

Education Revolution

THE MAGAZINE OF EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

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Checking in with the educational alternatives networks...

The movement is thriving!



INSIDE:

Reflections on Schooling and Learning • Reviews of Some Great New Books
And MORE!



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Education Revolution

THE MAGAZINE OF EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

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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Cover photo: The Friends School of Portland, Maine.
Courtesy of Friends Council on Education.

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Being There

WITH JERRY MINTZ



Congressman George Miller and other panelists at the “Democracy at Risk” conference

In April I attended the news conference of the Forum for Education and Democracy at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. The title was “Democracy at Risk.” The Forum is a think tank of progressive thinkers in public education. I am personally familiar with some of its members, such as Debbie Meier, who will be a keynote speaker at our annual conference in June. She was a pioneer in the movement for small schools and empowerment of teachers in New York City and Boston. A key convener was Linda Darling-Hammond, formerly at Columbia Teacher’s College and now based at Stanford. She is also a key education advisor of Barack Obama.

I arrived early for the 8:30 event and was able to speak to Darling-Hammond and express our concerns about The No Child Left Behind Act and how it was negatively impacting us as alternative educators as well as education in general. She said that Obama was well aware of the situation and, if he is elected, to expect drastic changes within his first year. It is our wish that the initiative be scrapped altogether.

Perhaps the most influential attendee was Representative George Miller, Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. One of his dubious distinctions is being one of the four original authors of No Child Left Behind. It was pointed out, however, that despite the destructive effect that the act has had in forcing schools to “teach to the test” and eliminate activities that addressed the whole child, it did make visible previously neglected minority children. On the other hand, it was also pointed out that, even by our own testing standards, students in the United States have retrogressed in relation to students in other countries since the act came into

effect, and the gap between whites and minority students has grown greater.

John Merrow of PBS fame was the moderator of the event. He promised that the audience would be able to ask questions of the panelists but let things go on a little long, and fielded few audience questions. Although I had some pointed ones for most of the panelists, I never got to ask any. Debbie Meier had said to me before the start that she hoped I would have some challenging ones. She knew that I would, especially since the three hour philosophical debate that we had at a restaurant when we were both speakers at a seminar in Moscow, Russia last September. John Merrow does know me and perhaps he decided to avoid trouble by not taking my questions.

One of the points I would have raised is their absence of discussion about private alternative schools and homeschooling, although this was mentioned by Milton Goldberg, one of the first speakers. He talked about doing research by going around the country speaking to students, teachers, parents and administrators from public and private schools. I believe that one of the most important sources for change in the public school system comes from outside the system, by independent alternative schools and homeschoolers. Many of these would take public money if they didn’t think it would destroy them. In fact, the best public democratic schools have recently been forced to close down by conservative boards or have been under attack. And homeschoolers fear public funding for the same reason. One public program for homeschoolers in Oregon has recently been rescued from the chopping block, but for how long?

Another democratic public alternative in Oregon, Blue Mountain School, has thrived for ten years. Based on Sudbury Valley, a democratic school in Massachusetts, its graduates have had a tremendous success record. But local reactionaries who feared the school's approach of democratic process and empowerment of students were able to elect four school board members. According to Oregon charter school laws, they were then able to vote 4-3 to close the school, and tried to do it mid-year! The school was able to legally stop that, but is still in a fight for its life.

After the Forum I talked to Claudio Sanchez of National Public Radio, whom I've known for many years. He hadn't heard of this situation, and wanted to know more, perhaps to do a story about it for NPR. So, no matter what else happens, if such a story is able to help save Blue Mountain this trip will have been well worth it.

I had lots of other questions. For example, the report is called "Democracy at Risk," a throwback to the "National at Risk" report of 25 years ago. But they did not talk specifically about empowering students and using true democratic process, as independent democratic schools do all over the world. What better way to imbue students with democratic values than to enable them to experience democracy in their schools?



AERO's Director, Jerry Mintz, with progressive education activist Linda Darling-Hammond

Also, there was a lot of reference to educational research. But that research is systematically ignored, going all way back to the famous Eight Year Study. I believe the reason is that the established education system functions more as a religion with traditional practices based more on ritual and faith. It doesn't seem amenable to research. How will they deal with that?

One somewhat frightening idea is extending the system to preschool. Homeschoolers also fear this. What if the system runs preschool the same way as our current system? Might this not extinguish natural curiosity and children's natural learning ability at an earlier age? Let them try to become effective for older children before extending to a lower age!

Anyway, I never got to ask these questions, but it was an interesting trip and will be a successful one if we are able to help save Blue Mountain School. ●

FROM THE

Editor's Desk

BY RON MILLER

In many ways it seems increasingly apparent that humanity is approaching a major turning point. Global climate change, peak oil, food shortages, endless war, and the destructive effects of economic globalization are forcing nations to recognize that we stand on the brink of an unprecedented crisis. We can continue on our current path toward disintegration and chaos, or we can evolve new policies, institutions and ways of living that put us into a sustainable relationship with each other and with the planet.

This year's elections in the U.S. reflect this vital choice. Barack Obama may well be one of those remarkable leaders who emerge at critical moments in history to manifest the new energies that are seeking to burst forth. If he is elected in November, there could be a dramatic outpouring of creative solutions to the crisis of our time. We could see radically different—and radically better—approaches to energy and resource use, international relations, social services and education, health care, and community empowerment.

Even so, Obama may not win, or he and his party may turn out to be somewhat less visionary than what's needed to truly alter the course of our political-social-economic Titanic. We have no time left for re-arranging the lounge chairs on its deck. We have no time to wait for conventional politics to catch up with the pressing realities of our age. And even an unconventional politics can't achieve a complete cultural transformation by itself—it can only clear the path to some extent. It is up to all of us to work for genuine transformation of the world. That is what we, in the allied movements for educational alternatives, are doing.

Our ultimate goal is not to establish more democratic schools or Montessori schools, to get rid of No Child Left Behind or free up a few million more homeschooling families. These are all means to the essential end, which is to liberate the enormous creative potentials of the human being from unnecessary repression. This means redefining society's understanding of "education" so that no institutions—government, business, schooling, or the media—wield their authority or influence to shape young people into robotic producers and consumers or narrow-minded ideologues.

It is not only Obama who expresses a yearning for new hope and fresh beginnings, but millions and millions of young people around the world, and we owe them an "education" that releases rather than tames their wild generative powers.

Let's keep our eyes on the prize, folks. The Titanic is heading for the iceberg and it's not enough even to put shiny new chairs out on its deck. Let's build a radical, vocal, unified and effective educational movement that transcends whatever squabbles we might have over teaching methods or fine philosophical distinctions. ●

Reports from the Networks

We thought it was time to check in with the various networks of learner-centered educational approaches to find out how they're doing. We received reports, or were directed to websites, by representatives of the following groups. This information offers a snapshot of the educational alternatives movement at this time.

Democratic Schools

BY DANA BENNIS
TEACHER AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION
CONSULTANT

Democratic schools – those based on freedom for young people to direct their activities and shared decision-making among students and staff – are on a steady rise in the United States and around the world. In New York state where I live, the last five years have witnessed two new democratic schools and growing enrollments at all area schools: Albany Free School grew from 45 to 65 students and maintains a long waiting list, Longview School in Cortlandt Manor has nearly doubled its enrollment, and the Brooklyn Free School, founded in 2004, is at max capacity with 48 students and 65 on a waiting list as they seek a larger site. Across the U.S. there are currently 88 democratic schools from Stellar Secondary School in Anchorage, Alaska to Grassroots Free School in Tallahassee, Florida, enrolling approximately 6,500 students. Internationally the number of democratic schools numbers over 200 from nearly 30 countries, with an approximate enrollment of over 15,000 young people. Schools are located in as diverse countries as New Zealand, Brazil, Guatemala, India, and South Africa, while the largest sub-groups include 25 democratic schools in Israel, 17 in Netherlands, and 30 Sudbury Model Schools around the world based on the original Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, Massachusetts. (Sources: www.democraticeducation.com and www.sudval.org).

However, there are strong challenges to the growth of democratic schools. A basic challenge we all face in the world of educational alternatives is to frame what we do and believe in a way that resonates with parents, teachers, young people, and policy-makers such that they realize there is another way to think about young people and learning. Working against this is the climate of standardization and strict academic accountability, accelerated since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, that has driven out much innovation in education (not to mention innovative teachers) and has led to threats and closures of some public

democratic schools in this country. The story is similar around the world, from England to Canada to Australia. However, these damaging education policies have inspired a powerful grassroots backlash that holds great opportunity for those involved with education alternatives, including democratic schools.

A related challenge that has become more pressing with the closure of public democratic schools, is to ensure that these schools are not just for the middle and upper classes but are accessible to everyone regardless of income. Locating schools in or near socio-economically diverse communities such as the Givat Olga Democratic School in Israel and Albany Free School, bravely bringing democratic education practices to public schools, working for greater flexibility in the charter school sector, and establishing sliding-scale and other equitable funding schemes that do not turn families away based on ability to pay are just some of the many possibilities. By engaging in these types of projects and working against the policies of standardization, we can further the democratic and educational alternatives movement and provide more young people with the chance to grow in an environment of freedom, democracy, and human rights.

