

Education Revolution

THE MAGAZINE OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Spring 2008, Issue #52

Volume 20, Number 1

Inspiring educational stories from the far corners of the earth



INSIDE:

Revolutionary ideas from Nepal, Japan, Canada, England, Norway, and Milwaukee!
 PLUS Education in the News and upcoming conference announcements



The 5th Annual AERO Conference "Moving From Ideas to Practice"

June 26th - 29th, 2008 = Russell Sage College = Troy, NY

The AERO conference brings together educators, students, parents, and many others interested and/or involved in educational alternatives from around the U.S., Canada, and the world. Many educational alternatives will be represented along with individuals from traditional schools and education backgrounds. Examples of the educational alternatives that will be represented include Public Alternatives, Unschooling, Montessori, Waldorf, Steiner, Choice, Democratic, Homeschooling, Open, Charter, Free, Sudbury, Holistic, Virtual, Magnet, Early Childhood, Reggio Emilia, Indigo, Krishnamurti, Quaker, Libertarian, Independent, Progressive, Community, Cooperative, and many more!

Keynote Speakers

Deborah Meier

Faculty at New York University's Steinhardt School of Education, Board Member for the Coalition of Essential Schools and Author of *Will Standards Save Public Education?* and *Many Children Left Behind* among many others.

Matt Hern

Author of *Field Day: Getting Society Out of School, Watch Yourself: Why Safer Isn't Always Better*, and *Deschooling Our Lives*

Donna Barker

Doctoral Candidate with Dissertation on *Alumni from Democratic Schools & Parent of Students that Attended Educational Alternatives*

Mary Leue

Founder of *The Free School* and *SKOLE: The Journal of Alternative Education* and author and editor of many titles.

Molly Nichols & Wesley Clark

Students at Harriet Tubman Free School

Khalif Williams

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Education Revolution

THE MAGAZINE OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

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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FROM THE Editor's Desk

BY RON MILLER

The editorial mission of *Education Revolution* can be summed up by saying that if you are looking for, or working to provide, person-centered, democratically oriented ways of learning, you will find in these pages that *you are not alone*. You are part of a global movement to replace industrial-age schooling with genuine, organic learning that respects human needs, child development, cultural diversity and high ideals such as universal love and peace. Dedicated visionaries in many parts of the world are striving day after day to establish such places of learning for a new millennium. Their stories are here.

Your daily work is probably consuming and exhausting. You are struggling to keep a small independent school afloat with limited resources, or contending with the politics of public schooling to keep an unconventional program going, or opening your heart to young people healing from the abuse they've suffered in our competitive and bullying culture; or maybe you're devoting hours of your life every day to nourishing your own children's learning. You probably don't feel that you have much energy left to build an international movement. But in reality, that's exactly what you are doing as you engage in your daily struggles. You are part of something larger. That's our message.

So, be inspired by the stories we gather from the far corners of the world—Nepal, Japan, Thailand, Norway, Milwaukee.... These experiments in humane and democratic learning reflect different facets of the emerging education revolution. They're addressing diverse local needs and cultural situations. They may not look quite like your school or home learning situation. But at their heart, they share similar principles and a similar determination to overcome the oppressive system of standardized schooling.

There are several theories about how cultures change. Often change is imposed from above, by ruthless or charismatic leaders. Sometimes it is shaped by drastic changes in the environment, such as new technologies, natural disasters or wars. But the most fundamental, transformational change in a culture is a shift in worldview: people stop

believing in the established picture of reality and start telling new stories. Recent writings on the "tipping point," "spiral dynamics," and cultural "framing" confirm what grassroots activists and anarchist thinkers have been saying for decades: change happens when people spontaneously abandon the established order and adopt a new narrative to explain reality, an alternative set of values.

That is precisely what the educational alternatives movement is doing. Yet few people realize that this cultural rebellion is actively growing in so many parts of the world. Besides AERO, there is no center, no nexus, where the widely scattered experiments in genuine education meet, where it becomes evident that together they add up to something much larger than any of them alone. The mainstream media aren't covering this story. Political leaders aren't aware of it. It's up to us to get the word out.

Many of us in this network have explored ways to create stronger means of advocating for educational alternatives. It's been difficult to build a focused, adequately funded organization with enough credibility or impact to reach the public's consciousness. Maybe, in an age of empire and standardization, the time has not yet been right. But just maybe, this age is coming to an end and our time is now at hand. The world needs us. ●

Congratulations

to our author **Charles Eisenstein**.

Utne Reader has selected his article

"Deschooling Yourself," originally published in the previous issue of *Education Revolution*, for reprinting.

Being There

WITH JERRY MINTZ

NOTE FROM JERRY:

Many people know about AERO's networking, but some are interested in knowing about work that actually goes on at the AERO office. For this issue's Being There column, I thought people would enjoy reading about the experiences of a single mother from Japan who needed help trying to find a democratic school for her son in the United States. She first contacted us nearly a year ago and we have tried to help her in her quest since that time.

BY MEGUMI HIGUCHI

I am the mother of Kai, an 11 year old boy. We are homeschooling in Japan, which is very difficult for ordinary students.

Kai had quit public school in Tokyo because he didn't like the coercive education and the situation of bullying in the classroom. At first I found a "free school" in Tokyo. He went there for three months. But he decided he didn't like that school, and since then he has been staying at home. I felt that the school was not democratic, because only adult staff and parents had made the big decisions about the school system and institution. The children couldn't get involved with the procedure. So he decided that he wouldn't go to any "school" and he became a homeschooler.

There are almost 130,000 elementary and junior high school students who are not going to school in Japan. The government calls them "not going to school children." Before they were called "school refusing children." Every child must go to school in Japan. If they do not go to school, they are automatically registered to the local public school board, and they are treated very disadvantageously in their future. The schools and teachers are pressing them very much. They admit that there are some kinds of problems in school, bullying and teachers, that make children not to go to school, but they would not admit the right of the choice of education and homeschooling. The government and ordinary Japanese people believe not going to school children have some kind of developmental disability or disease. Doctors in mental hospitals prescribe some psychotropic medicine to them.

Kai and I are very pressed by teachers, and we are isolated from the community, because ordinary people believe that the children must go to school, that if they don't go they will be dropped out from Japanese society.

I read a book by John Holt and knew about unschooling, but it was difficult for Kai to continue homeschooling in Japan.

One day I found the words "democratic school" and I saw that they are run by both adult staff and children equally. I was

very impressed with it and searched the web and then hit AERO and Jerry's site. I've read Jerry's book, and I wanted to see him and to talk with him directly. So I sent an email to him that I'd like to see him in New York City with my son. I planned to meet Jerry and talk with him and to visit Brooklyn Free School. It was a very short trip, but I was so strongly impressed with the reality of the democratic school and the children. I had interviews with the director of BFS, Alan and Jerry.

Aleksandra who is a member of the AERO staff and a friend of ours, met with us when she was recently studying in Japan. She was very worried about Kai's isolated situation and suggested that we come to U.S. and to stay there for a while. This time we came again to New York in February and stayed for almost one month.

I wanted to visit more schools around New York. Jerry arranged the schools for us and first we first visited Teddy McArdle Free School in Little Falls, New Jersey. The director, Alex Khost, founded the school last year. The name of the school is from a short story by J.D. Salinger. There are fourteen children at the school, from four years old to twelve years old; they are very active and energetic, and the everyday program is very flexible.

Some children are homeschooling and they are attending two or three days a week. Parents are coming with children and sometimes they have classes for cooking and weaving, etc., and they bring the children for field trip by their cars and take care of them, and they are almost like volunteer staff of the school. Alex and Dana, who is a staff member at AERO, and parents discuss the daily programs and running the school.

We attended our first democratic school meeting at Teddy McArdle. It is held every Thursday. It was amazing for me. Every month the chairperson and the secretary are elected. Children are running the meeting. Of course the teacher and the parents and children equally can make proposals. The younger children who were 6 years old could explain their proposals and hear the others' opinions and make decisions and run the meeting. It seems like just one of the ordinary scenes at democratic schools everyday, but I was really impressed with their ability and possibility and potentiality. Sometime the teachers and parents gave their opinions for suggesting to the children, but they could discuss everything by themselves. It would be important not only to state one's opinion but also to respect the others. The meeting is the final decision-making place, and the children have the consciousness for them to decide the rules of their school.

