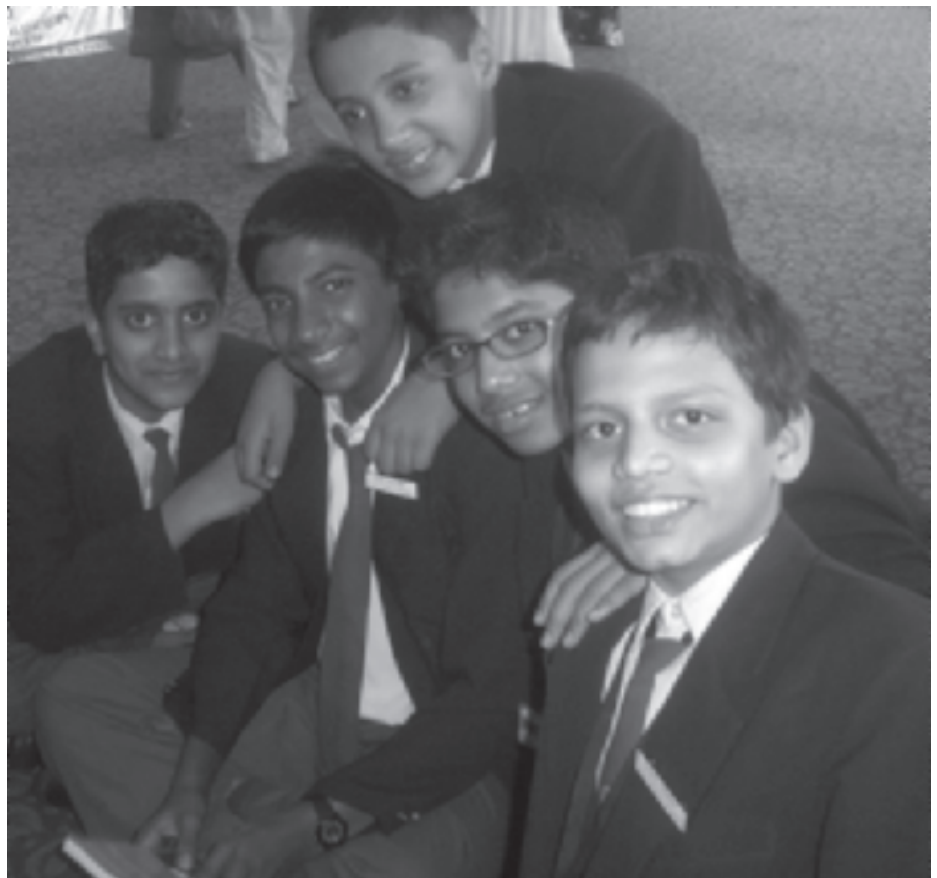
We reached our time limit for this session, but agreed in the end that there should be a parliament established with two representatives from each class from 7<sup>th</sup> standard and up, but this could ultimately be extended to the younger ages. We agreed to keep in touch by e mail, and the log keeper took e mail addresses and will send out the notes to everyone.

Much of the group then stayed as students from the 10<sup>th</sup> standard came in and filled the room. We didn't have much time but brought them up to date on what we had accomplished, and they were unanimously enthusiastic about pursuing this process.

Before I left Thane I wandered out to an area where some of the younger students were gathering to leave school for the day. They were about 12 or 13 years old. As I stood near the line several of the students at the front glanced over at me and did simultaneous double takes. It turned out that they had also gone to the workshops I had done in October.

One of them said to me, almost in disbelief, "Are you here to try to make this school democratic?"

When I answered in the affirmative he



*Some of the student prefect group from Pune DAV School*

yelled, "Yes!" and made a big upward fist pump!

#### **April 8, 2006, Day 6**

I'll report on the last three days elsewhere, as I was in a different mode, including the presentation of my talk on the 7<sup>th</sup>. One interesting note about that was that the student group from Thane came to the conference just to hear my presentation, the only student group that attended the presentation part of the conference.

Also, I received a report on the session with the group from Nerul from the log keeper, Abhirath, who said he had already read and very much enjoyed my book. It was very detailed and well done. I printed out the report and give a copy to the first DAV administrative person I saw, Dr. Sharma, who had been the first person who had contacted me in 2002 to come to India. He glanced at it and absent mindedly folded it up and put it in his pocket. A while later I saw him again and he was very excited about the report. It turned out that Abhirath is his son! He had no idea that his son was

making the report and I had no idea that Dr. Sharma was his father. He quickly introduced me to his wife who was also a bit floored about the project.

What I also want to talk about today began with a telephone call in my room. It was from a group of 20 students from the Pune DAV school. I was informed that they were waiting for me downstairs at the conference center.

Pune was the one school that I was not able to revisit from my last trip here. I had met with a group of about 35 student "prefects," representing the older student classes in the school, and we had gone through a democratic process. They were energized about the visit, but I guessed that the one meeting was not enough to actually effect any change in the school.

So, since I was not able to go back to Pune, when the group discovered I would be at the conference, they decided to come to me. Pune is about 3 hours travel from Mumbai.

I know Dr. Kushal was hoping for such a meeting, but it did look doubtful to me.

Nevertheless, there they were, waiting for me in the lobby of the conference center, about 20 students from the group.

It was noisy from some of the 500 students that were arriving to participate in the Indian Heritage day cultural presentations. There was nowhere to go to meet, so someone pulled over a chair for me and the group sat down on the floor in a circle, ready for a meeting.

They had all taken part in my previous presentation of democratic process in Pune, so again we had a running start. They wanted to establish the group in the same way as we had formalized the other groups earlier in the week. We put several items on the agenda, but started with making plans for the democratization of the Pune DAV School.

Sushrut, a boy of about 12, started out taking the log but gave it over to Shyamoli. It was decided after much discussion to establish a similar system to that of New Panvel. At first they favored a simple parliament with 25% teacher participation, but eventually came to think that it made sense to send parliament decisions to the staff meeting and then to the administration. If I'm not mistaken, they felt there should ultimately be two elected

representatives to the parliament from all classes, from the youngest on up. Also they felt that the teachers should have a vote in the parliament. But they thought that at first the current prefects should meet as the temporary parliament and development committee even before new elections were held, and should stay on as a committee until the democracy was fully established. Again they thought an email list or listserve would be a good idea to keep things moving.

There were then animated discussions about potential issues for the parliament to discuss, with this group making their recommendations.

The Agenda included:

- Leaving classes
- Hiring teachers
- Uniforms
- Lockers

The students decided to tackle the question of non-compulsory classes. After much discussion they passed two proposals: that a student had the right to leave a class if they wished, and could go to a designated area such as the auditorium or the library. Also it was passed that they needed 80% attendance to pass a class, so could only miss up to 20%.

They felt that students should be on the teacher hiring committee and have a vote

on it. Three students disagreed, fearing that "easy" teachers might be hired, but they offered no alternate proposal.

They favored the idea that one day a week uniforms would not have to be worn.

They felt strongly that there should be lockers on the first floor, and thought that the cost of that could be financed by a small locker fee.

The meeting lasted about two hours, taking place with full concentration and involvement in the middle of the noisy preparations for the Heritage Fair. It was a very impressive session and I felt their determination to continue the process we had started on my first visit to Pune.

After the meeting many people asked me what in the world was going on in the lobby that could have kept those students so involved, sitting on the floor for two hours amidst all that chaos. Of course the simple answer was "democracy!"

#### **Update:**

The students and teachers continue to communicate frequently as they get ready for their next term, which starts in June.