Friends (Quaker) Education: Challenging the Mind, Nourishing the Spirit

BY SARAH SWEENEY DENHAM
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, FRIENDS COUNCIL
ON EDUCATION

Friends believe that each person has the capacity for goodness and a responsibility to attain that goodness. Friends schools believe that education is preparation for the whole of life: the lively development of intellectual, physical, and social-emotional capacities as well as those of the spirit.

Friends school teachers are facilitators of the learning process, using dialogue, reflection and inquiry as tools for

learning in the classroom. The Quaker values of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship are deeply embedded in Friends school curricula and school culture. Students learn that all of life is sacred and resonates with meaning.

Friends schools teach students to:

- Resolve conflict with alternatives to violence through thoughtful listening and active engagement with different perspectives.
- Value and embrace the diversity of cultures and religions represented in their schools, and in the larger national and global communities.
- Search for truth through asking questions thoughtfully, respectfully, and responsibly.
- Develop the courage to take action in alignment with their core moral beliefs.
- Work for the good of society through active service learning activities in their communities and around the world — “letting one’s life speak.”

Today, 85 Friends schools across the United States are members of the Friends Council on Education (www.friendscouncil.org) serving more than 20,600 students. Both the overall numbers of students in the Friends Council network as well as the number of Friends schools continues to grow. The newest Friends schools to open are: Friends Center for Children, a cooperative daycare in New Haven, Connecticut; Friends School Charlotte, an elementary school in Charlotte, North Carolina; and Friends School of Portland, an elementary school on Mackworth Island off the coast of Maine. This year, the Friends Council on Education has had inquiries from groups that are exploring the idea of starting a Friends school in 13 different states.

Many Friends schools are experiencing renewal and depth in spiritual dimension through shared exploration of their core values as learning communities. High school students at Germantown Friends School initiated a Quaker deliberation process to create and maintain a student honor code. Trustees at Westtown School have added shared worship to their meetings as a way of knowing each other more deeply and building community. Friends school students are currently initiating dialogue and action on many issues, for example:

- collaborative problem-solving and community activism through an annual cross-school conference led by students at Friends School in Detroit;
- stewardship and sustainability through an environmental conference for middle school students and teachers at Carolina Friends school
- a student ‘Day of the Earth’ led by the Quaker student leadership program at Westtown School.

Friends school teachers, administrators, students and trustees, work to maintain focus on commitments to simplicity in a stressful and consumer-driven culture, and to focus on peace, creative problem-solving, openness and compassionate listening as our country enters its fifth year of war in Iraq.

Montessori Schools

BY DENNY SCHAPIRO

PUBLISHER, *PUBLIC SCHOOL MONTESSORIAN*

Montessori education continues to grow slowly in the U.S. with about 3,900 independent schools, 250 public schools sites (some one classroom, some more than 800 students) and about 110 charter schools. The high-stakes standards movement and shrinking urban school system enrollments pose challenges to maintaining integrity, but parent demand is strong, e.g., in spring 2008 more than 900 children were entered in a lottery for 35 openings in a Chicago Montessori magnet school.

The most significant growth seems to be taking place with older students and outside the U.S. Many U.S. schools, at parent urging, are developing middle and high school programs. Larger Montessori associations are becoming increasingly involved internationally, especially in China, where both the American Montessori Society and Association Montessori Internationale are developing initiatives, as is U.S. based entrepreneur Tim Seldin through his International Montessori Council.

Waldorf Education

(ADAPTED FROM WWW.WHYWALDORFWORKS.ORG)

Waldorf education is a carefully designed developmentalist approach rooted in the spiritual-scientific inquiry of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). Waldorf schools emphasize the creative arts and active, multisensory learning. There are currently 146 member schools of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (122 of these in the U.S.), which includes a growing number of high schools. Around the world, there are now over 900 Waldorf schools and 1600 early childhood programs. The movement is becoming established in China, Nepal, Egypt, Brazil and other parts of the developing world.

A recent survey of Waldorf school graduates found that 94% of them go on to higher education. While about 20% of American students choose careers in business, only 4.6% of Waldorf graduates do so—most going into the arts, humanities and sciences; 89% of respondents are satisfied with their choice of occupation. 91% reported that they practice and value “life-long learning,” and 94% consider themselves “self-reliant.” In addition, 90% highly value tolerance of diverse viewpoints. The survey further reported that “self-development, wakefulness to social and community life, as well as balance or ‘wholeness’ were the graduates’ foremost memories of their Waldorf education.”

Public Alternatives and Charter Schools

BY WAYNE JENNINGS
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
LEARNING ALTERNATIVES

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were 10,900 public alternative schools and programs for at-risk students in the nation during the 2000-2001 school year. Dr. Robert Barr has made an estimate of 20,000 public alternative schools/programs, which includes many programs not specifically for “at risk” students. We know that Minnesota has about 200 programs just for “at-risk” students that serve about 150,000 students annually ranging from part to full time. The strongest state alternative organizations are those in: Connecticut, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Washington. We have some contact with people in Texas, Oklahoma, Virginia and Missouri where there is something of an association and periodic conferences. California has several organizations covering specific aspects of alternative education and has strong state leadership.

From <http://www.examiner.com/5/06/08>

In the past four years 1,600 new charter schools opened and 500,000 additional public school students chose to enroll in charter schools. In the fall of 2007, 350 new public charter schools opened and an additional 115,000 public school

In the past four years 1,600 new charter schools opened and 500,000 additional public school students chose to enroll in charter schools. In the fall of 2007, 350 new public charter schools opened and an additional 115,000 public school students enrolled in these schools.

students enrolled in these schools. Nationwide in 40 states and Washington DC, over 4,300 public charter schools enroll more than 1.2 million public school students.

The Homeschooling Movement

BY PAT FARENGA
CONSULTANT AND AUTHOR

The number of homeschooling children continues to increase in the United States, though probably at a slower pace than during the 1990's when it skyrocketed. The U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, estimated there were 850,00 children being homeschooled in 1999 and 1.1 million homeschooled students in the United States in 2003. However I think the rate of increase is slowing. For the past few years I've been hearing anecdotal evidence, largely based on conference attendance numbers, that homeschooling numbers may have reached a plateau in some states, such as Washington, or have slowed down but are still growing at a positive rate, such as in North Carolina and Florida. Though the rate is slowing, it is still strongly trending in positive territory in the US. As homeschooling advocate Anne Zeiss writes, "That homeschooling is growing when there are even fewer children, is in itself amazing! Our growth rate in 2006 (from 2005) averaged around 3.6%, while public school enrollment was declining. Our change in the rate of growth, however, has been declining, right along with the birth rates" (<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/weblinks/numbers.htm>).

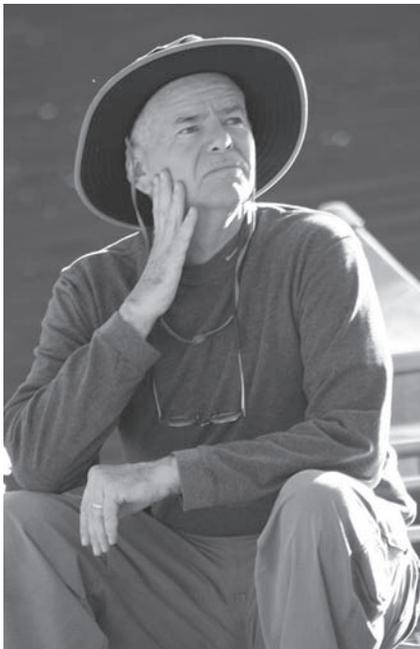
The US Dept. of Census report concluded in 2001 that homeschooling continues to grow at its fastest rate in the rural and suburban West, trending with the internal migration patterns of US citizens. I think the South is also a very strong growth area, though it does appear to be slowing down as noted above. I estimate there were at least 1.5 - 2 million children being homeschooled in 2007. ●

Oak Grove School of the Krishnamurti Foundation of America

BY MEGHAN MULQUEEN

“A school is a place where one learns the importance of knowledge and its limitations. It is a place where one learns to observe the world not from any particular point of view or conclusion. One learns to look at the whole of man’s endeavor, his search for beauty, his search for truth, and for a way of living without conflict.” ~ J. KRISHNAMURTI

In 1975 Jiddu Krishnamurti, regarded as one of the greatest philosophical and spiritual figures of the 20th century, began Oak Grove School (OGS) in Ojai, California with only three students and two staff. Today nearly 200 students and 40 staff members learn together an environment that is based on mutual respect and love.



Tim Hall, fourth grade teacher and dean of elementary and middle school students at Oak Grove School.

As a result of his passion for seeking out the truth in all situations, education was always one of Krishnamurti’s top priorities. He felt that if only the young and the old could be awakened to their conditioning of nationality, religion, prejudices, fears, and desires, then they might bring to their lives a totally different quality. Krishnamurti’s educational philosophy was formed from his beliefs in academically strong, inquiry-based learning in a noncompeti-

itive environment, respect for nature, and an understanding of one’s self and the global community.