The children were interested in Kai, who couldn't speak English at all, but he brought Japanese books of origami and paper planes. He made origami flowers and animals

and dragon and paper planes with them. They were curious about them and they were playing each other. Kai made some friends. When we left the school, Kai was so sad to be away from his new friends. He had so enjoyed making paper planes and playing video games with the other boys: then he told me that he was missed them so much and he thought he wouldn't like to visit other schools any more.

But next week, we visited Brooklyn Free School again. Kai had a friend from last April's visit. This time two other boys, Amiri and Rah, were waiting for Kai because they love Japanese comics and animations so much, and they are even learning the Japanese language at the school. When we arrived at school, they made a proposal to have a class with Kai. They were teaching Kai English, so

he taught them Japanese. They started right away exchanging their languages. So suddenly we had a Japanese and English class! It was very enjoyable for Kai, because he likes to learn English and to teach them Japanese. They like Japanese and Kai felt very comfortable.

They taught the conversation of every day language to each other. Amiri and Rah talked to Kai so politely and very kindly. I was so surprised that they showed such a mature attitude and they are only thirteen year olds. After they talked, they discovered that that they had common hobbies. They love the same animation from Japan. They laughed and sang anime songs together and time passed so fast.

We took a train from New York City to Albany Free School. The first afternoon, we were lucky to take part in a council meeting. They were seriously discussing about the amount of time people played video games at school. Of course, the chairperson was a child. The council meeting is very important for the school; any problem can be resolved at the meeting. The children know it and partake in it with confidence. They feel that they are members of community of the school and have responsibilities to it and respect for others. Megan, a teacher, told us that from the kindergarten class on they gave the guidance of the council meeting for the children, The children learn how the express their ideas and their feelings.

The third day, we went to the alternative high school nearby, Harriet Tubman Free School. It is an extension of the Free School. We met Isaac who graduated from Albany Free School and has been teaching there. He is also an AERO staff member and is AERO's conference director. It was the first time for us to meet a person who grew up in a democratic school. He told us that he would like to help network the group of democratic schools as a movement of alternative education.

We met with Chris, who just retired after teaching and

directing the school for more than 30 years. At his home he answered my questions and those that Japanese people would have. We ordinary Japanese adults tend to think that if we would give freedom to children, they could not handle it adequately, Chris answered that unhappy children could not handle freedom, because they would feel angry and not be connected with natural healthy instinct that makes them learn

everything with curiosity. The adults have problems trusting children, they fear freedom.

After our visit to Albany, we returned to Jerry in New York. Kai could not speak English when he first arrived, but he gradually could understand what people were saying. Once, with my help as translator, Kai interviewed Jerry and asked him why he started AERO. Jerry told his story, starting from

when he was a boy, learning from his grandfather. We heard about the start of AERO and the story of Jerry's starting his democratic school. Kai was so impressed with Jerry's stories and experiences.

He also enjoyed learning how to play table tennis. Jerry first brought us to the Boys and Girls Clubs where he has been teaching children. He wrote about his democratic table tennis club in his book "No Homework and Recess All Day." I've read it and I was so impressed with it. Jerry has run the club with a democratic meeting, and the children had changed their attitudes to peers and had self-confidence.

I asked Jerry how he was able to teach children so well. I can watch the surface situations of a child, but the child has some kind of layers in his or her self. Jerry answered that in addition to looking at children logically, he also made much use of intuition. These were amazing words to me. I think that Jerry has so much experience with many children that he could say this, and he loves the children as equal partners and respects them.

Kai hopes to come back by himself to learn English more and to cook for others. He can express his hope by his own words and now has self-confidence and especially many new friends. Kai exchanges e-mail with some friends in the U.S. now. Kai couldn't understand all of conversations with others in English, but he seemed to feel the power of freedom and democracy that we saw at the schools. I would like to say that he seems to be proud of having attended these democratic schools and communities and feels like he is a member of them now.

Kai and I appreciate everyone who treated us so kindly and shared the good times with us, especially Aleksandra, Jerry, who offered for us to stay at his house and arranged for us to visit so many places, and Ron who gave me the space to write about our experiences in U.S. in this magazine. ●



Kai with his new friends at Brooklyn Free School, Amiri and Rah

Hindu VidyaPeeth School

A Visionary Alternative in Nepal

BY DAMIAN WOODS

During my time as a volunteer teacher at Hindu Vidya Peeth (HVP), Nepal, I have been much impressed with the school's goals and aims and the way it implements these within the current context of Nepali culture and education system. In order to share this inspiration, I will first provide some brief background information on the education issues faced by Nepal.

In Nepal, over half the population and 2/3 of women are illiterate. Though in principle primary education at government schools is free, official statistics show only an 84% enrollment rate (2005) and of those who enter Grade 1, more than half do not complete five years of schooling. Moreover it is mainly girls, the children from Dalit ('untouchable') and other underprivileged ethnic communities who fail to receive an education. For example Dalits make up 13% of the population, but the representation of Dalits possessing graduate or higher education stands at only 1%. There are many factors behind this: discrimination, poverty, lack of awareness and on top of that parents themselves are illiterate and often fail to see the relevance of education for their children.

What is more, the decade long civil war in Nepal created over 8000 orphans and displaced over 40,000 children. According to a report by Save the Children Nepal, 26.8% of children were unable to go to school as a direct result of armed conflict. Though the violent Maoist insurgency supposedly ended in late 2006, Nepal continues to face struggles from the Maoists and other political groups that seek their goals through force of arms and with selfish intentions. Recent conflict and violence in the Terai and hills of Nepal has left yet more children orphaned and displaced, and there are some signs of communal and religious violence.

It is within this context that I would like to share the very positive role played by Hindu VidyaPeeth (HVP). The HVP movement was begun in 1985 and led by founding Principal Dr. Chintamani Yogi. It now consists of 3 schools. The schools are run on a private, charitable basis and stand out from government based education in several key ways. They provide full term hostel facilities and a free education to orphans, those from the untouchable caste and other underprivileged communities, and of course they offer education to girls without discrimination. Moreover the standard of education at HVP is significantly above the average for government schools, where large class sizes and general apathy among the teaching staff is rife. For example, in the recent SLC examinations which Nepali children take at 16, HVP had 100% pass rate in both its schools situated in the

Kathmandu valley, and its school based in Dang (in western rural Nepal), with the majority of pupils passing with either distinction or in the 1st division.

The most distinctive element that defines HVP education however, is its stress on Value Based Education. Its statement of purpose notes:

"Hindu Vidyapeeth-Nepal (HVP) is an Educational Trust run on a non-profit basis by Matribhoomi Sevak Sangh (MSS), a socio-cultural organization. In an age of growing materialism, fundamentalism and intolerance, HVP-Nepal is working to bring up a generation of people who have holistic qualities and clear visions and who can maintain and develop human virtues within and around them such as peace, harmony and love in the form of international brotherhood and co-existence."

During my time here, I can vouch that this is not a half-hearted ideal, but the very life breath of the HVP movement. In the current climate of political instability, violence, hate, "grab what you can while you can", HVP is training its pupils to think peacefully, and ask of themselves: "What can I do to help society, how can I serve, and strive to help others?" Whilst respecting and operating within traditional Nepali culture, the children are taught to question and seek to reform those parts that no longer serve, and to be tolerant and deeply respectful toward other cultures. Dr. Yogi frequently tells his pupils: "We are human beings first, before we are Hindu or Christian or Buddhist, and before we are Maoist or Pro-Monarchy, and so it is for Human Beings that we must build our values and our life."

I would like to share some of the practical ways HVP embodies Value Education. In addition to daily prayers, assemblies and the general ethos of the school a number of innovative programs have been developed for its pupils and teachers, namely:

■ **Mangal Satsang (Moral class):** On various days within a week the schools invite distinguished social workers, professionals and young achievers to share their experiences. Since Dr. Yogi is founder of several other institutions working for social betterment, he has a wide network of friends and numerous sources of inspiration to share with the children. This gives the children role models and helps them to set positive goals for their own life. Many students have expressed the desire to develop a goal to serve the society, nation and humankind as a result of these sessions.



Students depicting scenes from Krishna's life for a drama to celebrate Krishna's birthday and message.