Abhirthath, who took the careful notes at Nerul School wrote:

I wanted to thank you for assuring me that we will be getting our rights finally. I was proudly telling my cousins about our meeting, but after a thought that there might be no follow up for this concept, my hopes were fading away. But now I think something revolutionary will emerge.

Meghana from Thane School recently wrote:

I thought you would be happy to know that you last visit has certainly made a difference and everyone in the school, including teachers, are now fully aware of your ideas. After you left we students faced many reactions from the staff (some of them negative) but we are now making a sincere step towards democratization.... Do keep mailing me so as to help us with the democratization process.

Dr. Kushal and one of the DAV principals will be coming to the AERO conference!

*More student prefects from Pune DAV School*



# Looking for News

## Report on Two Amazing Schools Lynn Stoddard

Dear Friends,

I'm eager to tell you about two amazing schools in Colorado that I visited recently, the Jefferson County Open School in Denver and the Lab School for Creative Learning in Fort Collins. Both schools manage to work their magic within the confines of the public system. JCOS is k-12 and The Lab School is k-6.

The Jefferson County Open School was started by my friend, Arnie Langberg. It is patterned after the walkabout vision that Maurice Gibbons described in an article in the KAPPAN in 1974. In this article he describes what high schools would be like if they expected youth to enter adulthood ready to be contributors to society -- like Australian aborigine youth are expected to do when they travel for an extended period in the Outback without provisions and return with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to the tribe. Accordingly, JCOS students, in order to graduate, must pass through six "passages" or "challenges", Adventure, Career Exploration, Creativity, Global Awareness, Logical Inquiry and Practical Skills. Each student is expected to design his or her own learning through these "passages" and follow a personal passion. All of this is done with advisers playing a prominent role.

JCOS has been operating for over 35 years. In a study of the graduates, now underway, of 431 respondents, 91% have attended colleges of their choice without presenting grades or transcripts, and 84% have earned college degrees. This compares with a national average college completion rate of

45%. Also, 26% of JCOS graduates have earned graduate degrees from such distinguished colleges as Harvard, Yale and M.I.T.

Are you impressed? My wife and I attended JCOS for a conference on "Authentic Learning." Needless to say, the conference was inspiring, with many students and alumni participating. Even so, this conference was not the highlight of our trip to Colorado. On the way to Denver, I had a sudden impulse to stop at an elementary school with which I had had dealings about ten years ago, the Lab School in Fort Collins. (It is not associated with the university, as are many so called "lab schools.")

When I walked in the front door, you can imagine my astonishment to see, hanging on the wall, a large poster of three large intersecting circles labeled Identity, Inquiry and Interaction, representing the three dimensions of human greatness! As I entered the office, I saw on the wall another similar poster.

When I told the office manager who I was, she quickly made some phone calls to assemble some people she was sure would want to meet me. I was treated like a celebrity! It was a very humbling experience. For the next two hours the principal, Stephen Bergen, and others on the staff, including the custodian, explained and demonstrated how the school and community were fully engaged in helping students grow in the three dimensions of human greatness. One teacher was enthusiastic in explaining how the staff assesses and reports to parents, with student portfolios and teacher narratives, how well each child is progressing in Identity, Inquiry and Interaction. My wife and I had lunch at the school and learned that it has recently been named a member of John Goodlad's "League of Small Democratic Schools."

Perhaps the most impressive thing about what the school is doing is that none of the present staff of the school was involved in the interactions I had with the school nearly ten years ago. It's a totally different group! It was a thrilling experience to find a public school that has caught the vision and is so engaged in the philosophy I've been ad-

vocating for so long. The school has a kindergarten and after that, classrooms are multi-age. Six, seven and eight year olds are together in each class and nine, tens and 11's are grouped together. There are ten teachers and about 250 students.

I'm looking forward to greater involvement in the future at both the Jefferson County Open School and the Lab School for Creative Learning. These two could form an alliance that could beneficially spread their message to others. The gloom that has spread over public education as a result of the No Child Left Behind Law could be dispelled with these two schools as beacons of light and joy. The enthusiasm of teachers, the involvement of parents, and students in love with learning can form a nucleus of radiating energy.

### Note:

"Education for Greatness" is a philosophy of education wherein we aim to develop in students the qualities that make them valuable contributors -- not burdens -- to society. This is accomplished as parents and teachers unite to help students grow in three dimensions of greatness, Identity, Inquiry and Interaction. Students are respected as individuals with unique talents and gifts to be developed. Curriculum is used as a tool, not as goal. This allows teachers to perform as professionals rather than as slaves to a government-imposed curriculum and meaningless testing.

Lynn Stoddard is the author of *Educating for Human Greatness* published by Holistic Education Press. ([www.great-ideas.org/Stoddard.htm](http://www.great-ideas.org/Stoddard.htm)) A companion booklet, *School Reform from the Bottom Up*, is available from the author at [lstrd@yahoo.com](mailto:lstrd@yahoo.com) or (801) 451-2554.

You can order *Educating for Human Greatness* directly from AERO by visiting: [educationrevolution.org/edforhugr.html](http://educationrevolution.org/edforhugr.html)

## Montessori Education & Partnership Way Conference Jerry Mintz

Recently I was a keynote speaker at a fascinating conference in Carmel, California, the 2nd Annual Montessori Education and





*Riane Eisler and Tim Seldin at Montessori/Partnership Conference in CA*

alternative educators communicate and synergize with each other and with parents. We can learn from each other and together we can move the whole system to a learner-centered approach. In this spirit I would like to invite you to attend the AERO Conference 2006 at Russell Sage College in Troy, New York, from June 29th to July 2nd.

It is called "Finding our Commonalities and Celebrating our Differences. As I said, for the second year in a row Tim Seldin of the Montessori Foundation will be a keynoter and also do a series of workshops. We also have John Gatto (Dumbing us Down), Pat Farenga (unschooling), Susan Ohanian (NCLB opponent, author), Ron Miller (educational philosopher, author), and Mimsy Sadowsky (a Sudbury Valley founder). We deliberately keep the cost of the conference low. Don't miss this one! You can read about the details of the conference at:

[www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org)

Partnership Way. As you know, AERO includes a wide spectrum of alternatives, and there are at least 4,500 Montessori schools in the USA alone. Tim Seldin of the Montessori Foundation & Riane Eisler, author of *Chalice and the Blade* invited me, and he will be one of the keynoters at our AERO conference next month! Yes, the AERO conference only a month away, and the early bird special ends May 31st!

At the conference I spoke about Montessori's place in the spectrum of educational alternatives. I also did workshops on how to democratize Montessori schools.