His concern resulted in the establishment of schools in India, England, and California. The mission of OGS is to create a place where one can learn a way of living that is whole, sane, and intelligent. Consistent with the views of its founder, OGS encourages the art of inquiry, self-understanding, and relationship in a non-competitive and holistic learning environment.

In an interview, Timothy Hall, a 4th grade teacher and the Dean of elementary and middle school students, described the atmosphere at OGS:

“Teacher are considered ‘co-learners’; we are not considered sages on the stage, but rather guides on the side. Classroom management is not about controlling students, but about giving them the tools to be self-directed. If the teacher feels the children are lacking self-direction, the medium through which guidance is offered to the students is by giving lessons that entail the tools within to help the children on their path towards becoming self-sufficient. The teacher lets the children know that if they get stuck, they can work together to solve it. MISTAKES are key! Kids should be free to make mistakes.”

When asked about the basis of the curriculum at OGS, Tim answered that it is in line with the state standards. Since students often come from public schools, Tim emphasized that the content is not important as how it taught. “We don’t depend a lot on the textbook. Although it is a good guide, we do field trips, interviews with field specialists, and problem-based learning. An example of problem-based learning would be that I gave my 4th grade class the task of going to the administration and explaining to them why OGS should teach the students about global warming. The students then discussed the issues and main elements of global warming. We divided into four groups, and then conducted research into the areas of: photosynthesis, the carbon cycle, the greenhouse effect, and evidence of global warming. After we had prepared our case, we presented our finding to parents and to the school staff as to why global warming should be taught.”

At OGS, parent involvement is expected. Tim explained that the parents meet with the teachers and have meetings to discuss education, the class, fieldtrips, etc. “A school needs to be very clear about what it stands for, and then invite the parents to participate and contribute their ideas. There are many ways in which the parents can become more involved at OGS. The main way is through volunteer work. Each family volunteers 25 hours a school year. Moreover, a parent forum is

held once a month that allows parents and teachers to gather together to discuss the volunteering opportunities at OSG.”

Examples of volunteering opportunities at OSG consist of going on field trips, volunteering in the school garden or with food production, volunteering at the annual Earth Day Festival, or organizing the weekly Wednesday morning networking tea that enables the parents and OSG staff to meet, connect, and bond.

As with all schools, funding is an issue at OGS as well. The school has an endowment that produces income, along with an active fundraising program. The Earth Day Festival includes a lot of booths, an auction, art made by the children that is sold with all the proceeds going to OSG. The school also generates income at a fundraising tea where there are 110 tables and 10 people at each table. Each person is invited because they might be able to donate funds. During the tea a presentation is given about OSG, and the children perform music, a play, and a poetry reading. The attendees are then

asked to support the school.

Oak Grove School is an amazing place where valuable insights, learning, and beautiful relationships are cultivated every day. Tim fully believes in the school and in the Krishnamurti philosophy. His love for his students is evident in when he says “I try to make light of good and bad by changing the meaning of bad through the created acronym, Beautiful And Divine. Part of this is to know there is a spiritual being there besides a young body. The spiritual being has a completely unique way of looking at things that I would have never thought of before!”

Meghan Mulqueen is a children’s book writer, a yoga for kids instructor, environmental activist and a Spiritual Psychologist. She has a passion for the co-creation and co-learning that takes place between a teacher and a student. She plans to open up her own school in the near future for higher consciousness and education. ●

Personal Reflections on Learning

Reflections on School

BY JESSE WOOD

In college, I stumbled upon the writings of John Holt. His eye-opening, unorthodox ideas on how children learn were simple, sound, and poignant: “True learning – learning that is useful and permanent can arise only out of the experience, interest, and concerns of the learner.”

I read about Anna Fritz of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. William Upksi Wimsatt, in his book, *No More Prisons*, describes her as a 15-year-old honor roll student, who dropped out of high school to take control of her education and consequently her life. Instead of dissecting sentences in English class, she joined a writer’s critique group. Instead of music class, she studied cello with a university professor, and instead of social studies, she joined Peace Action Milwaukee. Her life and her education were one. Not separate as it felt for me in school.

After reading Holt and stories of other individuals educating themselves, I was flabbergasted. Then, I was angry. I was flabbergasted because I never heard of students controlling their own education before they were 18. I had no freedom in grade school—though I did get to choose between pizza or meatloaf on Mondays and tacos or turkey on Tuesdays. I was flabbergasted because much of what I learned didn’t matter to me in my life, such as all those dates and facts I momentarily memorized just because administrators and politicians like to see hard copy assessment.

I remember sitting in my small desk, along with other students, filling out countless worksheets in the sheer

silence after the teacher utilized one of her few levers: no recess or snack time if anyone makes a sound. I regret to say that when I student taught, I did both – threaten their play time and give them plenty of worksheets.

I also felt angry...angry because so much of my youth, when my mind was absorbent as a sponge, seemed wasted. Though John Lennon’s “Working Class Hero” is an extreme example, the beginning of the song parallels my sentiments: “As soon as you’re born, they make you feel small, by giving you no time instead of it all.” School prolonged my immaturity. Once I read a Native American who said that their young used to mature at around 12 years of age, but once they began their American education it took them longer to mature.

School suffocated my curiosity, too. Since I hated school, I thought I hated learning. I love learning, though. Now that I am out of school, I am as curious as George. I find myself spending more time in the library researching topics of interest than I did while in school. When I graduated from Appalachian State University, I wanted to learn something new. So, I found an apprenticeship in a fine woodshop in Foscoe, NC. Now, after a year of woodworking, I built my first mandolin. It sounds, looks, and feels better than the cheap Johnson I was playing.

I am 25, and now feel I am beginning to take my life and education into my own hands. All those years in school never gave me that empowerment. ●

Taking Off from Carlo Ricci

BY AADITTO SHEN

It was a real pleasure reading the article “Exploring My Own Time in School”, by Carlo Ricci, published in the Ed-Rev Magazine, #52. It’s definitely rare and essentially heartening to hear someone openly declare that memories of school sadden and anger him! The element that was most pleasing in his piece, reminiscent of writers like John Holt or A. S. Neill, was the directness with which he approached and elaborated an idea or a point. You can immediately sense that he is saying what he is feeling, rather than what he has been programmed to feel. For me, one of the best things about Neill’s book on Summerhill School is an important and functional word within the name of the book – “Summerhill: A RADICAL Approach to Child-Rearing.” Looking at a problem from its root, which is essentially what “radical” means, is something that society actually discourages us to do, as it has ramifications that are not conducive to herd-making.

Like Ricci, I too have suffered badly in the hands of formal education – and have also been blessed to have parents who did not roll with the band-wagon and brutalize me for having a mind of my own. In primary school, which in India means 1st through 5th grades, I used to be the kid who has enough brains and wits, but never utilizes them to their full potential. I just never felt the urge to learn the names of all the capital cities of the world by heart. I had better things to do.

I began taking an active interest in ornithology when I was about to graduate to secondary school, thanks to my exposure to an annual Adventure cum Nature-Study Camp, organized by a local wing of the Youth Hostels Association. By the time I was in standard VII, I had identified around 1000 species of birds in the field, and I remembered the name of each species without even trying.

I chose to go to art college only because I thought I was actually getting out of the stranglehold of academic study. I ended up specializing in history of art, for my Bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts, passing with first-class honors. I could never remember even one line of information from my school history text-book! My school history teacher met me at a fair one day, during my fourth year in college (BFA is a 5-year course). When she heard that I was specializing in history of art, the look on her face told a strange story – she was shocked, of course, but she was also visibly crestfallen – “How could this insolent, worthless, self-absorbed child, with no respect for authority, manage to carve out a niche for himself in the hallowed field of History?!” – That was the question writ all over her face filled with disbelief.

What she did not know was that it had actually happened through a simple twist of fate.

For the first two years at the art college every student had to work in all the five different fields that were offered.

Finally, before entering the third year, we had to choose any one of those subjects as our specialization. My first choice was sculpture. However, over those first two years, I had successfully managed to rub the teachers the wrong way – and when the time came, none of the practical department heads were prepared to allow me my choice! The only department that readily agreed to take me in was history of art.

It so happened that this surrender had a positive effect on me; the anxiety of “achievement” disappeared. And for the first time in my life I began to actually realize that I was smarter, possessed more sensitivity and had a much more acute understanding of life, compared to even the so-called toppers of my class.

That was of course not because I had taken care to rub the history teachers the right way – but simply because of that twist of fate; the history department was constantly at loggerheads with the practical departments. There was a never-ending rivalry that compelled each faction to do just the opposite of what the other was doing, at any cost!

It was almost ludicrous. Just because my last choice happened to be art history, and the fact that all the practical departments had refused me first, the history department had to go the other way. So, it was history of art or nothing at all for me.

The first year with art history specialization was sheer hell. I had no choice – all other doors had been closed in my face. I tried in vain to re-learn the tricks of academic “success” – reading pages on end of theoretical discourses, trying to mug-up quotes by renowned authors that made no real sense to me, hounding senior students to help me figure out the complex intricacies of academic art theory. By the end of the year I was again resigned to the fate of being a “drop-out” – which is a status that I had grown used to in school, where I had actually failed to be promoted in class once. It so happened that this surrender had a positive effect on me; the anxiety of “achievement” disappeared. And for the first time in

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Learning Self-Direction

BY CONRAD P. PRITSCHER

PROFESSOR EMERITUS, BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

As Mohandas Gandhi said: “There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.” Many of us may agree there is no way to freedom and self-direction. Freedom and self-direction are the way.