■ **Peace Club:** Through the support of YSP (Youth Society for Peace), a sister organization of HVP schools consisting of ex-pupils, peace clubs within each HVP school have been formed. The clubs organize various creative activities such as creating wallpaper, organizing poetry, art and music competitions based around values and service. They also celebrate various events such as International Day of Peace and International Volunteers' Day with practical projects and idea sharing. Together HVP and YSP are actively promoting the idea of pupil-led peace clubs to other government and private schools so that the idea spreads.

■ **Children's Camp:** Intensive 1-3 day camps are held that aim to inspire discussion on issues of values and ethics and peace. Through such mediums as guest speakers, trips to important spiritual and historical sites, friendship games, sharing of communal responsibilities, yoga, sessions of meditation and the singing of devotional songs the children are encouraged to engage and wrestle with the meaning of values as they bear on their own lives, and are inspired to find ways to implement them.

■ **Teacher Training:** The school offers training to both its own teachers and teachers from other schools to promote the value of ethics education. The training package includes:

- **Stress management:** meditation, group discussion, experience sharing and self assessment through questionnaires.
- **Creative Activities:** a special package of creative activities such as game, music, art, poetry that can help the teacher see the importance of using these as tools to help the students be more creative and benign.
- **Self respect:** In Nepal, due to low facilities in government and many private sectors, the teaching profession has often been merely "the last option." Therefore, the teachers have little self respect toward their profession. During training, the teachers are helped to gain the self-respect inherent in their profession and are inspired to see the enormous good that can be done through this medium. To help the notion of Value Education spread, Dr. Yogi holds day-long programs with

teachers from surrounding government and private schools, and has founded a "Society for Value Education" to act as a common forum for principals and schools to share and strive for ways of implementing the values.

In all, I have been mightily impressed by the tireless endeavor and unrelenting zeal with which HVP and affiliated movements pursue their goal of social upliftment. Dr. Yogi and his friends and staff are constantly finding new and inspiring ways to help and further their goals. For example, they recently formulated a program named "Educate a Child" to address the following problem. A key reason children from underprivileged families do not get education is because the families want their children to support and help them with their household works and agriculture. On the one hand they cannot afford the educational materials, uniform and school meals for the child, on the other hand they need them to work in the house, on the farm or in menial jobs. Indeed, according to 2001 census 1/4 of children in Nepal are engaged in child labor. In response to this, "Educate a Child" will be run on a sponsorship basis targeting children in the Dang area who are orphans, war victims or from under-class communities, and will give preference to girls. The program includes placing these children in local government schools so that they can carry on assisting their families with agriculture before and after school. Most importantly, the program will provide financial support to the families to sustain and encourage them to keep their children in education.

In all these kinds of ways, the HVP movement is continually seeking to meet the educational and social challenges facing Nepal. It truly lives up to the school motto: "Arise! Awake! Stop not till the goal is reached."

Damian Woods is a volunteer from the UK working at HVP Nepal from August last year until May, 2008. He can be reached at damianjlwoods@yahoo.co.uk. More information about HVP can be found at www.hvpuk.org.uk ●



A program led by Dr. Yogi and YSP at the Ashram celebrating International Day of Peace.

Yoshihide Ishiyama Addresses Some Current Problems of Japanese Education

BY PROFESSOR JOHN POTTER, KOGAKKAN UNIVERSITY

Yoshihide Ishiyama is the founder of a free school known as Mie Shure which has operated in Japan's Mie Prefecture for the past four years. Originally he was a teacher in the state system, which he left in order to join the staff of another free school, Tokyo Shure. With the blessing of Tokyo Shure he then left to begin his own project in the city of Tsu in Mie in 2003. He is also the head of the *Mie ni Free School o Tsukurukai*, a non-profit organization committed to founding further schools of this kind in Mie in order to provide an alternative to the rigid Japanese school system.

In the 1980s the Japanese education system was beset with widely reported problems such as the bullying and suicide of schoolchildren. In a bid to address these problems there was an attempt in the decade that followed to offer a more relaxed atmosphere in schools. To the strict textbook, testing and rote-learning methods, familiar to all Japanese, was added the idea of *yutori kyoiku* (literally “enjoyable education”) a revolutionary idea for Japan involving integrated project work. Meanwhile the system of compulsory Saturday morning classes was gradually phased out.

But in the 21st century the problems of bullying seem as severe as ever, and there are major concerns about truancy (more usually termed “school refusal”) as well as declining academic standards. The government has tried to solve the continuing problems of truancy and bullying with the provision of counselors in schools and programs in localities to prepare school refusers for return to school. It aims to tackle declining standards by the discouragement of *yutori kyoiku* and by increasing the hours of lessons. There are also plans for the introduction of compulsory moral education and martial arts. These backward steps are criticized here by Yoshihide Ishiyama.

What do you think about the problem of truancy or school refusal?

School refusal has been increasing from the 1970s right up until now. This is really a matter of children telling us about the problems of adult society. To begin with, the Japanese government said that school refusal was something that could happen to anyone, but then later they changed their view to say it is purely a problem of the individual.

However, this is a contradiction. School counselors were employed in the 1990s by the government and there

were also classes to provide guidance. Their purpose was to make children go back to school. So the government doesn't really have a proper understanding of what the problems of schools are. They don't have any clue about how to change the schools themselves—and are concerned rather with changing the children.

There are only a small minority of people who actually live in an independent way. Almost all other people live in a group-oriented way and see themselves mainly in terms of the group. School refusal is therefore a kind of way for children to become individuals.

Going back to the 1960s, Japan was still in a situation where the economy was being raised very rapidly. The people were producing a lot of goods and there was a big increase in mass consumerism. Under this background, the education system somehow worked. Children thought they could study at school and then they could enter society and buy lots of things and become rich. Not many people doubted the situation at that time.

But after the 1970s this became a problem because people began to think more about their individual happiness. Some people began to think that maybe there was some other way to be happy rather than just earning a lot of money and buying a lot of things. School and society began to contradict each other around this time.

My idea is that there is no individuality in Japanese society. There are only a small minority of people who actually live in an independent way. Almost all other people live in a group-oriented way and see themselves mainly in terms of the group. School refusal is therefore a kind of way for children to become individuals. To children, the adults always seem to be

too busy but these busy lives do not make them very happy. So why should children want to follow them?

In the 1960s there was a model adult society—if you did this, you got that. No one doubted it, but now there is no single blueprint for life. Now, there is a bigger division between rich and poor, between the so-called “winners” and “losers.” But even some of those winners have become depressed through overwork and some of them even commit suicide. Nowadays it is a very difficult time for children to live in Japan.

Is the situation regarding bullying any better?

If you did a survey now, I think Japan would probably come on top for bullying. I think there are three main reasons for this. The first is that the group, either at school or work, is always closed to outsiders. Secondly, group values are very different from those outside the group. Thirdly, these groups are beginning to break down. If those three things happen then the group will pick on someone inside the group to bully in order to keep the group going.

Part of my job is to listen to the victims of bullying. Inevitably, I also see the perpetrators of bullying and they are never loved by their parents. I don't mean that they are abused by their parents—in lots of cases the parents have an exaggerated expectation for their children in many ways (both behaviorally and academically) and so the children cannot be themselves at home.

Recently, there has been an increase of suicides resulting from bullying and the government has decided to give a message to children through the heads of schools, to tell children that life is important. This is actually meaningless. If you think about the young people who do the bullying, they often don't think life is important at all because they are not raised by adults who think like this. Then, when they see people leading happier lives, they inevitably want to destroy those lives and hurt those people.

The government has no idea about either the victims or the perpetrators of bullying. Schools send the victims for counseling and the counselor just listens to them and tells them to be patient or to tell their teacher about it. But the real situation is that the bullying which goes on is very well organized by groups. How can an individual fight against it? And so I think that this kind of counseling is a very irresponsible way to approach the problem.

In this situation, of course children will not tell anyone about the bullying because nothing will be solved. The result of this is that the amount of bullying is shown in surveys to be much lower than the actual situation. This is exactly what adult society, including the schools, wants to see and so nothing improves. If there is no bullying in a classroom then it must be a very good class, because I can tell you that every class in Japan has bullying. The Japanese government, schools, and the Ministry of Education just don't handle bullying properly.

Could you say something about the supposed decline in academic standards and the government's response?

In a recent survey of academic standards in schools around the world, Finland was placed highest in general terms. When

I saw the questions from the survey, they required a considerable amount of thought to answer. I suppose this is the universal idea of academic ability. When the results of this survey were made public there was a great deal of concern from the Japanese government and from Japanese parents because the country did not do well this time.