The fact is that Maria Montessori was more radical than some might believe. In my talk I presented some quotes from her that show that her thinking was far ahead of her time and very relevant today. We are now in the death throes of the old paradigm that children are "naturally lazy and have to be forced to learn" which seems to be the basis of conventional schools (as Tim Seldin calls them). "No Child Left behind" is a sad symptom of that kind of thinking. Alternative educators know that children are natural learners. Maria Montessori knew that long ago. But I believe we will not easily change the education system unless all

# A Brief History of Alternative Education

*by Ron Miller*

*Ron Miller has been involved in alternative education for 25 years, first as a Montessori teacher, then as an activist scholar and publisher (Holistic Education Review and Paths of Learning magazines and several books), and most recently as a member of the Education program faculty at Goddard College. Currently he is founder and director of a new program at Goddard designed for homeschooling teens. He has written or edited eight books, including Creating Learning Communities and Free Schools, Free People, and many articles, and has spoken at conferences in various parts of the world. He helped start the Bellwether School in Williston, Vermont for his three sons, but also sent one of them to a Waldorf school, and has recently been homeschooling another. Ron holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from Boston University, where he pursued an intensive study of the cultural roots of American education and the origins of alternative education movements.*

*Ron will be a keynote speaker at this year's AERO conference. His title of his keynote address is **Building an Educational Rights Movement**. In the address, he will talk about the challenge of building alliances among the many diverse and scattered alternative education networks and movements, and propose a vision of education for the new society that is beginning to emerge. More information on his talk and how to obtain his books can be found online at: [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org).*

Why are there “alternative” schools? Our system of public schooling was first organized in the 1830’s to provide a common, culturally unifying educational experience for all children, yet from the very beginning, certain groups of educators, parents, and students themselves have declined to participate in this system. Their reasons are various, and the forms of schooling—and nonschooling—that they have chosen instead are equally diverse. The history of alternative education is a colorful story of social reformers and individualists, religious believers and romantics; despite their differences, however, they share an especially strong interest in young people’s social, moral, emotional and intellectual development, and, more deliberately than most public school programs, they have practiced educational approaches that aim primarily to nourish these qualities.

Historians of public education have described how, during the period between 1837 (when Horace Mann became the first powerful leader of a state education agency) and the early twentieth century (when new scientific theories were applied to psychology, learning, and organizational management), a particularly narrow model of schooling became solidly established as the “one best system” of public education. According to this model, the purpose of schooling was to overcome cultural diversity and personal uniqueness in order to mold a loyal citizenry and an effective workforce for the growing industrial system. Education aimed primarily to discipline the developing energies of young people for the sake of political and social uniformity as well as the success of the emerging corporate economy. In the early twentieth century, these goals were concisely expressed by the term “social efficiency,” which was often used by educational leaders.

Many people are attracted to alternative schools and home education because they feel that this agenda of “social efficiency” does not allow for such values as individuality, creativity, democratic community life and spiritual development. Indeed, Horace Mann’s efforts to centralize public schooling were opposed from the start by religious leaders and other critics

who argued that education is a community, family, and personal endeavor, not a political program to be mandated by the state. For example, many of the Transcendentalist thinkers of the mid-nineteenth century—Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Brownson, Ripley—argued against the rigidity of public schooling and several of them started their own alternative schools. The Temple School in Boston, run by Bronson Alcott between 1834 and 1838 (with his daughter Louisa May as one of the students), is an outstanding historical model of alternative education; Alcott rejected the teaching methods of his time (rote memorization and recitation) and encouraged Socratic dialogue, with a deeply moral and spiritual emphasis.

The roots of many twentieth century alternative school movements go back to three European philosopher/educators: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and Friedrich Froebel. In his 1762 book *Emile*, Rousseau argued that education should follow the child’s natural growth rather than the demands of society, which, he claimed, tend to thwart all that is organic, natural and spiritual. This emphasis on the innate development of human nature became the primary philosophical basis for many alternative movements in education. It has influenced progressive educators as well as generations of libertarian thinkers. In the early 1800’s, the Swiss humanitarian Pestalozzi opened schools for orphans, adopting Rousseau’s principles. His work inspired educators in Europe and America (including Alcott). One of his disciples, Joseph Neef, emigrated to the U.S. and founded child-centered schools in three states between 1809 and 1827. Froebel was another teacher at Pestalozzi’s school, and later became famous as the founder of the kindergarten concept; it is not well known that Froebel envisioned all levels of schooling as being nourishing “gardens” for children’s spontaneous development.

This philosophical tradition strongly influenced Francis Parker, who, with John Dewey, originated the progressive education movement late in the nineteenth century. A public school superintendent, head of a teacher education program, and popular speaker and author, Parker

believed that education should serve the needs of children and conform to their styles of thinking and learning. Although Parker himself (and many subsequent progressive educators) tried to reform the “one best system” from within, his influence spread to many alternative schools during the first two decades of this century, such as those associated with progressive educators like Margaret Naumberg, Helen Parkhurst, and Caroline Pratt, among many others.

At the same time, two European educational pioneers designed alternative methods with roots going back to Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel. Maria Montessori was an Italian pediatrician/psychiatrist who studied child development with a meticulous scientific eye as well as a deep religious faith in the divine essence of the human being. She opened her first “children’s home” in 1907. Rudolf Steiner was an Austrian philosopher/mystic who developed a spiritual science called Anthroposophy that he applied to the fields of medicine, agriculture, architecture, and the arts, as well as education. He founded the first Waldorf school in 1919. Both of these methods have evolved into important international movements for educational change.

It was during the 1960’s that alternative education grew into a widespread social movement. During this decade, of course, countercultural themes that had always been marginal and virtually invisible—racial justice, pacifism, feminism, and opposition to corporate capitalism—exploded into public view. Mass demonstrations, alternative lifestyles and publications, and the urban riots and assassinations of that period led to a deep examination of modern society and institutions. Educators and other writers—including Paul Goodman, John Holt, Jonathan Kozol, Herbert Kohl, George Dennison, James Herndon and Ivan Illich—launched passionate attacks against the “one best system” and its agenda of social efficiency. The period between 1967 and 1972, especially, was a time of crisis for public education, when student demonstrations, teacher strikes, and a deep questioning of traditional assumptions shook the system to its core. In these few

years alone, over 500 “free schools”—nonpublic schools based on countercultural if not revolutionary ideas—were founded. Open classrooms and magnet schools (public schools of choice) were introduced. And the spirit of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel began to seep into academic and professional circles, leading, by the end of the 1970’s, to approaches that came to be called “humanistic” and “holistic” education.

The counterculture did not prevail; over the past twenty years, traditional values have been strongly reasserted in politics and in education. The 1983 report by President Reagan’s Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*, was a powerful statement of the traditional goals of American public schooling—social efficiency and economic growth—and it led to a tidal wave of political grandstanding, legislative mandates, and frantic “restructuring” mainly intended to produce better disciplined citizens and workers for a competitive global economy. George Bush’s “America 2000” agenda became Bill Clinton’s “Goals 2000” program—now enacted into law—which continued this top-down movement to harness the young generation’s energies to the needs of the corporate economy. Those who worked for progressive, child-centered, or humanistic education within the system during the heyday of the counterculture have found little support for their vision in recent years, and many have turned to alternative settings.

Within the public system there are now many alternative programs for students “at risk” of dropping out because they are so completely alienated by the impersonal routines of conventional schooling. And there are still significant pockets of progressive educators and related groups—such as those promoting whole language and cooperative learning—who remain determined to infuse public education with more democratic, humanistic purposes. But despite these oases of student-centered learning, the educational climate during the past decade has been affected by ever tighter state and federal control over learning, leading to still further testing, politically mandated “outcomes,” and national standards. There is some hope in

the relatively new concept of “charter schools,” which allow parents and innovative educators to receive public funding with less bureaucratic intervention, although it remains to be seen how much freedom such schools will be allowed if national standards begin to be enforced.

As government school systems become increasingly yoked to the purposes of the corporate economy, it is likely that thousands more families and educators will turn to the more democratic and person-centered values represented by alternative schools and home education. For the past century and half, alternative schools have been isolated countercultural enclaves with little influence on mainstream educational thinking and policy. But in the “postindustrial” or “postmodern” era that

appears to be emerging now, the industrial-age model of “social efficiency” is possibly starting to become obsolete.