It seems that education is for more education in a manner that training is not for more training. Unfortunately, most schools infrequently make a distinction between training and education and as a result, we develop trained, follower-type students rather than aware, self-directing learners. People who are primarily trained do not know until some authority tells them they know. Self-directing people often not only know they know; they can, at times, think something that cannot be found in textbooks. The assumption for those who are primarily trained is that they are often constrained by forces outside of themselves. The assumption for those who are self-directing learners often is, when they are constrained, they notice their part in allowing themselves to be constrained. As that awareness increases, they often rid themselves of allowing other individuals and groups to constrain them.

The assumption for those who are self-directing learners often is, when they are constrained, they notice their part in allowing themselves to be constrained. As that awareness increases, they often rid themselves of allowing other individuals and groups to constrain them.

After 30 years of using A.S. Neill’s *Summerhill* and Carl Rogers’s *Freedom to Learn* in university classes, I continue to find that self-direction makes one, one’s own authority. I have found, not only in my schooling but also in my teaching, that teachers who “educate” (rather than primarily train) often include experiential activities such as Socratic questioning, open inquiry, and they rarely dominate class discussion. Paradoxically, some powerful learning activities arise out of planned spontaneity. Mostly, however, those quality teachers remove constraints by providing high degrees of freedom for students to explore what the individual student finds interesting, remarkable, and important.

If there is no way to freedom and self-direction, there seems to be no one easy way to “let go” of habitual behaviors which lead a student to follow what authorities (controllers) want students to do. Experimenting with “letting go” of that which is stifling to freedom and self-direction is useful since there is no one best way to becoming free and self-directing.

I have found it useful for me to notice that if I genuinely smile, I am more aware and self-directing than when I am not smiling in many daily situations. In the beginning, a non-smiler may need to force a smile, but those forced “fake” smiles can be genuine in the sense that the “forced smiler” is attempting to concentrate on, and generate, what I have come to call “stem ways of being.” The stem ways of being have helped me move in the direction of “letting go.”

The stem ways of behaving can be difficult to define. With only training in clearly defined skills, there often is an avoidance of difficult to define processes such as awareness building, self-direction, imaginative mind-opening, and freedom. My schooling programmed me to believe that if I could not clearly define something, I was stupid about that something. I had to learn to “let go” of that and other programmings that led me to behave in an unaware habitual manner during my teaching, during my learning, during my social interactions, and while I am alone. Unaware, habitual behavior is often uncreative, mindless, and closed-minded arising from another’s direction rather than my own.

An old friend, Jim Guinan, a clinical psychologist, e-mailed me twelve conditions or events which I later called stem ways of behaving. They were stems like stem cells in that doing one of these twelve stems permitted me to do the other eleven more easily. One stem seemed to generate another. As I practiced doing these 12 stem ways of behaving, I noticed my teaching, learning, and other behavior become noticeably less habitual. These 12 stem ways of being help me to let go of many of the ways in which schools have programmed me. As a result I find I can more easily be self-directing, open-minded, peaceful, cooperative, and freer, even though I still have a long way to go. I have concluded that a person is well on the road to being educated/self-directing when they do one or more of these 12 stem ways of behaving:

- [1] increase the tendency to let things happen rather than make things happen (letting go).
- [2] have frequent attacks of smiling.
- [3] have feelings of being connected with others and nature.
- [4] have frequent, almost overwhelming, episodes of appreciation.

- [5] have the tendency to think and act spontaneously, rather than from fears based on past experiences.
- [6] have an unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment, and to make the best out of each experience.
- [7] lose the ability to worry.
- [8] lose interest in conflict.
- [9] lose interest in interpreting the actions of others.
- [10] lose interest in judging others.
- [11] lose interest in judging self.
- [12] be compassionate to self and others without expecting anything in return.

When you freely choose to direct yourself in the direction of these ways of behaving, you'll find that you are acting in a self-directing and free manner. Somewhat like a fake smile generates a genuine smile, when one genuinely

attempts self-direction and freedom, one generates more self-direction and freedom.

Mary Beth Marklein reported on January 23, 2008 that a recent survey conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates said universities need to look for new ways to demonstrate student success. Schools at all levels need this. The report referred to success in terms of student self-direction, global knowledge, and intercultural competence as well as critical thinking and communication skills. In my work as a university educator over many years, I rarely found self-direction and global knowledge as goals in course syllabi. Narrow goals (excessive specialization) may prevent learning self-direction, global knowledge, and intercultural competence. Free schools are founded on the notion that everyone is already free and the learning in free schools is the kind that enhances and continues the generation of self-direction and freedom. ●

Taking Off from Carlo Ricci

Continued from page 9

my life I began to actually realize that I was smarter, possessed more sensitivity and had a much more acute understanding of life, compared to even the so-called toppers of my class. This began to instill a new-found confidence, and soon I realized that I was in fact even sharper than most of my teachers!

I stopped trying to study art history. Instead, I went to the library and looked at every single work of art I could find in print, on the topic or the artist that was being addressed in class – and I formed my own opinions. Never again did I read a single line of the unending jargons and theories in those books. I just couldn't care less if they flunked me for that – and finally, that is what saved me, I think. Before I had realized what was going on, I had become one of the sought-after students in the whole college. Teachers who had long-established rivalries with me began to cite me as an example of high academic acumen. Of course, they had the last laugh when it came down to the grades – they chose never to give me my due, and they commanded the position to do so at will!

Formal education has not given me anything positive to show for it; if anything, my reactionary response to it might

have incidentally created situations which have helped me to learn on my own. But they have also bruised my internal being badly! Ricci says, "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." In order to achieve this rather ambitious goal, the human world must first become sensitive towards the underlying spirit that governs the universe. It is not so much an intellectual crisis – it is a spiritual one.

Greed – for an egotistic assertion of the self, for the ego-satisfaction of control, for the regressive pleasures of laziness, for opportunism, and for power – that for me is one of the fundamental issues that need to be addressed. Any holistic solution has to be all encompassing – there cannot be one solution for "holistic education," another for "holistic human relationships," and yet another for "holistic living."

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Jennings Community Learning Center

Imagine a school where becoming a responsible citizen, a productive worker and lifelong learner is more important than completing courses of study. The Jennings Community Learning Center (formerly, Jennings Experiential High School) has carefully defined the attributes of citizenship, work and learning and measures the success of its students accordingly.

Imagine also that the school emphasizes learning by doing rather than textbooks and lecturers. A visitor to the school would find students working on a variety of projects and topics of personal interest. On another day the students may have left the building for a ten day trip to New Orleans learning about people, cultures and occupations along the route. In that particular instance, part way through the trip the engine on one of the vans blew out necessitating a considerable amount of problem solving.

One group of students after preparing for a year installed a computer lab in Ghana, West Africa. They have returned four times to continue the work. Students learned several years of knowledge and skills through the experiences. Participating in the lifestyle living in a third world country will be remembered for life for those students and their teachers.

After a school-wide study of islands, students spend the night on islands in the St. Croix River, boys on one island, girls on another island and staff on another island. The trip to the islands was via a huge raft which the students built working with a local organization, Urban Boatbuilders. Student had prepared by learning survival skills and were given primitive shelters, tools and food. One night a heavy rainstorm caused the river to rise a foot and students had to cope with a new situation quite different from their normal urban life. Teamwork and creativity were exercised and students learned the importance of planning.

The school is a headquarters but students use the community and the world as real classrooms. They serve old people, young children and research community issues, often proposing solutions and taking action to implement them. They use community access video labs and social service theater programs. They enter high-mileage car and solar boat



Engaged, hands-on learning at the Jennings Community Learning Center, St. Paul, MN. Students work with a boat builder to construct a raft, while learning how to calculate size, capacity & floatation.

competitions and have often won.

Such experiences transform students. Experienced staff comment on how much students change in a brief period of time with these types of experiences. Staff say that student brains open to learning, think more deeply and solve problems with creative ideas. It's clearly a matter of powerful learning experiences having a huge impact on youths. This charter school, now in its eighth year, was established to test breakthrough practices. Jeff Holte, the director-teacher and Ellie Elmquist, staff member won't compromise with their ideals. Where most innovative schools over time drift back to the average, JEHS continues to take brain-compatible principles of learning to their ultimate applications with increasing bounds of faith about how students learn.

The school is named after Wayne Jennings, a 50 year veteran of school work, who created the school's initial design based on the Community Learning Centers model and he prepared the charter school application. He has remained on the school's Board of Directors as the school's cheerleader. ●

For more information, contact Jennings Community Learning Center, 2455 University Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104
tel: 651-649-5403 • www.jenningsclc.org

Envisioning: A School and a Future

BY EILEEN McCUE

Mid October in Maine is crisp. This morning when we gathered for our daily opening circle we were bundled in coats, hats, and mittens. Come January when the temperatures dip into the teens, we will spend more time inside, but this morning we enjoyed the smells of wood smoke and fall leaves on the breeze as nine-year-old Jacob led us in a round of our favorite harvest song. Next, we had our daily sharing time. Jenna, who is five and new to the school, was up late last night to see the brightest full moon of the year. We heard that Justin is feeling nervous about his college applications. Clara and Taylor shared that they are trying to work through a disagreement and might need some support. A hawk that circled overhead in an updraft distracted a few of us. Lisa pointed it out between Clara's sentences so that no one missed the rare opportunity to see such a beautiful bird.

