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# Education Revolution

THE MAGAZINE OF EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES



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## Educational Alternatives Around the World



### INSIDE:

Reports from India, Mexico, and Spain

Varieties of Holistic Education • News and Announcements



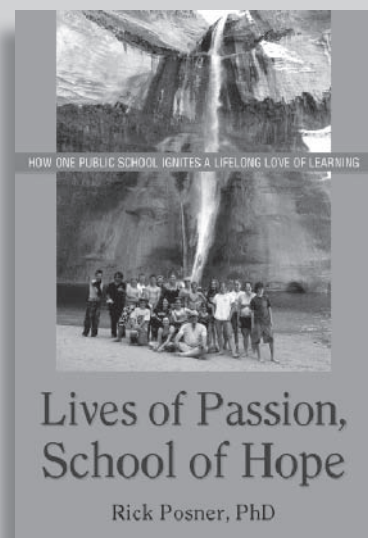
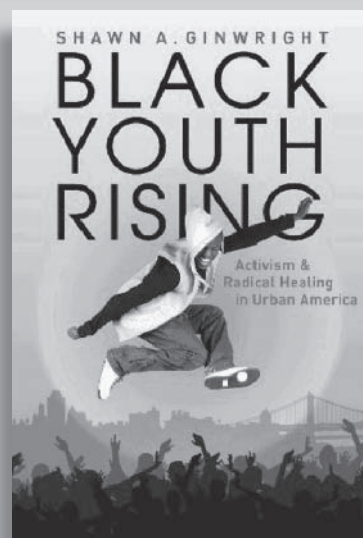
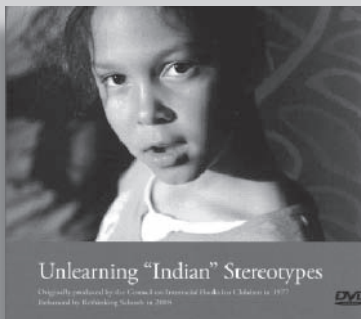
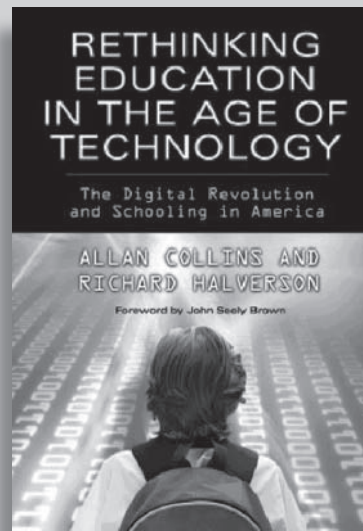
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THE MAGAZINE OF EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES



The **Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO)** was founded in 1989 by Jerry Mintz. AERO is a branch of the School of Living, a non-profit organization founded in 1934 by Ralph Borsodi. **AERO's** goal is to advance student-driven, learner-centered approaches to education. **AERO** is considered by many to be the primary hub of communications and support for educational alternatives around the world. Education Alternatives include, but are not limited to, Montessori, Waldorf (Steiner), Public Choice and At-Risk, Democratic, Homeschool, Open, Charter, Free, Sudbury, Holistic, Virtual, Magnet, Early Childhood, Reggio Emilia, Indigo, Krishnamurti, Quaker, Libertarian, Independent, Progressive, Community, Cooperative, and Unschooling. One of **AERO's** areas of expertise is democratic process and democratic education, but equally important is the networking of all forms of educational alternatives. It is through our work and mission that we hope to create an education revolution.

**AERO's** mission is to help create an education revolution to make student-centered alternatives available to everyone.

Towards this end, **AERO** provides information, resources and guidance to families, schools and organizations regarding their educational choices. **AERO** disseminates information internationally on topics such as: homeschooling, public and private alternative schools, and charter schools. **AERO's** long-term goal is to become a more effective catalyst for educational change by providing books, magazines, conferences, online courses, consultations, support groups, and organizational information and seminars in the field of alternative education.

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**Cover photo:** Young students at the Annai Creche, near Auroville, India. Photo by Jean Eisele.



# Being There

BY JERRY MINTZ



Jerry Mintz teaches ping pong during the Montreal consultation on a makeshift table at Concordia University.

In the last issue of *Education Revolution* (#58) we reported on our first consultation with a group in Montreal that is starting a new alternative. I returned to Montreal to follow up on that first meeting and actually work with some of the students that are now in the program. Kai Higuchi, a 12 year old homeschooled student from Japan, wanted to go with me on the trip. He has been on an extended visit to Brooklyn Free School to learn English, and remembered meeting the children of the two founders of the new alternative in Montreal, Marike Reid-Gaudet and Marilyn Rowe. He also wanted the chance to see Canada before he goes back to Japan.

Despite everything Kai went through to get back into the USA from Japan (see his article on page 17), he still wanted to go on the consultation trip. We were hoping we would not have to turn back at the Canadian border, or have to stay in Canada after heading back! After checking with Japanese, Canadian and American embassies and getting a notarized permission slip from Megumi, Kai's mother (see *ER* #52), we decided to let him go.