If you think about it in this way, Japan is very different. Basically, in Japan, education requires a great deal of memorization and repetition. To solve the problem the government simply thought that there should be even more memorization and repetition in schools and the system should return to the way it had been before.

We are child centered and programs or activities occur as a result of the children's own interests, supported by the staff. You cannot do this in any so-called normal school because they are all very adult orientated and the teachers decide everything.

This is ridiculous because the test given to people around the world required thought and personal expression, which is very different from the kind of education that the Japanese are used to. This reaction of the government and the people occurred because they just don't get enough deep information about the situation. Instead of information they get media reports with simplified headlines and quick phrases and slogans which make people think that these things are important.

This whole situation has led to the government deciding to change the direction of education and changing the emphasis away from *yutori kyoiku* (a situation where children should have a more enjoyable school life) including the introduction of integrated studies and project work. This *yutori kyoiku* has been going on for ten years. My question is, were the children really having a more enjoyable time? Almost all the children I have met have said that this was not the case.

The government gradually stopped all Saturday lessons too. However, the reality was that instead of going to normal school, many children were then sent by their parents to *juku* (cram schools) on Saturdays—and often on Sundays as well.

In whatever way the government changed the system to include *yutori kyoiku*, children still were graded by points at school and their teachers became even busier, because they didn't know what to do, since they had never experienced

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Milwaukee's New Vision of Public Education

BY DANIEL GREGO

For the last twenty-five years, a small coalition in Milwaukee has been questioning and posing alternatives to two of the unexamined assumptions underlying schooling in the United States.

The first assumption we challenged was that “public education” is something that occurs in a fixed, unchanging “system” of “public schools.” Holding this assumption, defenders of the status quo charge that promoters of charter schools, for example, are “attacking public education.” This is like saying that anyone suggesting anything other than a two-hand set-shot is “attacking basketball.”

The history of U.S. schooling, however, reveals that “public education” has always been an evolving, dynamic concept. For example, before 1850, no state had enacted a compulsory school attendance law. By 1918, they all had. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that public schools could be segregated by race, “separate but equal.” That decision was overturned in 1954 in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

At different times, in different places, different types of schools have been able to receive public funds. For more than a century, Maine and Vermont have provided “tuitioning” programs: rural towns with no public schools pay for resident children to attend non-sectarian private schools or a public school in a neighboring district. Minnesota created the first modern school chartering program in 1991, and since then 41 states have enacted such laws. (This idea is not new, however. Benjamin Franklin wrote a proposal for the City of Philadelphia to charter schools in 1751!) Recently, “virtual schools” that rely on technology instead of buildings have been gaining popularity.

In Milwaukee, some of us decided that everyone should be considered part of “the public” (an idea that has been surprisingly controversial) and that “public education” could be defined as “any learning opportunity supported by tax revenues.” We decided to take seriously the African proverb “It takes an entire village to raise healthy children.” As a result, we advocated for the creation of an “ecosystem” with many different species of publicly funded schools. We wanted to bring more of the public back to public education and help people see that educating children is the responsibility of the entire community.

Because of our efforts, there are now various ways schools can be supported inside the traditional Milwaukee Public Schools system, in partnership with the system, and outside the system. Most of these new options must be

considered “public schools” since they are either operated or authorized by public entities: the school board, the city government, the state university system, and potentially the vocational/technical college. However, even some private schools can become part of “public education” when parents are able to access them with publicly funded vouchers through the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program.

The second assumption we began questioning was that the only way to initiate adolescents into adulthood is to force them to endure four years in large, comprehensive high schools. The disastrous results of maintaining this assumption are everywhere apparent. The graduation rate in most major U. S. cities hovers around fifty percent in spite of wave after wave of “education reform.”

In Milwaukee, some of us decided that everyone should be considered part of ‘the public’ (an idea that has been surprisingly controversial) and that ‘public education’ could be defined as ‘any learning opportunity supported by tax revenues.’

Several years ago, a prominent politician, concerned about the large numbers failing in Milwaukee’s high schools, asked a group of “at risk” students, those most likely to quit school, why so many of their peers dropped out. There was a brief silence. Finally, one young man responded: “I think you’re asking the wrong question. Given what high school is, the question you should ask is: Why anyone bothers to stay?” After further reflection, he added: “I guess some people just tolerate high school better than others.” Is persuading more young people to tolerate high school the best that we can do?

We started asking ourselves: “What would happen if we were to start thinking about secondary education as less about an obsolete structure that so many adolescents find intolerable (huge, impersonal institutions; antiquated, arbitrary curricula; Carnegie units, etc.) and more about the

relationships with a variety of adults young people need in order to make the transition to responsible maturity?"

With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we began opening a variety of new, small high schools within our "ecosystem." Some have unique curricula focusing, for example, on communication, or science and math, or business, or the arts. Some have organized learning opportunities around internships in the community. In others, students meet graduation standards by completing projects of their own interest and design. The important thing is to provide young people with multiple pathways so that all of them can discover their vocations and contribute positively to their communities.

Some of us began to think of "education" not as an individual accomplishment, but as a community activity. For example, the schools that TransCenter for Youth operates—Shalom High School (founded in 1973), the Northwest Opportunities Vocational Academy (NOVA, 1993), El Puente High School for Science, Math, and Technology (1997), and The CITIES Project High School (2004)—attempt to embed their activities as much as possible in the community.

In addition to academic work, students plant gardens in vacant lots and share their produce with the hungry, organize food and clothing donations for the homeless, visit

the incarcerated, document the stories of elders in nursing homes, tutor younger children at nearby elementary schools, write and produce plays, create art exhibits for the public, initiate neighborhood clean-ups and recycling programs, conduct voter registration drives, and advocate for educational opportunities for other "at risk" children. Elders from the community are invited into the schools to share their knowledge, to mentor the students, and to guide their rites of passage into adulthood.

This new vision of public education in Milwaukee is a work in progress. We have tried to open spaces for opportunities and surprises, but the inertial force and the gravitational pull of the status quo have been difficult to overcome. And there are still many unexamined assumptions we have yet to tackle. From time to time, to get a little critical distance from our work, we remind ourselves of something Mark Twain once said: "You should never let your schooling interfere with your education."

Daniel Grego is Executive Director of TransCenter for Youth in Milwaukee. ●

Yoshihide Ishiyama Addresses Some Current Problems of Japanese Education

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this kind of schooling. It doesn't make any sense to return to the former system because *yutori kyoiku* has never been done properly anyway and the basic ideas of Japanese schools have never changed at all. In four years time, the government will increase the hours of schooling. I think school refusal will definitely increase as a result.

What have you been able to achieve at Mie Shure?

We call Mie Shure a free school for alternative learning, but in fact most children who come here have come from state schools because of their negative experiences there, rather than choosing our school in the first place. So the reality is that many children here were school refusers before. Those children were upset by the state schools they previously attended and felt that they didn't fit in.

We are working together here at Mie Shure in order to make an alternative learning place. We are unique in Japan. We don't have any age limits or divisions into groups by ability. We are child centered and programs or activities occur as a result of the children's own interests, supported by the staff. You cannot do this in any so-called normal school because they are all very adult orientated and the teachers decide everything.

Mie Shure is a very democratic place run by the children and the staff together. Anyone can make suggestions in the

weekly meetings that we have. It took about three years for the meetings to work in a democratic way because in Japanese state schools the class meeting time is very limited and is controlled by the teachers and by a few extrovert children. Our children were not used to meetings such as ours and so it took this length of time for them to develop.

School refusers who were unable to express themselves properly in the state school situation have gradually become themselves and are now able to take part very well in our meetings in a democratic way. The other members of Mie Shure accept them, unlike the situation they found themselves in previously. For example, in Japan, everyone is very aware of age differences. Even a one year age difference at school can be a problem and younger children will automatically use more formal and polite language when addressing older children.