With sharing time celebrated, we move into our four project crews. The building crew helps Rob mix cob (a mud and straw composite) to spread over the outside straw bale walls of our newest community members' house. Brady and Chris are with the garden crew harvesting the sweet fall crop of kale and Brussels sprouts. For our lunch today, they will cook up that harvest with some of our own squash and potatoes that have been curing for winter storage. The forest crew tags trees to be harvested. With William's help, they decide which trees are best for beams for the next building project and which are best for firewood. Foraging for fall mushrooms like chicken of the woods and tasting and marking the best of the wild apples is on their list as well. The last crew, with Jon and Lisa at the stream, clears away invasive species along the streambed and replaces them with native plants. As they work, they record the plant and animal life they see as part of their feasibility and impact study of a micro-hydroelectric plant.

Although the project crew work is structured, students have a great deal of autonomy here. They choose a crew for five weeks at a time. At the start of that period, they decide as a group what they will work on. They identify goals and make a plan, which is revisited weekly. At that point they also decide the type of background knowledge they might need to embark upon the project.

For example, before doing the stream study, the crew with Jon and Lisa researched native plants, as well as how micro-hydroelectric power generation works. Projects fill most of the morning, leaving the afternoon open for students to pursue their individual interests.

The project crews wind down a little before noon, leaving time to wash up for lunch. We sit together eating and chatting informally about the morning's work until William announces that he is ready to go out to the field if anyone wants to join him. Several children jump up, excited to continue the fort they started building in the shelter of a stand of old apple trees at the edge of the field. The afternoon is time for self-directed workplay here. I see Justin wander off to the quiet room where he has been writing college application essays. Jenna is headed just after him, but she will look at books and probably nap. Other children will play games, chat with community members, explore the community land, or any of a multitude of other activities to which they are drawn. Our day will end late this afternoon with clean up chores and our closing circle.

The school described above does not yet exist. This vision includes a small intentional community focused on sustainability that would provide the setting for the school. The school and the community would help to nurture a new paradigm of sustainability that has begun to emerge. The school will guide children to discovering who they are and where their passions lie, thus creating healthy and whole adults. By giving students time and space to connect with the land, they will develop an intimate understanding of the natural world and their interconnectedness with it. Signs are everywhere that we are nearing the very edge of the Earth's ability to ensure our survival and that we must rethink how we live. Creating a learning community based on a strong connection to place, learning from and working with the surrounding ecosystems, and empowering students to be responsible for their learning, will be a strong foundation to foster the emergence of a new paradigm of sustainability, empowerment, interconnection, and caring.

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News & Communications

COMPILED BY CAROL MORLEY AND RON MILLER

National.....

Charters Leverage Rivalry, by Evie Blad, *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*. Charter schools accelerate students' academic performance while creating a competitive environment that strengthens the traditional schools around them, a researcher said Friday. Stanford University economics professor Caroline Hoxby explained the findings of three studies on charter schools in a presentation sponsored by the state Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas Fayetteville. While studying the effect of charter schools, Hoxby tracked the academic progress of 13,000 New York City charter school students admitted to the schools through a selection lottery.

Charter schools adapt the traditional school model through methods such as targeting curriculum, lengthening the school day and modifying class sizes. The schools that showed the most significant gains in the study implemented longer school days, many as long as 10 hours, trading the extended day for larger class sizes. "They use their autonomy to pursue different policies," Hoxby said. "But nothing that they do differently is something that a regular public school could not do." Charter schools raise the bar of competition for public schools around them, causing a subsequent increase in student test scores, Hoxby said the study found.

Dan Marzoni, president of the Arkansas Education Association, said the statewide teachers' union supported charter schools when they were billed as laboratories designed to find creative solutions that could later be implemented in traditional public schools. "The way things have evolved with charter schools, that promise has never been fulfilled," he said. Instead, charter schools have become small learning communities that skim high-performing students with committed parents from traditional public schools, Marzoni said. "Basically, what you have now is people trying to create private schools with public money," he said.

Parents want educational options. From <http://www.examiner.com/> A national opinion poll conducted in March, 2008 of 800 registered voters found that 77% of parents support having more public school options for their children. The poll conducted by The Glover Park Group for the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools also found that when a description of public charter schools was provided to surveyed parents, three in five (60%) expressed interest in enrolling their children in a charter school. A majority of voters (52%) believe that allowing parents to choose the public school they think best meets

the needs of their child will improve the larger system of public schools. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (www.publiccharters.org) is the national nonprofit organization committed to advancing the charter school movement. The Alliance works to increase the number of high-performing charter schools available to all families, particularly low-income and minority families who currently do not have access to quality public schools.

Homeschooling Update by Pat Farenga. California homeschoolers got a shock in February, 2008 when a lower court case suddenly affected all homeschoolers in the state. The judge in the case, *In Re. Rachel L. et al*, claimed that CA law did not allow homeschooling, primarily because most homeschoolers are not state certified teachers, and his decision created an uproar and confusion throughout the state, as well as the country. There was soon public support for homeschoolers from Governor Schwarzenegger and even the CA State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jack O'Connell. O'Connell announced, "I have reviewed this case, and I want to assure parents that chose to home school that CA Department of Education policy will not change in any way as a result of this ruling. Parents still have the right to home school in our state." Nonetheless, the media, as well as some homeschoolers and their supporters, made the situation appear as though homeschooling was being attacked on a grand scale and "your state is next." Fortunately, cooler heads are prevailing and the case is being appealed. Due to the court schedule, we will probably not know the outcome until the fall. The HomeSchool Association of CA and California Homeschool Network have been addressing this issue from the beginning and their websites have the latest information about this case: <http://www.hsc.org/moreonthecase> and <http://californiahomeschool.net/howTo/updates.htm>

Michigan homeschoolers are currently watching a bill, HB5912, that appeared in March, 2008. This bill requires all homeschoolers to register with their local public school district. Go to www.Clonlara.org for more information. Clonlara, and the family of its founder, Dr. Pat Montgomery, suffered a major loss when Pat's husband, Jim Montgomery, died suddenly in December 2007. I offer condolences to Pat, her immediate family, and the Clonlara family. Jim was an important part of Clonlara's history and success and his smarts, smile and good humor will be missed a lot.

In April, 2008, New Hampshire homeschoolers "turned

National

out in droves to oppose a bill that would require parents to submit a curriculum plan to the state,” according to the *Nashua Telegraph* (<http://www.nashuatelegraph.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080416/NEWS02/55894821/-1/OPINION02>). According to this article, New Hampshire homeschoolers still need to “notify their local school district that they intend to homeschool their children,” but a bill passed in 2006 that eliminated the curriculum plan requirement, so homeschoolers wonder what the purpose of resurrecting the requirement would be. The bill was referred to committee and there is no word, yet, as to how this will turn out.

Irish homeschoolers are claiming they face discrimination as examiners may refuse to mark coursework, thereby preventing a secondary school degree (called a “Leaving Certificate”) from being conferred upon them, writes Breda O’Brien. Due to plagiarism concerns, the State has decided that coursework must be constantly monitored by the teacher, and validated by a principal. Apparently no teachers or principals in Ireland are coming forth to vouch for the coursework of homeschoolers who ask for it. The State Examinations Commission has formed a committee to look at the issue, but there is no indication when it will report, so present-day homeschoolers who want a Leaving Certificate are in limbo.

John Holt’s thought and work are the exclusive focus of Vol. 5 in the new Continuum Library of Educational Thought, released Nov. 15, 2007. In this volume, Roland Meighan has written a wonderful intellectual biography and critical exposition

of Holt’s work. He also discusses the reception and influence of Holt’s work and the relevance of the work today. The Continuum Library of Educational Thought website describes the series as follows: “A major international reference series providing comprehensive accounts of the work of seminal educational thinkers from a variety of periods, disciplines and traditions.”

Homeschoolers’ basketball tournament receives national attention. Sarah Phipps wrote in *The New York Times* (www.nytimes.com/2008/03/16/sports/16homeschool.html?th&emc=th) about the National Christian Homeschool Basketball Championship that took place in Oklahoma in March. The tournament featured 300 teams from 19 states. Phipps wrote, “Only a decade ago, home-school athletics was considered little more than organized recess for children without traditional classrooms. Now, home-school players are tracked by scouts, and dozens of them have accepted scholarships to colleges as small as Blue Mountain in Mississippi and as well known as Iowa State.” She pointed out that only 18 states allow homeschoolers to participate on athletic teams at public schools. Tim Flatt, who runs a program for 125 boys and girls, ages 8 to 18, on 11 teams in Oklahoma, said that “a lot of home-school teams play in small gyms, church gyms, and they play against weaker competition. They don’t get to experience something at a national scale. I wanted to make the kids feel like they were getting big-time treatment, and their parents want to take a week of vacation to come here.”