Perhaps, as Ivan Illich envisioned in his 1970 book *Deschooling Society* and James Moffett describes in his recent book *The Universal Schoolhouse*, the idea of a public school system may have outlived its usefulness. According to these and other authors, in a democratic, information-rich society, learning should take place everywhere in the community, and young people should have access to mentors who nourish their diverse personal interests and styles of learning. We have a long way to go before this sort of system is in place, but if our society does in fact move in this direction, it may well be alternative educators who show the way.

# Mail & Communications

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*Edited by Carol Morley*

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**Middle schools consider a K-8 future**, by Shirley Dang, *Contra Costa Times*: Across the nation, large urban school districts are embracing an educational reform as old as the Victorian corset: schools that teach kindergarten through eighth grade. Perhaps as a throwback to the little red schoolhouse – or a nod to successful parochial instruction – public schools in Baltimore, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Philadelphia and Palm Beach, Fla., are making the switch. Some districts have ushered in K-8 to solve enrollment problems. Others view it as an academic intervention, citing studies that show that K-8 students outperform their middle school counterparts on tests. Many administrators say these campuses experience fewer of the discipline problems associated with more crowded – and decidedly more adult – middle schools or junior highs. There are about 5,000 K-8 schools in the nation. More and more, urban administrators say that middle schools do not serve the needs of adolescents. The reversion to K-8 started in the East and Midwest in the late 1990s. In the past few years, the popularity of K-8 schools has crept over the Rockies and is finally hitting California. In the 32,000-student West Contra Costa school district, parents and board member Dave Brown have enlisted UC Berkeley graduate students to help formulate a proposal for presentation to the West Contra Costa school board this spring. The movement started as a way to ward off enrollment loss at elementary schools. But as interest grew, parents also cited dissatisfaction with the urban district’s middle school test scores and decried the lack of campus safety. In West Contra Costa, converting three elementary schools to K-8 would cost \$850,000 or more, according to a December district analysis. The figure



does not include any renovations to either accommodate more students or upgrade buildings with amenities common at middle schools, such as gymnasiums, science labs or theaters.

**The NCLB Show & Sing-Along:** A new online advocacy campaign from the American Federation of Teachers features a musical cartoon beseeching the public to demand changes in No Child Left Behind in the upcoming reauthorization of the law. Visitors to the site are asked to sign a petition that states, "For all children to succeed, schools need high academic standards, rich curricula, quality professional development for staff, help for struggling students, adequate funding and a fair system of assessment and accountability. The No Child Left Behind Act has failed to live up to its promise. Our children are paying the price. Congress and the administration need to listen to parents and teachers. It's time to make some constructive changes and get NCLB right." <http://www.letsgetitright.org/cartoon/>

**Mayor: When it Comes to Schools, Smaller is Better,** by Kerri Lyon: Small schools, most of them limited to about 500 students, are all the rage in New York City. The mayor believes they're more nurturing and will ultimately improve an abysmal graduation rate. Mike Bloomberg announced another 36 small schools will open in September. "No doubt these small schools are making a big impact on their students," Bloomberg said. The city's been creating small schools at lightning speed. By the fall there will be close to 200, but because they're just a few years old, there's no proof yet they're doing a better job of graduating students. Robert Hughes heads New Visions for public schools which runs about 80 small high schools that will graduate its first class of students in June "We have a long-term goal of graduating at least 80 percent of our students," said Robert Hughes of New Visions. "We're not going to hit that this year, but we are replacing schools that were extremely impoverished and had graduation rates of 35 and 40 percent. We're going to be way above that. The small schools have shown better attendance and promotion rates, but some eighth graders are still thinking bigger is better. "So I can see new people, not the same people over and over," eighth-grader Gabriella Rivera.

**No Dollar Left Behind?** The most aggressive education law in a generation, No Child Left Behind aims to make sure all kids can read and do math on grade level. It has also benefited an industry of vendors, who collect public money and help schools meet the law's requirements. Revenues for products and services sold to public schools hit almost \$22 billion in 2004-05, according to Eduventures, a market research company. That was up 6 percent from the year before, and revenues are expected to keep growing at that kind of rate. But the market is not expanding for all. Some vendors say the law has even cost them money by eroding demand for any academic area not considered to be a federal priority. In particular, money is flowing to testing, tutoring and teacher training. All three areas have direct ties to deadlines under the No Child law. <http://www.cnn.com/2006/EDUCATION/04/21/no.child.vendors.ap/index.html>

**2006 Education Vital Signs: US Schools in Facts & Figures:** American School Board Journal presents state-by-state figures on student enrollment, teacher salaries, per-pupil expenditures, assessment scores, and other gauges of the health and well-being of our nation's schools. Other articles explore international comparisons of student performance, preschool education, high school graduation, student health, education law and finance, and the No Child Left Behind Act. This report card on American education is mixed, with high grades in some areas, low ones in others. But as these articles make abundantly clear, there is plenty of room for reflection, reform, and renewal. <http://www.asbj.com/evs/index.html>

**Math Maze,** A new game system, can help parents guarantee that their children own the prerequisite skills necessary for future success. The Math Maze Game System has not only helped many students learn, but master basic skills such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, which are essential to future success in advanced mathematics. Math Maze appeals to parents and teachers because it not only reduces the shame which slower learners often experience in and outside of the classroom, but it also gives its students a sense of ownership, leadership, and excitement towards learning through its passive approach. It provides an element of challenging yet rewarding learning for more highly developed students through its multi levels while consistently engaging its players. Math Maze game cards are printed in both, English and Spanish. Math Maze is currently being used to help elementary, middle and high school students take the dread out of practicing math and makes learning fun. <http://www.mathmaze.us/>

**Failed Breakup of H.S. in Denver Offering Lessons,** by Catherine Gewertz: The impending closure of the Manual Education Complex in Denver is sparking a conversation about what can be learned from the experience at a time when the nation has pinned high hopes on improving secondary schools by turning them into smaller, more personalized environments. The Denver high school, which subdivided into three schools in 2001, will shut its doors in June after persistent, poor academic performance. The conversion of the comprehensive high school was among the first financed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. As such, Manual has been in a fishbowl since its reorganization into small schools. Policymakers, scholars, and activists have been watching and evaluating the effort. Further information on the Manual Education Complex is available in the April 2005 report, "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do: Lessons Learned From the Experiences of Manual High School," which is posted by the Colorado Children's Campaign. <http://www.edweek.org>.

**Zero-tolerance policy for schools blasted in report as overreaching,** by Peter Bailey, Miami Herald: A poorly defined and overused zero-tolerance policy, meant to deter violent crime in Florida public schools, has resulted in thousands of students being funneled into the juvenile detention system for minor offenses, according to a study being released today. The report, issued by the Advancement Project, a NAACP-affiliated group based in Washington, D.C., says teachers are often turning over

the task of disciplining students to school police, and “setting students on a schoolhouse-to-jailhouse track.” The study concludes that “in the final analysis . . . school districts have spent millions of dollars for school police officers who spend most of their time disciplining students for conduct that should be addressed by school programs, counseling and parental involvement.” According to the findings, there were 26,990 school-related “referrals” to the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice during the 2004-05 school year. About half of those arrests were for charges such as disorderly conduct, trespassing and assault. In all, misdemeanor offenses accounted for 76 percent of the charges. The report, “Arrested Development: Addressing the School Discipline Crisis in Florida,” spotlighted disciplinary actions in the Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Pinellas, Hillsborough and Duval districts. The report says Florida schools increasingly “utilize internal discipline methods that focus on isolation and removal instead of addressing the underlying behavioral problem.” The district is the first in the state to implement a civil citation program, which officials say will cut down on most of the arrests. Under the program, first- and second-time offenders will get citations for minor offenses such as disorderly conduct and trespassing.