When I have talked to parents I have found out that the teachers in state schools didn't work in order to help children. I felt there was a limit to what a teacher could do. When I was a teacher in a state school I thought that I could do things the way I wanted in the classroom. I tried to disagree with many things that went on at the school and tried to change them but I couldn't. This was the reason why I decided to leave the state system in order to start a school which was child-centered. ●

Every Other Day School

Reprinted from http://norway.cerris.com/?Norwegian_Musings, author unnamed

When my mother started school in Norway 70 years ago, she went to school only every other day through 7th grade. She attended a small rural school. There were only 12 or 13 students in each class. Her favorite teacher was a farmer who made financial ends meet by teaching. During class he would leave once in a while to feed the chickens. To the joy of the students, he often came back to class with chicken feathers and droppings on his hat. While the teacher was at the farm tending to his livestock, my mother and her classmates were absorbed in their work and were well behaved. My mother said she loved school. She really couldn't understand why her five American children disliked it so. On the other hand, I wondered why she liked school so much. I finally asked her about her school days and found out why.

My mother's school day was filled with simple hands on activities and subjects that reflected her culture. After each subject, the children would get a short recess to run and play. Her subjects included religion and hymn singing, math, earth science, English, art, hand sewing, knitting and woodworking.

You would think that this easy going school would produce non-academic students. The opposite was the case. At the end of the year testing, the rural school always did better than the city school. People were amazed because the country students only went to school every other day and had very simple items for learning materials.

She said that knitting introduced basic math and geometry. Mom would divide stitches, add stitches, and subtract stitches. They didn't use circular needles so the students had to divide the items into equal parts to make a circle. Also, the strings of yarn would turn into shapes. Knitting in Norwegian culture was very important. When women got together everyone would knit and talk. The big thrill was to use a compass in art class. The children made interesting circles, flowers, and other patterns. She colored the shapes and started her life long love of designs and color. It was also her creative introduction to geometry.

Science was the study of their local environment, which included bees and their life cycle, flowers, trees, animals and habitats, birds, weather, the sea, and landforms. She even remembers studying about atoms.

On the students' day off, the children played about what they had learned. They spontaneously studied flowers and birds, and other local flora and fauna. School encouraged the children to know all aspects of their surroundings and culture.

Also, the students who wanted to go on to the gymnasium could go to English language class. My mother speaks, reads, spells, and writes English almost perfectly. The approach they used was singing English songs without any musical accompaniment. Steven Foster songs were sung at every weekly class, mom still knows all the words and tunes.

Most of the subjects taught were connected with Norwegian culture. Much of Norwegian folk art is based on woodworking, painting patterns, and knitting and handwork. Folk dancing, music, and local costumes also were a large part of Norwegian society. Folk costumes were worn for wedding dresses and special occasions. They were home-made masterpieces with beautiful embroidery. Also, religion was a part of the students' school, home, and weekend activities.

You would think that this easy going school would produce non-academic students. The opposite was the case. At the end of the year testing, the rural school always did better than the city school. People were amazed because the country students only went to school every other day and had very simple items for learning materials. The students at the city schools attended every day with modern approaches and new supplies.

Lastly, I asked my mom what she liked best about school. She said she enjoyed the fun activities, the simplicity, and that learning was exciting. Most importantly she said, "There wasn't any pressure to perform." My mother went on to the gymnasium after graduating from this simple school. Her school years at the gymnasium were eventful as well because it was the beginning of the Norwegian occupation during WWII. But, that's another story! ●

Exploring My Own Time in School

BY CARLO RICCI

The definition for learning that inspires me most comes from John Holt, who wrote that “Living is learning. It is impossible to be alive and conscious (and some would say unconscious) without constantly learning things”¹ In this sense, I did learn while I was in school, but regrettably I now recognize, and always intuited, that my schooling was clearly miseducation. When I think about my schooling, sadness and strength overcome me. It is too late for me, but not for others. We must all do our part to inform others of the alternatives and to act in a way that the alternatives are a reality—because they are.

Unfortunately, my formal schooling did not allow me the dignity to unfold, but my living did. The problem, of course, is that throughout my living I had to contend with the time taken away from me by formal schooling.

Time is the most precious gift that we have and as I look back I am angry by all the time that was taken away from me by formal schooling. The best I can do now is to make sure that others are better informed and that others have the opportunities that I did not have. This is the basis of my work and my hope. Young people are among the last acceptably oppressed groups and we have an ethical obligation to advocate on their behalf.

I would characterize my own schooling as abusive, stifling, limiting and frustrating. My grades out of high school were so low that I did not immediately get into university. I did not know what I know now. I had options but was unaware of them, just as so many young people remain unaware today. Ultimately, for all intents and purposes, I completed my Masters in one year and my PhD in one year while working full time as a high school teacher. I was able to do this largely because of what I was doing on my own before I got there. I share this not to be a braggart but to highlight the point that none of us can know a person’s future attainment. Sadly, a large part of contemporary schooling falsely pretends that a person’s future potential can be determined.

Even as a graduate student at one of the most respected universities in Canada, my experience remained abusive, stifling, limiting and frustrating. Even at the graduate level, in general, I was limited by the courses that were on offer and by those that were compulsory. While in the courses I had to read the material that the professors expected me to read and answer questions that they found to be important. Many of my students now believe that I have a degree in alternative schooling, because they feel that I know so much about it. The truth is that everything that I know I learned on my own. I did not take any courses in my schooling that focused on this topic—even if I wanted to, none were available. I tell my students that I received my

certificate from a post-secondary institution, but that I educated myself—schools were obstacles. I cannot stress this enough.

Some ask if I would be able to read or write without schooling. Again, my response is that I did learn to do these things without schooling. I believe that we learn to read and write on our own. Schooling was an obstacle in my way toward self-education.

I owe a lot to my parents in all of this. As the schools devalued me as a human being and as a schooler, my parents always supported and encouraged my decisions. I made mistakes and they were very good at not pointing them out to me. They did not judge and evaluate my every move, but they were there as pillars and collaborators to help me in any way that I needed.

Holistically, schools are not the problem, but they are a symptom of a much larger problem. Creating learner centered democratic schools will not improve the lives of children much, but creating a learner centered democratic world will. Ageism is too often arbitrary, senseless, and punitive. In his book, *Escape from Childhood*, Holt asks, what if children had the right to equal treatment under the law (for example, to work for money, travel, live away from home and so on)? He says that most who believe in the institution of childhood see it as a walled garden. He goes on to write “What I want to do is put a gate, or gates, into the wall of the garden, so that those who find it no longer protective or helpful, but instead confining and humiliating, can move out of it and for a while try living in a larger space.”² I agree with Holt and believe that putting up gates could be a laudable aspiration for an educational revolution.

References

1. John Holt, *Learning all the time: How small children begin to read, write, count, and investigate the world, without being taught*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1989,. P. 157.
2. John Holt, *Escape from childhood: The needs and rights of children*. Cambridge, MA: Holt Associates Inc., 1995, p. 9.

About the author: I currently teach in the faculty of education’s graduate program at Nipissing University and I founded and edit the online Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning (JUAL) at www.nipissingu.ca/jual/index.asp. Everything of value that I have learned, I have learned outside of formal schooling. I have never taken a course in school connected to what I now teach and write about. I have two daughters ages 2 and 4 that I hope will decide to be unschooled. ●

Summerhill Update

BY JASON PREATER

In the Autumn term 2007 Summerhill was inspected by OFSTED, the UK government's school inspection service. The positive result of this inspection was in dramatic contrast to the 1999 inspection which resulted in an attempt to close the school. In this brief article I shall describe how both the school and the government changed in the years leading up to this most recent inspection.

The school is a family business run by the Readhead family. They have made significant changes over the past few years: there is tarmac where there used to be gravel; there are extensions to many buildings, new classrooms and a new theatre; the kitchen has been transformed; there is new flooring, new locks on doors, newly re-pointed brickwork; the classrooms have new books, posters, educational games, a whole-school computer network and frequently refreshed paintwork. The lawns and playing fields always look trim.

Zoë Readhead, the daughter of A.S. Neill and Principal appointed two "Curriculum Advisors" from the staff to assist her in dealing with teachers and making decisions about academic matters. The Advisors oversaw the provision of lessons ensuring that groups of children were not missing out. Hard-working teachers can easily ignore whole age groups, ability levels or forget about those children who are currently not going to classes at all.

Emphasis on the National Curriculum and examination courses was offset by investing in woodwork, music and crafts, by discouraging teachers from putting children in for examinations early, and by appointing another English teacher to focus attention on reading and writing. The arrival of Leonard from Canada led to a vibrant Class 2 which remedied a major deficit in the 1999 inspection. (Leonard headed the team as the senior Advisor during the 2007 inspection and is currently working with other democratic schools to create a European network.)