International

FINLAND

What Makes Finnish Kids So Smart? (adapted from an article by Ellen Gamerman, *The Wall Street Journal*, 02/29/2008). High-school students in Finland rarely get more than a half-hour of homework a night. They have no school uniforms, no honor societies, no valedictorians, no tardy bells and no classes for the gifted. There is little standardized testing, few parents agonize over college and kids don’t start school until age 7. Yet by one international measure, Finnish teenagers are among the smartest in the world. They earned some of the top scores by 15-year-old students who were tested in 57 countries. American teens finished among the world’s C students even as U.S. educators piled on more homework, standards and rules.

In tests last year sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Finland’s students placed first in science and near the top in math and reading. The academic prowess of Finland’s students has lured educators from more than 50 countries in recent years to learn the country’s secret, including an official from the U.S. Department of Education. What they find is simple but not easy: well-trained teachers and responsible children. Early on, kids do a lot without adults hovering. And teachers create lessons to fit their students. “We

don’t have oil or other riches. Knowledge is the thing Finnish people have,” says Hannele Frantsi, a school principal.

Finnish educators believe they get better overall results by concentrating on weaker students rather than by pushing gifted students ahead of everyone else. The idea is that bright students can help average ones without harming their own progress. Finnish teachers pick books and customize lessons as they shape students to national standards. “In most countries, education feels like a car factory. In Finland, the teachers are the entrepreneurs,” according to an OECD official.

One explanation for the Finns’ success is their love of reading. Parents of newborns receive a government-paid gift pack that includes a picture book. Some libraries are attached to shopping malls, and a book bus travels to more remote neighborhoods like a Good Humor truck.

Finland has a high-school dropout rate of about 4% -- or 10% at vocational schools -- compared with roughly 25% in the U.S., according to their respective education departments. Finland’s high-tax government provides roughly equal per-pupil funding, unlike the disparities between Beverly Hills public schools, for example, and schools in poorer districts. The gap between Finland’s best- and worst-performing schools was the smallest of any country. College is free. There is competition

International.....

for college based on academic specialties -- medical school, for instance. But even the best universities don't have the elite status of a Harvard. Taking away the competition of getting into the "right schools" allows Finnish children to enjoy a less-pressured childhood. While many U.S. parents worry about enrolling their toddlers in academically oriented preschools, the Finns don't begin school until age 7, a year later than most U.S. first-graders.

Once school starts, the Finns are more self-reliant. While some U.S. parents fuss over accompanying their children to and from school, and arrange every play date and outing, young Finns do much more on their own.

CANADA

From **Homework a Homewrecker**, by Kristin Rushowy, **thestar.com**: While research shows some benefits to homework in grades 7 and 8 and high school, there's scant evidence that it improves student achievement in the younger years, say professors Linda Cameron and Lee Bartel of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. There is a growing body of research in the U.S. that has found homework isn't all it's cracked up to be, and a growing number of parents who say because of homework and other demands, children have no downtime; one writer has even gone so far as to say today's children have a "nature deficit disorder." Some American elementary schools have cut back or entirely banned homework. Cameron and Bartel embarked on this study because of the lack of comparative Canadian data. In their study, more than 1,000 parents were surveyed and said while they like the good work habits homework promotes, as well as how it helps parents be involved in their children's academic lives, the amount students are getting is interfering with family time, play time, causing stress and even marital troubles.

UNITED KINGDOM

Parent power: The Comprehensive Created by Mums and Dads, by Hilary Wilce: Drive past The Elmgreen School, in West Norwood, south London and all you will see is an unremarkable Victorian primary. Yet for some educational visionaries, this school is a blueprint for the future. These are the people who want to see a thousand different schools blooming in the garden of education. They include David Cameron, the Tory party leader, and they are excited because the launch of The Elmgreen School this year shows that parents can start up their own school successfully within the maintained school system. The area was chronically short of secondary school places. Half of all local 11-year-olds had to go to school out of their home borough of Lambeth, while the rest had to travel long distances within the borough, often to schools that were single-sex and faith-based. The idea was first raised in 2003, and four years later, after a multitude of financial and bureaucratic setbacks, the school opened its doors in its interim home of a refurbished primary school. The school has a greater number of parents on

its governing body than other schools, and there are close links between home and school.

Both sides stress that this not a parent-run school, and for head Asma Mansuri, a former deputy head in neighbouring Streatham, the most exciting aspect of her job is the chance to handpick her teachers and build a school from scratch. She has started with innovations such as no bells, and assemblies later in the day, not first thing. The school was determined to open as a specialist school, and persuaded the Government to bend the rules -- as a new school it couldn't furnish evidence of previous achievement -- to allow it to set up as a school based on the humanities. It has a committed staff, a friendly atmosphere and a carefully thought out view of the culture it wants to foster -- inclusive and respectful, with high standards and a commitment to all aspects of learning. Its reputation is growing rapidly and nearly 800 children applied for 180 places this year.

This will warm Cameron's heart. He wants to see "a new generation" of co-operative schools, and says that a Tory government would scrap existing rules that block the setting up of new schools when there are surplus places. "We know that if parents have a say in how their school in run, if they feel their views matter and their wishes count, the school is always better," he told an audience in Manchester last November. "What better way ... than to give them ownership of it? To make them not just stakeholders but shareholders." The Government, too, is keen to give parents a bigger involvement in setting up schools and legislated two years ago to encourage "parent promoters" to approach local authorities about building a new school in their area if they feel provision is inadequate.

State Schools Shunned for Home Education, by Polly Curtis, *The Guardian*: Parents are increasingly seeking alternative forms of education such as home schooling or Steiner schools to free their children from the state sector's regime of testing and targets, academics suggest today. Most English pupils now start formal learning at four years old, among the youngest in the world, and go on to be the most tested throughout their education, according to a series of in-depth reports which will feed into a major review of primary schooling by Cambridge University. The government should learn from the way children are taught in alternative settings such as Steiner schools where they learn through play, the academics say. An estimated 50,000 children are being educated at home. The research says home-educated children perform better and that children from disadvantaged backgrounds can improve disproportionately. Home-educated pupils are less likely to watch TV or spend hours on computers. "Both the numbers opting for home schooling and the range of motivations of those wishing to do so have expanded considerably in recent years. One substantial and growing group is comprised of those who have abandoned formal schooling because they believe it to be too constrained," according to a paper by James Conroy and colleagues at Glasgow University. ●

Resources

Diversity Among Democratic Schools

BY JOHN LOFLIN
DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION CONSORTIUM
BLACK & LATINO POLICY INSTITUTE

Enhancing the “Widening the Circle” theme of AERO, conference director Isaac Graves began talking to me about a concern regarding the involvement of people of color and under-represented groups in the AERO conference.

We decided try and answer the question: Why are there no free or democratic schools started and administered by African American parents or community with African American children attending?

I worked on a presentation that would give viewers both an historical and personal response to the issue with some recommendation. Several people attend the presentation and later some met to further discuss the concern. Those presently involved are: Diana Bethel, David Easton, Jerry Mintz, Trudi Forrestal, Ken Jacobson, Moya Khabel, Isaac Graves, Arnie Langberg, Lily Mercogliano, Khalif Williams, Ron Miller, W. Miner, Ellen Raider, Krenie Stowe, Deborah Thomas, Ben Williams, and Leo Fahey.

Perhaps this group can help AERO and other alternative education advocates to appreciate the part black progressives played in the formation of alternatives to public schools (and their traditional school style) back in the late 60s and early 70s.

A follow up presentation, discussion and action is planned for this year’s conference.

If you want a copy of the power point presentation e-mail me at johnharrisloflin@yahoo.com.

The cost is free, but please send your critique.

Center for Education Reform

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WASHINGTON, DC 20006
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Check out CER’s *Weekly Research Digest*, now available under “What’s New” at www.edreform.com. Every week, the research team at the Center digs a little deeper into recent reports and studies, both published and non-published. We’ve been collecting and processing this data daily to support our efforts across the country for the past fifteen years. Now, we are happy to make it available to you, hopefully to help you cut your learning curve and save you valuable time.

Since its inception, The Center for Education Reform has continued to build and maintain the largest, most comprehensive research database in the education reform space. To date, nearly 11,000 records are archived.

Please note that the inclusion of research in CER’s *Weekly Research Digest* does not imply The Center for Education Reform’s endorsement of the findings or methodology presented. The *Weekly Research Digest* does not evaluate or rank the merit or significance of the studies presented, but merely provides a summary of key findings.

Education for Liberation Network

WWW.EDLIBERATION.ORG/

We are a national coalition of teachers, community activists, youth, researchers and parents who believe a good education should teach people—particularly low-income youth and youth of color—to understand and challenge the injustices their communities face. The network currently has more than 630 members who represent a diverse collection of educational institutions and organizations: public schools elementary through high school, local and national youth organizations. In 2007 we launched the EdLib Lab, an interactive database of Education for Liberation curriculum materials that allows users to find, share and comment on social justice resources.