Advancement Project officials say the guidelines defining what infractions classify as zero-tolerance violations are outlined in vague and broad parameters. The group is calling for school districts to limit using the zero-tolerance policy to serious conduct that is a major threat to school safety.

**Parents Partnering with Teachers Can Change the Future of Education:** But for many parents, getting involved at school – or even fully supporting their child at home – is anything but straightforward or easy. Many work in jobs that offer no flexibility for illness or other family crisis, let alone the “luxury” of volunteering at school. Others never finished high school, or had such a miserable K-12 experience that they feel ill prepared to support their own child. Language differences are another huge impediment for many parents, writes Roberta Furger. Just like English-speaking tourists flummoxed about the institutions of a far-off country, immigrant families often feel bewildered by the U.S. public school system. They don’t care any less about their children or value education less than English speaking parents, but understanding how the system works, let alone finding a role for themselves in it, is not as straightforward as marching up to the principal and saying, “Sign me up.” Now the scientific evidence is clear: When parents are involved in school, students of all backgrounds and income levels do better. When their parents are involved, kids are more likely to earn higher grades and score better on standardized tests; they attend school more regularly, have improved social skills, and are better behaved in school; and they are more likely to continue their education past high school. The deeper the partnerships, the greater the opportunities for broad-based and lasting change. <http://www.edutopia.org/>

**Taking TAKS to Task**, by Jenny LaCoste-Caputo, San Antonio Express-News: In Massachusetts, New York, Washington and California, students and parents have boycotted state tests in recent

years. And a growing number of colleges and universities also are turning their backs on standardized tests by dropping the requirement that applicants submit an ACT or SAT score. More than 730 four-year colleges and universities nationwide do not use the SAT or ACT to make admissions decisions about a substantial number of their applicants. Policies vary from school to school. Some schools may not require test scores at all, while others exempt students who meet grade-point average or class rank criteria. Some schools may require the scores but use them only for placement purposes or to conduct research studies. “The issue for me with TAKS has never been whether or not I can pass, but whether or not I can participate in something I believe is unfair,” Kimberly Marciniak said. “Civic responsibility is something I learned about in my seventh-grade year. You have no right to complain about the president if you don’t vote. Well I look at TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) the same way. I would have no right to complain if I know there is something I can do to change it.” Marciniak applied to small, “test optional” liberal arts colleges. Her top two choices: Hampshire College in western Massachusetts and Knox College in Galesburg, Ill., both offered her scholarships based on her decision to boycott TAKS. <http://www.mysanantonio.com>.

**Party time’s over: Parents fight for recess as schools push for MCAS prep**, by Laura Crimaldi, Boston Herald: With schools scrapping recess to tack on more test-prep time, parents in Massachusetts and across the nation are rebelling against the nose-to-the-grindstone trend that robs their kids of vital play time. School administrators and teachers anxious to perform are drilling third- and fourth-graders. Nationwide, 40 percent of elementary schools have either eliminated recess or are considering shortening students’ free time on the playground, according to the National Parent Teacher Association, which is partnering with the Cartoon Network for the “Rescuing Recess” campaign. The Whitman-Hanson Regional Schools have been without morning recess for seven years to accommodate learning demands and MCAS pressure, according to Superintendent John McEwan. “Success-driven adults are forgetting we have children in schools. They are not business executives. They are not 7-year-old CEOs. They are children and they need to have a break in the middle of the day,” said Beverley Ann Griffin Dunne, a Peabody School Committee member and mother of a third-grade girl. Dunne is pushing a “social development” curriculum that would add 10 minutes of playtime to the school day. State Rep. Paul Casey (D-Winchester) filed a bill last year requiring elementary schools to set aside 20 minutes for outdoor play and physical activity at the request of a Stoneham woman concerned about childhood obesity. The Cartoon Network is pledging to spend \$1.3 million on the “Rescuing Recess” letter-writing campaign, said Jim Samples, the station’s general manager. “Children need time to play and learn how to get along with peers,” said Mary Twiss, the grandmother of a Peabody second-grader.

**The Education Forum**, an education policy advocacy organization based in Wellington, New Zealand issued a new report, School Choice, A Hot Topic with findings like: 96 percent

of New Zealand parents wanted to be able to choose the school their children attend; The British favor letting parents choose either state or independent schools and have public funding follow children to the chosen school; Sweden saw a huge increase in government funded independent schools since school choice was introduced in 1992; School choice has continued expanding in the U.S. with both charter and vouchers. Charters now enroll 1,000,000 students in 3400 schools. The first charter school opened in 1992. 100,000 students are served by vouchers and tax funded scholarships. Some 400,000 families are eligible for tax credits for private school tuition. Favorable legislation for school choice continues to be passed by legislatures. <http://www.educationforum.org.nz/index.asp>

**Study gives schools tips on Latinos; Discipline among staff is key**, by Pat Kossan, *The Arizona Republic*: When it comes to helping struggling Latino kids learn, success has little to do with money, class sizes, fancy reading programs, parent involvement or tutoring, a study released Thursday concluded. Those things can be found at both good schools and bad. Here's what separates the best from the faltering: principals and teachers who test and retest students, who use the results to teach and re-teach, and who don't stop until they find a way for every kid to grasp the lesson. Latino students make up more than 405,000 of the state's 1 million school kids. They are a growing population but are lagging behind their academic peers. About 30 percent of Latino students drop out before high school graduation. The Center for the Future of Arizona, headed by former Arizona State University President Lattie Coor, and ASU's Morrison Institute conducted the three-year study. They were helped by Jim Collins, a former Stanford University business professor and author of the best-selling *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't*. Collins' book examined why some companies organized themselves into steadfast successes by comparing them to twin companies that stayed flat or burst onto the scene and then failed. The study applied Collins' methodology to compare 12 of Arizona's best schools, in its poorest neighborhoods, to 12 similar but failing schools, sometimes in the same district. The result is *Why Some Schools With Latino Children Beat the Odds . . . and Others Don't*. Here is what it reported makes the difference in a successful school: Disciplined thought: These principals and teachers admitted failure and changed their approach.

**Disciplined people:** These principals pushed ahead despite roadblocks and used their entire staff to find solutions. They fought through children suffering from poverty, drugs and crime. They fought through bad reading programs imposed by districts, oversized classes, underpaid teachers and public mandates that created mounds of paperwork. **Disciplined action:** The principal and staff select one program or plan, stick with it and make it better and better. The study has nothing to do with imposing business values onto schools, Collins said, because the same mediocrity and undisciplined focus plaguing many schools also plagues businesses.