Outside the school there were major changes in the educational establishment. At the time of the 1999 inspection there was a crusade to "improve" education, which led to draconian measures being taken against "failing schools" across the country. The idea was to protect the entitlement of children to a good quality education, but resulted in increasingly difficult rela-

tionships with head teachers, governors and parents, Summerhill being just one example of this.

By 2003 the atmosphere had changed. The government produced a document called Every Child Matters (ECM), the result of an inquiry into the horrific death of Victoria Climbié following abuse by her aunt. The five principles in this document, which from now on were to underpin all work with children, offer both in spirit and detail a pretty accurate description of Summerhill-style childcare.

OFSTED, the education inspectorate, was also changing. Most schools run perfectly well without inspection and the politically-motivated crusade to 'improve' education of the nineties faded as people questioned the amount of money OFSTED was spending. In their New Relationship With Schools, there would be fewer inspectors for less time and they would rely upon the management team's Self-Evaluation.

When the 2007 inspection finally came around the inspectors must have been surprised and relieved to see that there was little to criticize. It was evident that the school met the ECM targets, the management was focussed, the children were obviously happy and involved in their education and had excellent opportunities for self-development. Summerhill has changed and the inspection regime has changed leading to a moment in which there is no conflict.

However, beyond the walls of Summerhill, there are already changes in the air. There are strong pressures to consider the five principles of ECM a "waste of money" that would be better directed at more assessment and control. At Summerhill, where high staff turnover can lead to rapid change, recruitment and retention of stable staff will be the most difficult problems as Will Readhead, Zoë's son, prepares to take the family business into the next generation.

Jason Preater is a former Summerhill teacher and Curriculum Manager. ●

Creating a Network of Young Leaders

BY NINA MEYERHOF

Children of the Earth (COE) is a non-profit organization, officially recognized by the United Nations as an NGO, dedicated to the building of a better future for all generations. To this end, COE offers youth leadership programs globally, educational workshops, conferences, as well as presentations at national and international forum. COE promotes building networks and coalitions of groups with common purposes to further the concept of creating greater global cooperation, multicultural understanding, spiritual values and ethical living. COE's goal is for youth to hear the call, one by one, and individually become socially responsible and active peace builders.

The 21st century holds the greatest possibilities for an integrated peaceful and prosperous global community. Connected by telecommunications and a growing spirituality, humankind has a chance to actualize an evolutionary state of being. At the same time, the future has never before been more challenged by worldwide terrorism, poverty, rapid climate change, inadequate education and health care and geopolitical unrest. The kind of world that the next generation will experience will depend upon the collective vision and intention of world leaders. As long as the global culture is grounded in fear, greed and scarcity, we will continue to use our human and financial resources for war and destruction. As we shift towards love, compassion and education, we will deploy resources for the common good, lifting up all people to a life of hope and security.

It is imperative that we spend our time and resources on young people, supporting leadership and educational experiences that promote respectful communities, common ethics, sustainable practices, peace, and economic opportunities. Children of the Earth is dedicated to creating a network of young leaders committed to the promotion of peace and opportunity. COE has been bringing youth together for over

25 years, providing community and networking opportunities to young leaders who are committed to positive global change. By developing a culture of co-operation, collaboration, mediation, relationship-building and understanding of our common humanity, these young people go back to their local communities and influence others through sharing their vision of how we can be together.

Children of the Earth has established chapters around the world, including Liberia, Uganda, Ghana, the Philippines, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Canada as well as other countries.



Dhammakaya Retreat on the River Kwai, Thailand, offering meditation to youth from around the world...then the Celebration of Light for Magha Puja Day of the Buddha with over 200,00 people attending and the WSYC as special guests.

Each chapter receives guidance and support in its endeavors. COE also hosts the World Spirit Youth Council, which aims to connect youth who live oceans apart by awakening the realization that we are all related to one another and the earth. Youth are inspired by other active people they meet and become spiritually activated themselves; they are called to be a moral force on the world's stage. They often start their own small organizations or make a daily contribution to the world, also

sharing their work with more youth and creating a ripple effect. The WSYC awakens young people to the human connection that is as the root of all humanitarian and social change. WSYC most recently met in Thailand in February.

The ultimate goal for Children of the Earth is to establish a One Peace Institute. The OPI will offer structured learning opportunities to young people that inspire, motivate and unite them to translate universal values into global action and culturally appropriate projects in their own communities.

Please visit www.children-of-the-earth.org for further information.

Dr. Nina Meyerhof is the founder and director of Children of the Earth.

Conferences

Reclaiming the Wisdom Tradition for Education

MONTEREY BAY, CALIFORNIA, MAY 29-JUNE 1

This event represents a rare gathering of some of the most inspiring authors & speakers of our time, including Matthew Fox (creation spirituality), Jack Miller (holistic education), Riane Eisler (partnership education), Michael Nagler (nonviolence) and others. Held at a beautiful retreat center, it will offer workshops and conversations exploring how contemporary education might embrace “wisdom” from humanity’s diverse philosophical and spiritual traditions.

For more information see www.sworps.utk.edu/aep/html/conferences.htm or write to Bruce Novak at brucenovak@mac.com

IDEC (International Democratic Education Conference)

IDEC 2008 will take place Aug. 11th to 18th 2008 in Vancouver at the University of British Columbia. Attendees will include teachers, students, administrators and parents from democratic schools around the world, as well as local education scholars and officials.

For more information see www.idec2008.org/

EUDEC 2008

Registration is now open for EUDEC 2008. Information on the conference program and fees has been made available on the website (www.eudec2008.org), along with online registration forms. Participants who register by 30 April can take advantage of the 25% discount available for early registration. The European Democratic Education Community, EUDEC, was founded in February and sets out to pursue the following aims:

- To support all forms of democratic education throughout Europe
- To promote democratic education as the sensible educational model for all democratic states
- To establish, in legislation, the right to found and attend democratic schools
- To provide aid and support to democratic schools and start-up groups
- To facilitate exchange of information between democratic schools in Europe and create connections between schools for cooperation and mutual learning
- To evolve into an independent and sustainable organization with charitable status



News & Communications

COMPILED BY CAROL MORLEY AND RON MILLER

National.....

Report Ranks Nation's 21 School Choice Programs. A new report by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, *"Grading School Choice: Evaluating School Choice Programs by the Friedman Gold Standard,"* grades the nation's 21 existing school choice programs based on how well they live up to the standard of providing school choice for all. The Foundation evaluated programs according to several measures of accessibility. Florida's McKay Voucher Program earned top marks for providing options to the state's special needs students. Other top graded programs were Georgia Special Needs Vouchers, Arizona Personal Tax-Credit Scholarships and Foster Child Vouchers, town-paid independent school tuition in Vermont and Maine, Ohio Autism and EdChoice Vouchers, and the Illinois Personal Tax Credit. "This report is a benchmark by which legislators and advocates can judge their proposed legislation and re-examine their existing programs in order to provide the broadest access and opportunities to students and families in their states," said Robert Enlow, the Friedman Foundation's Executive Director and Chief of Operations. "We want to reaffirm our commitment to the gold standard of educational freedom established by Milton Friedman. We support school choice for all, not just for some, and it's our job to constantly remind the country of the need for the most basic American freedom of universal choice in schooling." For a full copy of "Grading School Choice" as well as information about other Friedman Foundation events and publications, please visit the Friedman Foundation's web site at www.friedmanfoundation.org or call Ashlee Wilson Fujawa at 317-681-0745.

From **Texas Has to Make Schools Safe for Learning Without Turning Misbehaving Students into Criminals,** *Houston Chronicle:* According to an analysis of statewide data for 2001-2006 and thorough studies of more than a dozen Texas school districts, the number of students suspended and the number removed to alternative discipline campuses skyrocketed after the Legislature's 1995 overhaul of school discipline laws. This, the public interest law group Texas Appleseed states, has caused a "school-to-prison pipeline" that puts inordinate numbers of youngsters on a path to dropping out of school and into the juvenile justice system. The far end of the pipe pours into Texas' massive adult prison system. Appleseed's report, "Texas' School-to-Prison Pipeline, The Impact of School Discipline and Zero Tolerance," argues that schools that suspend and expel students to Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs for

minor misbehavior not covered by the zero-tolerance mandates unwittingly funnel kids into this life-stunting pipeline. Infractions that have gotten children suspended or expelled include profanity, rough play, bringing prescription medicine to school and disrupting class. Once in a DAEP, students are five times more likely than mainstream counterparts to drop out. The link to crime is clear: In Texas, one in three juveniles in a Texas Youth Commission lockup is a dropout. Dropouts comprise 80 percent of the adult prison population.