In 2008 we started a monthly, online discussion series called “talkin ‘bout,” which brings together educators, activists and youth to participate in a public conversation on the network website about timely and important topics in social justice education. ●

Book Reviews

**Montessori, Dewey, and Capitalism:
Educational Theory for a Free Market in Education**
by Jerry Kirkpatrick. Claremont, CA: TLJ Books, 2008.

REVIEWED BY RON MILLER

This is one of the most original, intriguing and provocative books on education I have come across in a long while. Jerry Kirkpatrick, who is not primarily an educational scholar but a professor of international business and marketing, has concocted an audacious blend of ideas that are rarely, if ever, considered together even though, as he demonstrates, they form a coherent whole.

It is unusual enough to discuss the congruencies between Maria Montessori's and John Dewey's approaches, but Kirkpatrick also adds the libertarian, "objectivist" philosophy of Ayn Rand and the anti-statist economist Ludwig von Mises to the mix. Most students of Dewey's social democratic vision or Montessori's cosmic spirituality would be shocked to see their ideas associated with the militantly individualist atheist Rand. But once the shock wears off, there is a coherent philosophy being described here, and in important ways (though not in all ways) it could serve as the core philosophy of the educational alternatives movement.

The foundation of Kirkpatrick's approach is his assertion that "consciousness is active, not passive, in the perception and conceptualization of the world in which we live" (p. 77). He spends many pages explaining that traditional philosophical views about the how the human mind grasps reality fail to appreciate the purposeful, volitional nature of the mind. Thinking and knowing require concentrated attention and deliberate choice. Genuine learning is an act of free will. It is on this point that Montessori, Dewey and Rand converge.

Kirkpatrick devotes an informative chapter to the historical origins of modern educational thinking, showing that a pedagogy of freedom emerged gradually over the centuries, particularly after the philosophical period of Enlightenment. He cites this comment in Rousseau's *Emile*, for example, calling it "the first statement of modern educational theory":

If ever you substitute authority for reason [the student] will cease to reason; he will be a mere plaything of other people's thoughts.

Kirkpatrick's main argument is that genuine learning involves the exercise of independent reason, and this demands freedom from coercive authority. He backs this up with a thoughtful discussion of the process of reasoning, in which he explores motivation, emotions, self-esteem, and the complementary conceptual functions of integration and differentiation. His argument reflects Rand's philosophy of objectivism, yet he shows how educational liberators such as Montessori and Dewey held similar views. This section of the book is fascinating and compelling, and provides a strong rationale for

the democratic practices used in many varieties of educational alternatives.

Then the author takes another step in this argument, which I still find intriguing but also more problematic. He writes, "Spontaneous activity in education requires spontaneous activity in economic life, and vice versa. The one reinforces the other" (p. 149). Drawing on von Mises's severe critique of bureaucracy, Kirkpatrick insists that a truly free society would eliminate all forms of coercion, including all government activity beyond protecting individual rights. Any public funding or management of schooling violates this cardinal libertarian principle because "the trappings and mentality of bureaucracy," and the coercion involved in taxing the public to pay for schools, thwart the spontaneity and creativity of the free market.

Kirkpatrick envisions a fully capitalist system of education, in which "education consumers and entrepreneurs, not government 'experts,' will have the power to cooperatively shape the market, by determining what, how, and to whom knowledge is to be provided" (p. 167). In the opening lines of the book, the author declares that "I assume that this system is morally and economically unassailable." Here is where his bias, as a business and marketing theorist, starts to show through. An awful lot hinges on this overconfident assumption. I think this is a key point that advocates of educational alternatives need to ponder very carefully.

In my writings on "holistic" education, I have frequently emphasized the vital importance of *balance* and *context* in framing our educational and social ideas. I see danger in taking any abstract principle, even a highly desirable one like "freedom," as being absolutely positive across all historical, cultural and existential situations—as being "morally unassailable" in Kirkpatrick's terms. There are some valid reasons to assail the morality of the completely unregulated free market. Even in the brief quote above, I find it very troubling that a capitalist educational system would determine "to whom knowledge is to be provided." We *know* who has access to the most valuable knowledge in a capitalist society—the people with the most wealth. They have the resources (not only money but also what theorists call "cultural capital") to perpetuate their families' economic and social superiority. Educational "entrepreneurs" would serve them first, and best, because that would maximize their profits, which is what entrepreneurs by definition seek to do.

Kirkpatrick sidesteps this reality by insisting that in a libertarian utopia, the absence of government regulation and interference in the market would drive the cost of living down enough so that even the poor could afford private education. To make it even more accessible to them, he dredges up the Lancasterian ("monitorial") system that was used in the early nineteenth century to provide a controlled, factory-like, and cheap way of educating the working class (the children of the elite class were not sent to such schools). Then he declares that "education is a staple that anyone who has children must budget for" (p. 182). I find this to be a remarkably callous dismissal of the realities of poverty and class in a competitive capitalist society. This is where libertarian ideology, which I otherwise appreciate in many ways, gets lost in self-confirming fantasy.

No matter how logically (that is, abstractly) coherent it

is to equate the learner's freedom from coercion with the taxpayer's freedom from bureaucracy, a pedagogy of freedom that leaves poor, working class, or otherwise marginalized children stuck in second or third class learning environments is not moral. The ideal of a completely free, spontaneous society is lovely, but where it runs into the hard realities of greed, class interest, and other intractable human foibles, there is need for some modification, some balancing. The now discredited phrase "compassionate conservative" comes to mind: If we want to open up the educational bureaucracy to a marketplace of alternatives (something that most of us in this movement really do want!), I think it needs to be a compassionate, or socially responsible, marketplace.

Just as there is a movement for socially responsible business that considers justice and environmental stewardship as essential elements of the bottom line, the educational alternatives movement needs to insist on a just, compassionate, and moral way to provide alternatives equitably across society. As we ask what role government should play in this, we need to be discerning and cautious in our ideology; certainly the massive bureaucracy wields far too much authority today (can you say "No Child Left Behind?"), but the opposite extreme would engender its own set of equally troubling problems.

I am also disturbed by the author's conception of education as a business enterprise. He views teachers as "salespersons of knowledge" and parents and children as "consumers," and asserts that "buying and abstaining from buying by consumers will ultimately determine which are the better schools and philosophy of education" (p. 168). I simply cannot accept a worldview that turns everything in the world into a commodity for sale. Education, in particular, is a moral and existential endeavor, concerned with meaning and community and expansion of self-awareness and understanding. The intrinsic value of such aspects of life cannot be quantified, cannot be established in the marketplace, without being rendered sterile and soulless. Consumers buy things for many reasons, including vanity, impulse, emotional hunger, and the seductive power of advertising and public relations, so their choices of educational services may bear little or no relevance to the intrinsic worth of the learning experiences provided to their children. Our task is to balance maximum educational choice with a moral vision of human potentials and a caring society that nourishes those potentials. The naked marketplace does not do that.

I was fascinated by this book because I went through a serious Ayn Rand phase in my own intellectual development many years ago, and indeed, it was her endorsement of Montessori education that first introduced me to the path my career has taken. However, although I still find her worldview provocative and worth wrestling with, I found I could not accept the self-assured egotism that is at the core of her moral vision. Rand understood Montessori's work in a selective and limited way, as I think Kirkpatrick takes both Montessori's and Dewey's. For those educational visionaries, freedom was not egotistic, but was well balanced by a spiritual (Montessori) or social (Dewey) conscience.

I do think you should read this book. Wrestle with it yourself, and see where you come out.

***Choices for the High School Graduate:
A Survival Guide for the Information Age*
by Bryna Fireside, 4th Edition, New York:
Checkmark Books of Facts on File, Inc., 2005.**

REVIEWED BY DAVE LEHMAN

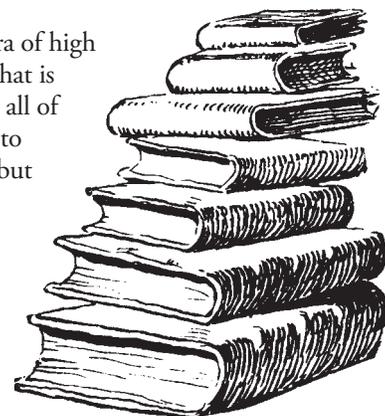
"College ready" is the mantra of high school reform. And clearly that is a laudable goal. We all want all of our young people, not only to graduate from high school, but to have the opportunity to go to college, and educators should make it a priority to prepare these students to have not only the academic skills, but self-confidence and personal motivation to seek a higher education. So,

yes, a college education is a worthwhile and beneficial endeavor, but it is not always the right path for every high school graduate. Many high school graduates do not feel ready for college, or do not want to embark on another four years of studying right away, or don't think that's what they really want to do, or with the increasing costs of higher education, will need to earn money for college immediately after high school, or may not want to be saddled with payments on a heavy college loan.

Choices for the High School Graduate, Fourth Edition discusses a wide range of options available to students looking for an alternative to college upon high school graduation – travel, overseas, military service, special academic programs, apprenticeships, internships, volunteer work, online and distance learning, deferred admission, part-time work, trades. This is but a partial list of what is available in this excellent resource, which is based extensively on interviews with young people, college administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, parent/caregivers, demographers, and career specialists.