## *Home Education News*

**Meet My Teachers: Mom and Dad:** No longer the bailiwick of religious fundamentalists or neo-hippies looking to go off the cultural grid, homeschooling is a growing trend among the educated elite. More parents believe that even the best-endowed schools are in an Old Economy death grip in which kids are learning passively when they should be learning actively, especially if they want an edge in the global knowledge economy. Homeschooling can untether families from Zip codes and school districts, just as the Internet can de-link kids from classrooms, piping economics tutorials from the Federal Reserve, online tours of Florence's Uffizi Gallery, ornithology seminars from Cornell University, and filmmaking classes from UCLA straight onto laptops and handhelds. Also driving the trend is a new cottage industry of private tutors, cyber communities, online curriculum providers, and parental co-ops. One popular critique of conventional education likens it to a mass-production institution that is failing to adapt. Schools, critics say, are like old industrial assembly lines, churning out conformists who could function well in rote factory jobs or rigid corporate hierarchies but not in New Economy professions that demand innovation and independent thinking. Homeschooling isn't universally applauded as a solution, however. Some parents and educators worry that it retards children's socialization. Others say it siphons much-needed resources like per-pupil funding and the activism of the savviest parents. Schooling in isolation could threaten civic cohesion and diversity of thought, says Stanford University education professor Rob Reich. Reich favors stricter homeschooling regulations to supplant the current patchwork of state laws so that children can be assured of exposure to more than just what their parents sanction. [www.businessweek.com](http://www.businessweek.com)

## *International News*

### Australia

**From Gifted Children Forced to Dumb Down at School**, by Justine Ferrari, *The Australian*: AS many as 250,000 gifted children across Australia are being forced to dumb down at school, trapped in classes up to four grades below their ability. The head of the gifted education centre at the University of NSW, Miraca Gross, said between 10 and 15 per cent of the school population was exceptionally talented. Half the gifted children aged 8 to 10 who were tested on Year 8 maths, English, science and reading scored better than the average 14-year-old and similar results were found for children in years 7 and 9 who were tested on Year 12 material, Professor Gross said. "If they achieve at their full level, other kids don't particularly want to be friends with them," she said. "The other choice is to dumb down and work at a level much lower than they can, ask silly questions in the classroom and make deliberate mistakes in their work or tests so other kids will think they're like them." The centre tests about 2000 students every year who are identified as advanced learners by their teachers but Professor Gross said the vast majority of talented students left school unrecognised. Professor Gross said schools were still poor at



identifying their gifted students and often reluctant to develop and accommodate their needs. The university's Gifted Education Resource Research and Information Centre tests about 1500 students annually in years 4 to 6 (aged between 10 and 12) with work designed for Year 8 students (about 14 years) in maths, science, English and reading. About 500 students in years 7 to 9 sit Year 12 tests.

Professor Gross said many gifted students were ostracised or quietly ignored by their age peers and it was imperative that schools started actively identifying and catering for gifted students, in the same way as for those gifted in music or sports. "Gifted kids can feel they have to make a choice between friendship and achievement," she said. The Gifted Education Resource Research and Information Centre is taking registrations for the talent search tests for primary and high school students until March 31 through its website [gerric.arts.unsw.edu.au](http://gerric.arts.unsw.edu.au)

#### Iraq

**Schools also on the Front Lines in Iraq:** The torrent of violence that has swept Baghdad and surrounding provinces since U.S. forces invaded three years ago, and surged since last month's attack on a Shiite shrine, has left little unscathed — even schools. What were once sanctuaries of learning have become places of fear, undercutting efforts to rebuild the dilapidated education system left by Saddam Hussein. Bombs, rockets, mortar and machine-gun fire killed 64 school children in the four months ending Feb. 28 alone, according to a report by the Education Ministry. At least 169 teachers and 84 other employees died in the same period. "We are in a society of insecurity," said Education Minister Abdul Fallah al-Sudani. "Schools are not excluded from the suffering of our society." It's unclear why the Dijla school was struck last October, but mortar rounds are difficult to aim. The school is located in a religiously mixed neighborhood that is home to a number of government officials and other prominent Iraqis. But dozens of other schools were targeted in the weeks before December parliamentary elections, when their use as polling stations put them on the front line of insurgents' efforts to derail the vote. More recently, schools have been caught in the wave of sectarian killing, reports Alexandra Zavis and Bushra Juhi. <http://www.boston.com/>

#### Puerto Rico

**New Education Initiative Brings Montessori to Puerto Rico Public Schools:** A collective of 13 public schools in Puerto Rico has launched an ambitious program to bring Montessori education to the children of San Juan and surrounding communities. Spearheaded by *Dr. Ana Maria Garcia Blanco*, principal of *La Nueva Escuela Juan Ponce de Leon*, the project calls for the formal training of 53 local teachers by staff from the *Westchester, NY-based Center for Montessori Teacher Education / New York* (CMTE / NY) over the next two years. It is no secret that public schools in Puerto Rico have had a very difficult time. Many schools have become accustomed to violence on their premises. The school dropout rate is very high — 50% in the case of *Dr. Garcia Blanco's La Nueva Escuela* — and the consolidation of small neighborhood programs into larger schools has cut them off from their

communities and the possibilities of partnership with parents. Two years ago, a movement to change this environment began. A select group of local teachers began training with CMTE/ NY, with the object of bringing Montessori methods to some of the most at-risk schools in Puerto Rico. Montessori training opened wide new vistas for the local teachers chosen for the program, as they experienced the power of creative educational development and conscious community building. This provided a sea change in the actual classrooms of teachers and schools that have joined this collective.

The teachers for the second, San Juan-based phase of the training program, which began in October of 2005, were selected from a total of 13 "sister schools" of *La Nueva Escuela*. Many of them are veteran public school teachers who are committed to helping transform their own schools into the kind of model program represented by the mother school. *Dr. Garcia Blanco* and her staff have spent the last 15 years transforming their school in a poor urban neighborhood on the verge of shutting down - with a 50 % dropout rate and a climate of violence - into a place of stability, excellence and peace in the Montessori educational tradition. *Dr. Blanco* has created a community-based school outreach program that has made *La Nueva Escuela* a model for other schools contemplating the Montessori method and a central force in the neighborhood. This is where CMTE/ NY has been vital to the growth of *La Nueva Escuela* and her sister schools. In October 2005, CMTE/ NY began a program for 29 Elementary and 28 Early Childhood teachers in Puerto Rico. Core CMTE/NY staff members fly in to give presentations with the support of those teachers who trained with CMTE/NY in New York. During the first year of the program, CMTE/NY staff members will also be doing consultation visits to the schools to help them move forward, in proportion to their desire to become full Montessori schools. Student internship visits by CMTE/NY staff will begin in the second year of the program. Once there is a core of veteran teachers with the full scope of formal training, the role of CMTE / NY would be phased out in favor of a local training program staffed by Puerto Ricans and serving the larger island community.

#### Conferences:

##### June 29 - July 1

International Association for Learning Alternatives  
[www.learningalternatives.org](http://www.learningalternatives.org)

##### June 29 - July 2

3rd Annual AERO Conference  
[www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org)

##### July 3 - July 7

iEARN International Conference and Youth Summit  
[www.iearn2006.nl](http://www.iearn2006.nl)

##### July 15 - July 21

Education and Non-Violent Communication (NVC)  
[www.pivot.ca/ecolepeace](http://www.pivot.ca/ecolepeace)

##### August 31 - September 4

Rethinking Education (10 Years)  
[www.rethinkingeducation.com](http://www.rethinkingeducation.com)

# We Are Outlaws

## Being a Public Freedom and Democracy School in Un-Democratic Times

*Olivia Frey*

Co-founder and Staff at the Village School

*“The future is not about designing curriculum. It’s about awakening to creation . . . .*

*The most important thing is the awakening.”*

—Robert Louv in *The Last Child In the Woods*



Village School, a K-12 public freedom and democracy school in Northfield, Minnesota, U.S., is a place of awakenings. It is a place where small, daily miracles occur.

### Hear the stories of our students:

Elizabeth is now 15. She is a leader in the school. She regularly participates in Restorative Justice Committee where she pushes and challenges students to admit to hurting someone—hitting them or excluding them from their game. She serves lunch to her classmates, and takes over Morning Group for her adviser when he is sick. She is acutely aware of the health of the community, and hears the alarm in the jagged vibrations in the air when something is amiss—a student has taken someone’s cell phone without the person knowing it; another person has lied about throwing eggs against the building. She does not take things into her own hands and mete out fierce punishments. She opens her hands and takes our hands in order to heal breaks in the community peacefully and justly.