The school-to-prison pipeline is filled with black, Hispanic and special education students, who are far more likely to be given discretionary referrals for discipline than their numbers in the school population would predict. Also, contends the American Civil Liberties Union, pressure to do well on high-stakes standardized tests pressures schools to suspend poor academic performers in order to raise overall scores. Much of this damage is avoidable: Fully two-thirds of Texas students sent from their school to a DAEP campus are transferred at campus officials' discretion. (The remaining third are mandatory removals under state law.) Texas can do better. Schools can be safe for learning without turning students into criminals for minor infractions, exacerbating an out-of-control dropout problem and setting kids who are merely unruly on a path toward prison.

From **Our Factory-Model Schools are Soul-Killers for Students,** by Julia Steiny, www.projo.com: Factory-model schools produce many dropouts. Actually, they're designed to do so. Factories eliminate product failures, in this case disaffected students, as early in the process as possible, in the service of efficiency. Until these schools cease to be educational assembly lines, dropouts should come as no big surprise. In a report called "Locating the Dropout Crisis," researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that 1 in 5 high schools in the U.S. graduate fewer than 60 percent of their students. One in 10 schools graduates fewer than 50 percent. The press dubbed these schools "dropout factories." But the Industrial Age language is no mere metaphor. Factory-model schools are soul-killers for students and teachers alike. They manufacture student disaffection. And they burn the teachers to a crisp. The solution to "dropout factories" is to give teachers what they want: successful students. To do that, we'll have to dismantle the factories. Focusing some time and resources on building the connective tissue between teachers and kids will finally ease us away from our blue-collar, industrial-production-model schools — which were never a good idea for young human beings in

National.....

the first place. With humans instead of organizational machinery in charge, schools will become productive places to teach and learn.

From **New Route to Charter Status Sought**, by Diane R. Stepp, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: Local school boards are hammering down approval of startup charter schools, rejecting 80 percent of petitions last year, charter school advocates said as they met last week in Marietta. The best hope of circumventing hostile school boards is passage of pending legislation, HB 881, that would set up a separate state body to pass judgment on charter school applications, said Tony Roberts, chief executive officer of the Georgia Charter Schools Association. Currently, charter school applicants can seek approval from the state Department of Education or a local school board. The proposed law would give them a third place to go. It also would allow such entities as colleges, universities, counties or cities to act as co-sponsors of new charter schools, serving in an advisory, not a governing, capacity. An alternative authorizing agency would bring “much-needed objectivity” to the charter school process, Roberts said in a statement. Local school districts do not now pass on full per-pupil funding to charter schools, holding back dollars for administrative and other costs, Roberts said. The charter school funding pinch was eased somewhat last year with a bill that required school systems to pass on dollars for transportation and food services. “That was the last straw” for some school districts, Roberts said. Broy said local boards are concerned about losing money and control as students leave for charter schools.

From **Home-school Kids Barred from Activities**, by Christina Hernandez, *Newsday.com*: Uriah Pissalidis, 16, a drummer from Baldwin, has played a modest concert for family with other members of his fledgling rock band. But he hasn’t had the chance to perform before cheering crowds with his school district’s jazz or marching bands. Because Uriah and his sister Rebecca, 12, are home-schooled, they aren’t permitted to participate in extracurricular activities in the Baldwin Union Free School District. Their father, Alex, 45, said he has tried for a year to get permission for his children to participate in activities, arguing that they are entitled to because he pays more than \$5,000 yearly in school taxes. The district said in a statement that it “is under no legal obligation to provide extracurricular services to home-schooled children” and it “is not prepared to undertake the additional costs” associated with opening up the services to students not enrolled in district schools. David Albert, director of communications and research for the New York State School Boards Association, said Baldwin’s decision was typical. A New York commissioner of education regulation prohibits anyone not enrolled in public school from participating in interscholastic sports. Decisions on whether to allow homeschoolers to participate in other after-school activities are left to local school boards. Most districts do not allow home-

schooled children to participate -- citing financial limitations, links between extracurricular activities and curriculum, and a limited number of program slots, Albert said. Eighteen states force public schools to allow homeschoolers access to sports and other activities, according to the Home School Legal Defense Association, a Virginia-based advocacy group established to defend and advance the rights of homeschoolers. Other states leave the decision up to school boards or deny access entirely.

From **Homeschooler to Lead State Board of Education**, by Robert Kittle, *News Channel 7 South Carolina, Dec 12, 2007*. The South Carolina Board of Education, which is responsible for public elementary and secondary schools, elected as its new leader a woman who has never sent her children to public school. Kristin Maguire of Clemson homeschools her four daughters. Board member Diane Sumpter, who represents the Columbia area, said Maguire’s election was a sad day for the board. “Certainly I support homeschooling, but not as the face of the State Department of Education or the chair of the board,” she said. But Maguire has been a member of the board for eight years and has won admirers for her dedication and hard work. Board member Rick Adkins, who represents Anderson and Oconee counties, says she’s the most-prepared member for board meetings. “She knows the education system, public education system, backwards and forwards so I had absolutely no problem supporting her. She’s absolutely the best person for the job,” he said. Even state superintendent Jim Rex said he had no problem with the election, even though Maguire had publicly supported Karen Floyd, Rex’s opponent for superintendent. “She’s been positive. She’s been engaged. So I don’t anticipate any changes,” he said. Maguire says she can understand why people might have a knee-jerk reaction to her election and think it’s wrong, but asks people to give her a chance. “We have board members that haven’t ever had children. We have board members who haven’t had children in schools. And, you know, to say that they’re disqualified from being part of the process or that they don’t have the dedication or concern for all public students, it’s an, I think an insult to the Board,” she says. She also points out that she is a product of public schools, has an engineering degree from Clemson and her mother was a classroom teacher.

From **How Teenage Rebellion Has Become a Mental Illness** by Bruce E. Levine, Ph.D., <http://www.alternet.org/story/75081>, posted Jan. 28, 2008. “For a generation now, disruptive young Americans who rebel against authority figures have been increasingly diagnosed with mental illnesses and medicated with psychiatric (psychotropic) drugs. Disruptive young people who are medicated with Ritalin, Adderall and other amphetamines routinely report that these drugs make them “care less” about their boredom, resentments and other negative emotions, thus making them more compliant and

manageable. And so-called atypical antipsychotics such as Risperdal and Zyprexa — powerful tranquilizing drugs — are increasingly prescribed to disruptive young Americans, even though in most cases they are not displaying any psychotic symptoms ... John Holt, the late school critic, described passive-aggressive strategies employed by prisoners in concentration camps and slaves on plantations, as well as some children in classrooms. Holt pointed out that subjects may attempt to appease their rulers while still satisfying some part of their own desire for dignity “by putting on a mask, by acting much more stupid and incompetent than they really are, by denying their rulers the full use of their intelligence and ability, by declaring their minds and spirits free of their enslaved bodies.” Holt observed that by “going stupid” in a classroom, children frustrate authorities through withdrawing the most intelligent and creative parts of their minds from the scene, thus achieving some sense of potency”

The New School, Newark, Delaware, has been showcased in an article on private schools in Delaware. The article, “The Private School Insider,” can be found at www.delawaretoday.com.

Shenandoah Valley Community School was featured in the Harrisonburg, Virginia *Daily News-Record* in January.

(We are reprinting the following reviews from several years back for a new generation of educational activists who may not be as connected to the history of the movement.)

Challenging the Giant: the Best of SKOLE, The Journal of Alternative Education, Volumes I and II
Mary M. Leue., Ed.

REVIEWED BY CLAUDIA BERMAN

The alternative movement started 40 years ago during the social revolution of the sixties and seventies. At this time, hundreds of small schools were created by parent groups or individuals. Many of the schools were short-lived. Those that have survived continue to provide an alternative to parents seeking a more holistic education than that provided by most public schools.