The author has taught in Chicago, Baltimore, and New York City, and is the parent of three high school and college graduates, each of whom chose vastly different career paths. She is also the author of several middle grade and young adult books as well as articles for *The New York Times* and *Seventeen*. In the Introduction to the fully updated and revised Fourth Edition of what was originally titled *Choices: A Student Survival Guide for the 1990s* published in 1989, she speaks particularly to high school juniors and seniors (and their parent/caregivers), stating: "The truth is, there is no one right way to grow up. And there is no way anyone can predict what the future holds for you... You are lucky to be on the cutting edge of the most exciting century ever. But you have to be prepared to try more things and take more risks than others who have come before you."

Beginning with chapters aimed at helping students think about who they are and what they want to do after high school, there is a two-part "Self-Assessment" aimed at both "general academic skills" and "personal and interpersonal attitudes and qualities" with a closing on "analyzing your answers," as well



as a section on resume writing. The book offers help for those planning to go directly to college after high school graduation, including how to read college guidebooks and catalogs and guidelines for college transferring, an increasingly common practice. There are such practical tools as a copy of the actual enlistment/reenlistment form required by the U.S. Armed Forces.

Then, too, there's the chapter entitled: "Am I Having Fun Yet? Nuts and Bolts of Making the Most of Your Time Out," with numerous ideas on "how to rent an apartment and choose housemates," "a word about using credit cards," "putting money aside," "tips on banking," as well as practical suggestions on how to make a budget, including dealing with health insurance, housing, and transportation, etc. But, what makes this a particularly useful guide is that for every chapter, and even every section of a chapter, there are mini-case studies with interviews of students involved.

Choices for the High School Graduate ends with a "Final Note – For Parents Only" and begins by stating: "This is the only section in the book not directed to students. Instead it is an open letter to your parents." The passage ends by saying "I hope this modest book will help your son or daughter make some important decisions about his or her future – and that you will find it within yourselves to support his or her choices." The book does just that; it helps young people looking to learn not only about how to approach college after high school, but what other options there might be and how to access them. A must read for any high school student and his or her parent/caregivers.

Brief Reviews

BY DANIEL ROSEN

Free School Teaching: A Journey into Radical Progressive Education by Kristan Accles Morrison

This book is Kristan Accles Morrison's journey through education. Praised as a star student growing up, Morrison could not envision a more ideal and fulfilling career to go into than education. Yet, once she switched roles from student to teacher, she quickly became frustrated with the traditional education system. It irked her that she could be the "perfect" teacher, one who motivates all students to be interested in all topics at all times. Rather, she began to realize that the traditional education system is nothing more than a game, a game that involves winners and losers. Though she identifies herself more as a winner, she hates the "game" of school, and therefore began to research educational alternatives, and explored motives that truly entice children to learn, rather than play a crap shoot. She became awe-struck by alternatives' ability to educate every child equally and individually. To experience the differences between traditional and alternative schools first-hand, Morrison visited Albany Free School. In the book, she clearly contrasts the two systems of learning and grasps the radical system's effectiveness. You can purchase *Free School Teaching* from the AERO online bookstore.

The Secret Revolution by Dr. Emmanuel Bernstein

We all know that conventional schooling isn't working. Triggering boring and useless information into students' heads is not what creates an intellectual and interesting individual who is excited about learning. Dr. Bernstein recognizes this unfortunate circumstance, and that is why he wrote the book, *The Secret Revolution*. This book clearly exemplifies characteristics that a good teacher attributes, values and styles that a good school should attain, and steps we can take in the future to end conventional schooling and begin educating our children. Furthermore, he zeroes in on failing schools, teachers, and teaching styles. He explains a hypocritical situation: America claims to be a democracy, yet it fosters fascist ideals into its children's heads. *The Secret Revolution* contains true stories of situations in which educational alternatives have encouraged children to strive to their highest possible potential and also stories in which conventional schooling has destroyed students' desire to learn. This book is a must for parents, students, and teachers alike. You can purchase *The Secret Revolution* from the AERO online bookstore.

Shine in Your Own Way: Inspiration for Parents of Failing Kids by Nancy E. Gill

Many parents of "failing" kids know that their children are their own unique spirits and more than the numbers and letter grades of their examinations. Nancy E. Gill has dedicated her life to helping struggling and failing kids and teenagers. Nevertheless, she didn't write *Shine in Your Own Way* for these kids; she wrote it for their parents. In her book, she encourages parents to give their children freedom and a nurturing environment in which their interests and strengths can truly shine through, rather than their failures and weaknesses. Any parent who feels hopeless about their child needs to read *Shine in Your Own Way*. It will reinvigorate you and help you see the spirit in your child. *Shine in Your Own Way* is published by Down-to-Earth Books (P.O. Box 488, Ashfield, MA 01330).

Student Voice in School Reform by Dana L. Mitra

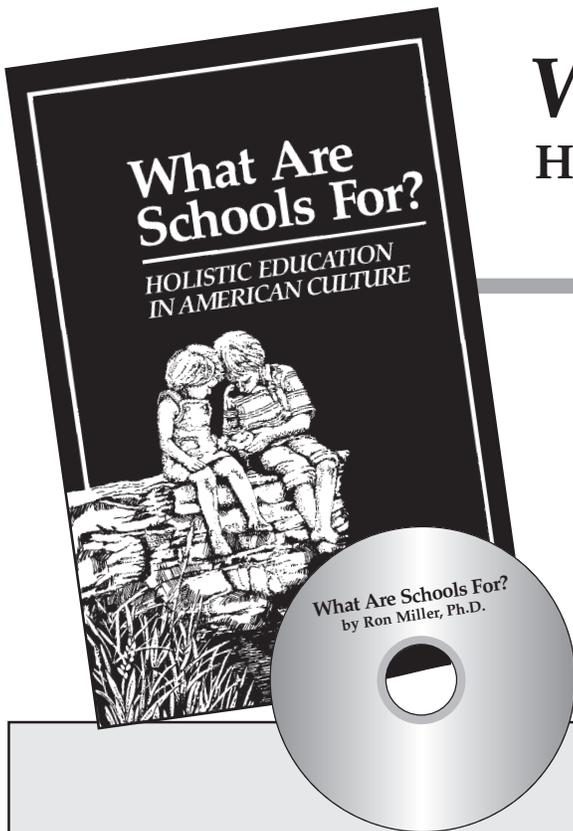
Failing schools often view their students as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. If this philosophy were reversed, the possibilities would be infinite. *Student Voice in School Reform* by Dana L. Mitra is the true story of how the Whitman High School community of the San Francisco Bay area was able to improve its school by getting its students involved in the reform process. It is a remarkable story of how, when students are given the chance, they can make an astronomical difference in their own lives and community. Whitman High School can be used as an example for schools across the country. *Student Voice in School Reform* is an extremely interesting and captivating read. It is published by SUNY Press (www.SUNYpress.edu). ●

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What Are Schools For?

Holistic Education in American Culture

by Ron Miller, Ph.D.



What Are Schools For? is a powerful exposition and critique of the historical context and cultural/philosophical foundations of contemporary mainstream American education. It focuses on the diverse group of person-centered educators of the past two centuries and explores their current relevance to the new challenges facing education in the post-industrial age.

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"I can picture (the third edition of What Are Schools For?) as a fixture in progressive teacher education programs... It will be required reading in many foundations of education classes, an optional text in any educational psychology class in which the instructor seeks a thorough overview of the field, and a well-thumbed text in the professional development programs of TAWL groups."

Patrick Shannon, Pennsylvania State University

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"... the best historical treatment of holistic-humanistic education that I have read."

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"... a deeply thoughtful, beautifully organized and written exposition of holistic education philosophy (that) will surely appeal to all who are concerned with fundamental changes in our schools."

Lois Bridges Bird, Editor, The Whole Language Catalog

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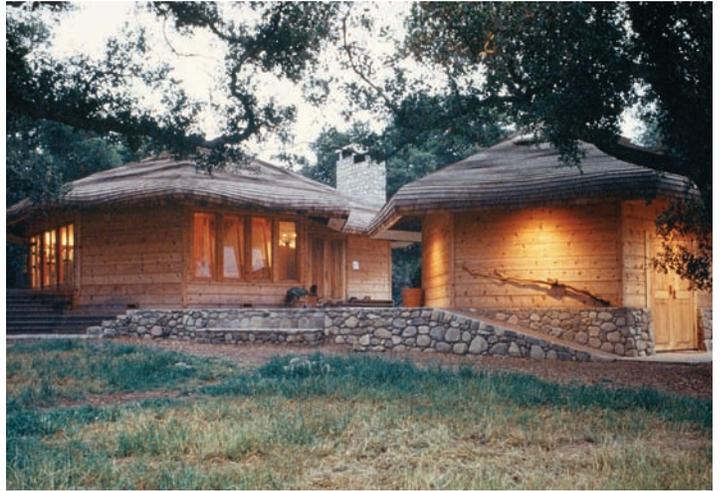
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TOP: Oak Grove School.

LEFT: Photo courtesy of Jennings Community Learning Center, St. Paul, MN.

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