Elizabeth wasn’t always this way. Many years and personal transformations ago, Elizabeth’s cousin pushes her in the lunch line. She pushes him back, and when he runs out the cafeteria door, she chases him and pounds on his back as hard as she can. She then returns to the lunchroom and with two sweeps of her arms, pushes all the lunch trays full of food onto the floors. Grapes roll and mash potatoes and gravy splatter against the lockers.

Jimmy came to Village School from Florida when he was twelve. He could not read, and could barely speak full sentences. When a teacher would ask him how he was, he would shout “No!” “No” was the word that defined his life, and the word that governed his spirit. Jimmy would speak through daily disruptive and destructive actions: sewing into plywood with the sewing machine that a student’s grandmother had leant to us; burning “fuck” into the back seat of the school van with a lighter.

Jimmy was determined to speak, which his mute, aggressive acts of destruction were testimony to.

#### *Student Commanding a Submarine at the Village School*



Jimmy now is 17. Today he speaks. He argues eloquently. He puns and jokes with his teachers. He sustains long, complicated, one could say even philosophical, discussions with his teacher who used to be a college professor about what makes someone a better person, or unraveling the relationship between the psychology and the actions of another student. He speaks out and speaks cogently and clearly in School Meeting, honing in on the heart of the idea under discussion, and guiding us gently back on track.

Why did these children change? Because they are in a place of awakenings. They attend a free democratic school.

Students of all abilities come to Village School. But they all come to the school with one thing in common. They want freedom. They want to be trusted to make their own decisions about what they should know and who they should become, even the youngest child. They want to ask questions without being called “disruptive” and sent to the principal’s office. They don’t want to sit in a desk all day, and be able to move only when a bell rings and someone in power gives them permission to move, and if they can’t sit in the desk, they are given medicine to control them. They want the freedom to make mistakes and figure it out for themselves, not alone, but in the company of people who love them and trust them. They believe that they can do it if only given the chance.

What we believe, what children believe, this is deeply known by all of you reading this who attend free democratic schools, who started them and teach in them, volunteer in them, write about them, watch them with love and trust.

It is harder to believe when you are the state department of education that oversees a free democratic *public* school, when you are the school’s sponsor who must obey the laws about state standards and the federal NCLB act, when you are the general public who pays taxes to support the school where children are free and where they make decisions, and you are used to “school” as oppressive and punishing.

In our ninth year of operation, Village School is undergoing our fourth review to renew our contract with our sponsor, the local public school district and with the state department of education, required by charter school law. It is not going well. The newspaper headlines blare “Village School faces uncertain future” and “Northfield charter might lose sponsorship.” The local chief of police bellows “permissive” and “loose supervision” and “irresponsible.” The FAX machine groans constantly—57 pages of documents to the lawyer, 12 pages of documents, 20 pages of documents. Village School has not implemented the state standards, which are largely content-based and would require us to “deliver” instruction in a conventional “scope and sequence” way. Village School has not made Adequate Yearly Progress, in fact, allows students, some even encourage students, to refuse to take the standardized tests. Students “run loose” in the building and are “free to roam” outside and in the community without adult supervision. We plead guilty to all charges.



State and local reports criticizing Village School imply that teachers are incompetent and negligent. In fact, we are quite intentional. We are careful about implementing a program that we believe will harm children's intellectual growth. One state social studies standard, for example, is that children will learn that the two most important figures in the history of the U.S. are Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. While we do not deny that these men were important, we question whether they were the most important. The Minnesota standards were written in a highly charge political environment, and reflect as much politicians' personal agendas as they do any belief in what children should know. At Village School and all free democratic schools, we are not interested in children and youth just memorizing facts, and questionable facts at that. We want students to ask questions, to originate questions; to challenge accepted thinking; to not accept the world, but change the world; and have the courage to do so. We responded to one parent who lamented that our students were not required to read the works of William Shakespeare, "We do not require students to read Shakespeare. We want them to be Shakespeare." Did Shakespeare fulfill standards and take standardized tests? How could he have possibly written what he did without these accountability measures?

The Minnesota Department of Education may say that they are "concerned" that we have not "embedded" standards and that the students at Village School are supposedly not learning math or reading. The police chief of Northfield can say that he is "concerned" that our students run around in the halls or go fishing during the school day or even sell pot downtown. But what the department and the police really are "concerned" about is that our students have freedom.

Village School students have freedom of speech, freedom of movement, freedom of thought, all kinds of freedoms. They have freedom to not only disagree with teachers' actions or words, they have freedom to swear at us, because we are not about trying to control their swearing or their words. We are about helping them to find their voices and their thoughts and shaping them so that they can be as powerful and effective as they can. They have freedom not only to leave the building, but also to throw rocks at the neighbor's dumpsters, because we are not about controlling every deed that they do, good or bad. We are about students learning responsibility, real responsibility, not obedience because they are afraid of punishment, but responsibility motivated by care, motivated because they have come to see, with our wise help, how their wrong deeds have affected others, and they decide that they don't want to hurt someone anymore. They have freedom to make art with the swastika, as abhorrent as that symbol is to us, because we are not about controlling their thoughts, because that is what the Nazis did in their repressive and authoritarian educational system before World War II, a system that scholars will tell you contributed to the birth of that genocidal movement.

As citizens in this nation, and in all public spheres, including education, that supposedly values freedom and democracy, we should foster freedom and democracy in every corner of our lives. But it is possible that most people do not want freedom or



*Democratic Meeting at the Village School*

democracy, really, and especially do not want them for their children. It's hard to believe anything else, until our leaders—our national, state, and community leaders—and our citizens in the public sector act differently from how they act now, particularly with regard to education.

On Thursday, April 6, UPS delivered the latest round of standardized tests on which No Child Left Behind adequate yearly progress is based to all public schools in Minnesota. The tests were overnight expressed because the company was late in putting the tests together for shipping. Village School received twenty five boxes of tests. Traditional public schools with many more students than ours received hundreds of boxes. We also received two empty boxes, flattened, which were used to return completed tests. It cost \$12.00 to ship each of these flat, empty boxes to our school. This is how we as people in this country are choosing to spend public money on children and their education.

During this, our latest and most contentious review of our public charter, at least two of us have questioned seriously why we will continue as a public school. The philosophy of freedom and democracy erodes with each standardized test. Our lawyer writes that to survive, we might need to change our program "just a little."

For now, we are solidly in it, though we are deemed "way out there," even "outlaws." Being in it, we can see and say, pay witness to the current destructive forces of public education. Our very public controversy and conversation has challenged the usual ways of thinking.

Witness and testify. It is a noble gathering we are all a part of, shades of the past and souls of the current century, living and breathing democracy at times when our very leaders want voices silenced and democracy stifled. Yes. We are Outlaws.

**Editor's Note:** *On May 30, 2006 the Northfield School Board voted 5-2 against renewing Village School's charter. The staff of Village School are presently considering other options, including finding sponsorship from another organization and continuing as a private school.*

# Books etc.

by Aleksandra Majstorac Kobiljski

## Parent-Driven Schools

By Randy Gaschler

This book is a battle cry of a headmaster who saved his school from closing with the help of the parents and now lobbies for a revolution in American public school education system. For any one educator who has been involved with heading an alternative school, struggles of Randy Gaschler will sound very familiar. He claims that what the education system needs is not a reform, but a revolution! The only question is where to start and how to proceed.