In 1969, Mary Leue, editor of *Challenging the Giant*, gathered a group of people in Albany, New York, and started The Free School, now one of the longest running independent alternative schools in the nation. After committed hard work and years of experience, she and a small group of other members of the northeast region of the National Coalition for Alternative Community Schools (NCACS) founded *SKOLE, the Journal of Alternative Education* (pronounced Skolay), dedicated to the documentation of small schools such as her own. Important lessons were being learned in these small schools that could benefit educators everywhere, but the schools had little voice in the larger educational public. The aim of the Journal was to supply a voice for the alternative education community with the hope that the small schools could share their successes and failures with a wider public.

This book is an anthology from *SKOLE*. In this collection, the editor draws on writings from within the alternative educational community and presents rare views on schools that work. It contains writings from teachers, students and scholars. Some selections are written by professional writers, some are not. The tone of the book is one of casual sharing and acquaintance. Some pieces are written as journal entries while others are academic in nature. To add to the casual, reader-friendly tone of the book, the editor adds information or commentary after each article that helps put the article or author in context.

The methods, educators and philosophies addressed in the anthology are as varied as the people and schools themselves. Each alternative school has a unique character. Each account of a school’s history, philosophy, or methods could stand alone. The articles share common elements that reflect the essence of alternative education: student and parent empowerment through democracy, a reverence for nature, and attention to the whole person (intellectual, physical, emo-

tional, spiritual), to new research on the brain and learning styles, and to human relationships.

This book covers much ground in its casual collage format. The editor has included excerpts from books and reprints from other educational journals by such prominent educators and authors as Sylvia Ashton-Warner, John Taylor Gatto, Jonathan Kozal, Ted Sizer, Robert Theobald, and Ron Miller - all of whom have been instrumental in educational change and supporters of alternative education in the last 25 years. She has also included a summary of research from the Hofstra University Center for the Study of Educational Alternatives, a long-term public alternative school research project on how to design alternatives for success. This is a short but important piece that could be beneficial to many schools looking to create specialized programs or alternatives within larger schools.

Many alternative schools are family-based, creating a community of parents, teachers, and students. The anthology includes poetry selections from students, which enhance the character of the collage and remind us of the impact the students themselves have had on the alternative education movement. The anthology would not be complete without this addition. This book, *Challenging the Giant Volume II*, and its partner, *Volume I*, are valuable additions to the growing library of materials that document the alternative education movement and support a holistic world view.

Challenging the Giant, The Best of SKOLE, The Journal of Alternative Education, Volume III
Down-to-Earth Books

REVIEWED BY EMANUEL PARISER

Volume III of *Challenging the Giant: The Journal of Alternative Education* includes a wonderfully diverse range of authors sculpting its pages from Zöe Readhead, A.S. Neill's daughter, writing about her father, to homeschooler Rebecca Furbush-Bayer, on the imperiled European wolf, to Ron Miller and John Gatto verbally duking it out over whether public schools are redeemable or not.

Mary Leue, the editor and founder of *SKOLE* and the Free School in Albany, has the knack of inviting people to write - whether they be 5 or 50 - anyone who has something to say, something they mean sincerely, can say it in *SKOLE*. This "best of" collection is divided up into ten sections including: profiles of alternative schools around the country, essays by teachers on learning (several delightful chapters from Chris Mercogliano's newly released *Making it Up As We Go Along: The History of (Albany's) Free School*), student writings, some gripping John Gatto polemics, writing as usual like a butterfly but stinging like a bee, and some pieces on the "Plight of Our Children."

The voices and points of view filling this edition are ones not usually heard from in "mainstream" discussions of education. They are impassioned, dedicated, disgusted, learned, stimulated voices who are writing to communicate, to vent, to celebrate, to broaden their experience and those

of their readers beyond the bounds of their own personal horizons. No one point of view dominates, no one writer gets top billing, no particular vision is put on a pedestal. But there is an urgency to what is said - an urgency which is evident for those of us working with children and adolescents in and out of schools, which grows each day; an urgency which these assembled voices embody. It is an urgency which begs for action.

As Mary exhorts us on the book's back cover: "Don't just sit back and stew...Take back your power!...Make a start now by deciding what you really want (for your children), then begin working to figure out how to get it." Meanwhile order a copy of this book from AERO.

Also available: *RETURN OF THE GIANT: Challenging the Giant, Volume IV*.

SOURCES FOR BOOKS ON EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

AERO Bookstore (<http://edrev.org/products.html>) sells books from various publishers, including many of the classics in the literature.

Educational Heretics Press (<http://edheretics.gn.apc.org/>) based in the UK, has published an extensive series of original titles advocating diverse learning alternatives and examining the failures of standardized schooling.

Great Ideas in Education (<https://great-ideas.org/titles.htm>) specializes in books on holistic education.

Correspondence

Hello, all of you wonderful AERO folks!

I am with a group of individuals in the eastern part of Pennsylvania who have begun in earnest the process of opening what we are calling the Seven Generations Charter School. We are working towards opening for the 2009/2010 academic year. A primary emphasis of this school will be to have a highly integrated curriculum that involves significant focus on environmental matters and community/global stewardship. A high degree of experiential/hands-on/outdoor/Nature-based learning will be a major part of this charter school as well.

For anyone that might be interested, our website is www.sevengenerationsschool.org.

We are working on our charter school application along with a particular charter school funding grant that is available through the PA Dept of Education. One of our challenges is developing (or finding? or borrowing? or building off of? or potentially purchasing?) a curriculum that is integrative as well as environmentally-focused along with also meeting the academic standards of the State of Pennsylvania. We need to write about what our curriculum will be and how it will meet the state standards, etc., etc. What kinds of suggestions might anyone have regarding curriculums of the type that I have described or of schools that are doing an integrated curriculum that focuses on environmental/community/global matters?

I thank you all in advance for any help, suggestions or guidance that any of you might be able to provide our little school.

Phil Arnold (philarnold@lehighcounty.org)

After reading Charles Eisenstein's excellent "De-schooling Yourself," in issue 51, I was surprised that I did not know almost all of the ways in which I needed de-schooling. I am also surprised that schools continue to constrain through instilling habits which need eradicating. One habit he did not mention is the habit of thinking that one person can do very little to change oneself or society. Traditional schools have taught us: "that's just the way things are and little if anything can be done about it." Thanks to Eisenstein for his outstanding article. (P.S. Hi to Nat Needle)

Conrad P. Pritscher
Professor Emeritus, Bowling Green State University

After 26 years of homeschooling and helping 4 of my 6 children through college, I'm just as dissatisfied with the universities as I have been with the public schools. Others I know feel the same. In my opinion, only homeschoolers are facing the PARENTAL OBLIGATION to teach our youth without demanding payment. I think it's time we take our experience in challenging public school and turn it toward higher education. I want to start a new type of university, but I can't do it alone. I'm creating action plans and gathering interested local people. I'd like communication from anyone interested as student, teacher, or supporter.

Following is a bare outline of my thoughts.

The university structure must be oriented toward individual student needs, not the "assembly-line" needs of administration. First, I would identify what a student already knows and record credit for that knowledge and experience. This is already done through CLEP tests, DANES, or Excelsior College Examinations, but many schools refuse such credit because that means lost tuition charges. Offer students every opportunity to "test out" of a class.

Second, help each student recognize personal strengths, weaknesses, learning styles, and interests. "Know yourself." Again, this is done with available tests.

Third, help determine what each student wants or needs in knowledge and experience according to goals. Then direct them to relevant information, mentors, experiences, and services that will enable them to achieve their goals.

I would encourage a life-long education, and broaden subject matter. I believe many would continue their education if the "degree" didn't result in life-long debt. Everyone should learn self-sufficiency and resourcefulness: how to produce and prepare food, create shelter and clothing, devise some self-employment, and acquire transportation when needed.

Intelligence is more than linguistic and mathematical/logical knowledge. I feel we should improve in each of the following intelligences as well: kinesthetic, musical, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, natural, spiritual, and business/financial.

To implement this plan I need to:

1. Organize people who are interested and have talents to share.
2. Secure a location for storing records and educational materials.
3. Acquire an official name, address, telephone number, web site, etc.
4. Acquire by donation or purchase necessary recording equipment for tape, CD, DVD, etc. and office equipment: computers, copy machine, etc.
5. Involve necessary personnel: office staff, recording staff, mentors, those who can give legal or professional counsel.

If you wish to share your talents in the creation of a new university, please contact: michaelackerman3@gmail.com and we'll discuss the subject further.

Michael Ackerman

2008 Registration Form

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Jerry works with students of the democratic table tennis club at the Boys and Girls Club. Picture by Megumi Higuchi

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