For Gaschler, it was all about one simple and logical idea – giving control of our schools back to the parents. The key of a good school is its accountability to the parents. He repeatedly refers to parental involvement in the school as a key point which differentiates Horizon Instructional Systems, one of the first charter schools in California, from others. With a philosophy that made teachers accountable to parents and paid by number of students they served, Horizon was bound to encounter oppositions from the teachers' associations, unions and the education board. It was only after two years that the Horizon's charter was revoked and the 700 angry parents started fighting to keep the school open. Gaschler vividly describes the nitty-gritty of lobbying, internal politics and subtle (and not so subtle) techniques education bureaucrats, accountable to politicians, used to keep the school out of the game. First three chapters are a cautionary tale every charter school director should read with considerable attention. It is a lesson in passion and fight for what you believe is good education for your child.

It is in the subsequent chapters that one is at times puzzled by absence of some other key players from the educational setup provided by Gaschler. A strong emphasis on parental control over education is based on two assumptions that Gaschler does not fully address in his book. One is that what parents want for their children is necessarily the best and that the parents should be the only decision makers. He emphasizes the fact that Horizon did not expose children to controversial subjects unless parents made a choice. It sounds like a good strategy to keep parents happy about teaching or not of evolution but I am not entirely convinced that parents should have the same say when it comes to sex education of twelve-year olds. Second unexamined assumption is that children actually have parents who have the time, commitment and desire to be in control of their child's education. It does not

account for the possibility that a number of children have parents who do not take the time to care or do not have the ability to make the calls required to choose the best for their education.

Furthermore, with all the emphasis on parents, children's role in their own education is quite oblique. Gaschler is clear on children's natural drive to learn, damage standardized tests can effect on a child and the impossibility of "one size fit all" school system. But when it comes to democratic procedure, power of children to choose their curriculum, mandatory class attendance or not and accountability of the teachers to the students, Gaschler is less clear.

Randy Gaschler's book is a powerful account of a struggle to reform American public education system- a struggle many in the alternative education movement have given up. It is probably one of the toughest struggles around and his book explains exactly why. His vivid account of the practicality and foulness of the resistance put up by education bureaucrats is a vivid reminder how high the stakes are and how strong is the resistance. One can only hope that in the sequel of this book one can read more on children and how they experienced those two weeks in March 1995 when the school's faith was hanging in the balance.



## Self Design: Nurturing Genius Through Natural Learning

By Brent Cameron with Barbara Mayer

Based on belief that children are natural learners, Cameron wrote a book which guards the precious balance between scholarship and focus on practice of educational designs. Inspired by research in epistemology, work of Douglas Harding and four stages of human development, a

book offers a way to nurture the enthusiasm which followed natural learning. Like a number of other educators, Cameron is devoted to a key premises that children do not need to be pushed towards learning but that their love for learning only needs to be nurtured. He is unique in pointing of how much of the approach to education is related to the way in which we choose to be human beings – returning to the original point of view.

One of the most rewarding features of the work is that while based on holistic ideas about education it is not detached from the day to day challenges of sustaining a learning environment conducive to the educational process. This book will be most useful to parents and educators who want to go beyond practice of schooling and re-examine fundamental assumptions of how things are done, even in the world of alternative education. The book is a helpful balance of research accessible to lay audience, philosophy that can be practiced without compromise and a roadmap to casting education in the broad light of relationship between adults and children that is a welcome refreshment to an educators book shelf.

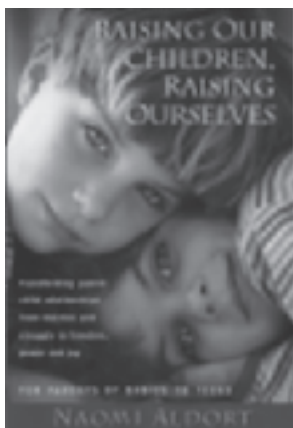
***SelfDesign can be ordered through AERO at:***  
[www.educationrevolution.org/selfdesign.html](http://www.educationrevolution.org/selfdesign.html)



**Worlds Apart**  
By David Gribble

As the title has it, there are two worlds of education. They both share some broad aims that sound similar but embody concepts that understood in different ways. So different that they were incompatible. David Gribble gives an overview of values, opinions and practices. He deals with everything from school uniforms, curriculum, student parties and buildings. He attempts to present both positive and negative aspects of two systems. This is a first-hand view as David Gribble experienced both worlds but remains an avid advocate of democratic education. It is one more in line of Gribble's work which brings the movement closer and closer together. In a sense it is an invitation for dialogue between generations within the democratic and alternative education movement world-wide.

**Worlds Apart can be ordered through AERO at:**  
[www.educationrevolution.org/worldsapart.html](http://www.educationrevolution.org/worldsapart.html)



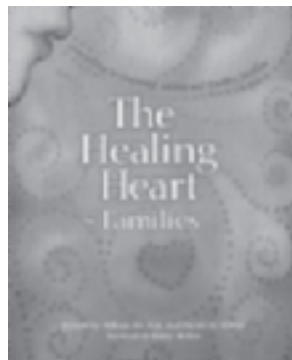
**Raising Our Children, Raising Ourselves**  
By Naomi Aldort

Parents are on an eternal quest to understand their children's feelings and behavior. This book is aimed at parents who are often bewildered at their children's behavior and find it difficult to handle it. It engages with children's needs and ways in which they can be met. The fact that one loves ones child does not mean that the child we experience it and feel

loved. How to address the gap between what parents and children feel if one of the major quests of this book. Realizing that children often act from the feeling of being helpless is an important step if helping address the issue of child's autonomy. If children feel that they have the power to initiate a response that will speak to their needs is one of the ways to preempt the feelings of anger and depression with children.

The book also speaks to precise ways in which parents can help change from negating to empowerment of their children. Separation of yourself from your child, listening to your child with attention, validating of child's feeling and empowerment to resolve their own problems. It is a powerful book for parents on their way to understand themselves and their children and grow alongside each other.

**Raising Our Children can be ordered through AERO at:**  
[www.educationrevolution.org/raising.html](http://www.educationrevolution.org/raising.html)



**The Healing Heart – Families: Storytelling to Encourage Caring and Healthy Families**

**The Healing Heart – Communities: Storytelling to Build Strong and Healthy Communities**

Edited by Allison M. Cox and David H. Albert

*Reviewed by Rev. Maggie Sebastian  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ, Wheeling, WV)*

Cox and Albert have brought together companion volumes that encourage the healing art of storytelling. The premise - that in sharing stories from our own cultural backgrounds and from those of other places, we can hear *our own stories* and thus find healing – has been around as long as humanity.

Cox and Albert take the human need to hear and tell stories for healing and give practical applications for healing story telling in a variety of family and community settings. Both public health professionals, Cox and Albert, through networking and their own experiences have compiled not only many stories from around the world, but also the stories of the storytellers.

Topics covered in the two books include grief, domestic violence, spirituality, sexuality, health, parent/child relationships, environment, and community development. The actual stories are set apart in grey boxes which gives the reader the ability to zip through and read all the great stories first, think of how they are touched, and then go back and find out in what context the stories were actually used. This set of books is valuable not only in the alternative school setting, but also for families, churches, and community groups.

**The Healing Heart Books can be ordered through AERO at:**  
[www.educationrevolution.org/hhfamilies.html](http://www.educationrevolution.org/hhfamilies.html) and  
[www.educationrevolution.org/hhcommunities.html](http://www.educationrevolution.org/hhcommunities.html)



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