After driving nearly 400 miles through northern New York state (among other things I taught Kai some French along the way), we hit the Canadian border. After looking at our papers they did send us inside to immigration, but ten minutes later we were on our way in Canada. We arrived late that night at Marike's house. Kai and Marike's 13 year old son Loic remembered each other from the AERO conference and really enjoyed their time together in Montreal.

The next day we went with Marike's family to Concordia College to meet the parents and children who were interested in or involved with Marike and Marilyn's project. We were concerned that not many would show up, as some had said they were busy that weekend, and others said they were sick. Therefore I wasn't at all clear about what I would be doing with the group. People began to arrive. I had brought some videos with me so we thought we might show the Summerhill Drama in the small classroom. We had a video projector and we set it up to show on a white board. But when I realized how many children there now were, more than a dozen, I decided to first demonstrate organic curriculum with them.

## ORGANIC CURRICULUM

The children ranged in age from about 5 to 13. I told them that we were going to brainstorm any questions that might come to their mind: It could be something they always wanted to know. But nothing would be considered too silly—in fact, silly was good! I gave some examples of questions my niece asked when she did this when she was 11 years old. Everything would be written down, and afterward we would vote on the questions which had the most interest and start with them.

*Here are the questions in the order they were asked:*

*Why does the moon go around the earth?*

*How does light work?*

*Why do lights burn out?*

*Why does hair grow?*

*Why does everything fall down?*

*Where do we go after we die?*

*Why are there a lot of countries?*

*What separated the countries?*

*Why does the sun shine?*

*Did Indians use bows and arrows?*

*Why do pirates steal treasure?*

*Is Venus the coldest planet?*

The first question had the most interest, followed by the hair question.

The discussion of the first question went in some amazing directions. One student talked about how cold it was in the

craters of the moon. This led to a discussion about what was cold, what was heat and what was temperature. This led to discussions about different temperature scales, the movement of atoms and molecules, and absolute zero being the point at which atomic movement stopped. This led to the theoretical question about what could happen if you go below absolute zero: Would there be something like negative or anti movement? We eventually came back to the formation of the moon and the theory that it had been spun off from the Earth after some great collision with an asteroid.

When we discussed the hair question one student pointed out that elephant's tusks, rather than being like teeth, were actually made of the same material that nails and hair were made of. I hadn't known that! We also discussed the question of life after death. One point that was made was, if you did come back, at which age would you be? Also, could there be some general repository of human knowledge and existence that did survive?

People were pretty blown away by this demonstration. Actually, so was I. I never cease to be amazed at what the empowerment of and listening to children leads to.

After this demonstration we showed the DVD of the Summerhill Drama, the BBC produced story of how the English bureaucracy attempted to close the school and how Summerhill fought back, went to court and won! They watched with rapt attention as we showed about half the film. The video is not yet available for sale and has not been otherwise showed in North America. We've been trying to arrange this, but meanwhile only have permission to show it to groups like this.

After the video I got the sense that everyone was interested in having a demonstration of a democratic meeting. When I explained to the students that they could put anything on the agenda they wanted, one of the students, a ten year old, jokingly put "Parents should buy pizza and candy for all the students every day!"

Much to his shock I took him seriously and put it on the agenda. It was the first thing we talked about. The kids were excited about it. But as we talked they realized that we needed to do fundraising and wondered if that was the best way to spend the money raised. In short order the original student modified his proposal to two days a week, then one day a week, and finally once every three weeks.

The issue of what language the school would speak was tentatively decided to be two day in French, two days in English and one day mixed or other languages.

The parents and students seemed quite satisfied with that process.

Later we drove to the Mohawk Indian Reserve on Mercier Island, just over the bridge from Montreal. It was quite a contrast. I hadn't been there for 20 years. In the 1970's I had helped the Mohawks start two schools, at two different reservations, both called the Indian Way, to help save their language and culture. We were to meet at one of the three traditionalist longhouses that are now on the island. That fact alone indicates how fractured politically the tribe is today. Nevertheless the language has been saved and the Indian Way School still exists at Kanawake.

On arrival at the Kanawake Reserve (as they are called in Canada) we went to a dark building with a man sleeping inside. It did not look like a promising evening. But Stuart the elder let us in the longhouse, remembered me and Shaker Mountain School, and within a short time more and more adults and children, Mohawk and free school, began to arrive. Food began to arrive, and in the end there was a big pot luck, a lot of talk around the big table, and lots of play by the kids outside. I met a woman whose children go to a new Mohawk language school right next to Indian Way, and Marike met a Mohawk woman who is homeschooling her children. She will join their group. Because of internal politics, most of the people at this longhouse do not send their kids to the other schools and they are thinking of starting their own school.

The next day we did an open presentation at Concordia. We reported on the previous day, showed some of the Summerhill video and the documentary I made on homeless working children in Delhi, India. We then had an interesting general discussion about alternatives in general and our freeschool project in Montreal.

On the way back they looked at our papers at the border and let us back into the USA! The next day we visited Albany Free School, Harriet Tubman Free School and the AERO office in Albany before making our way back to the NYC metropolitan area. We had driven over 800 miles. ●

“ Last Saturday we were lucky to have Jerry Mintz with us in Montréal. We got together so he could demonstrate organic curriculum and how to do democratic process. We started with organic curriculum. Jerry was the facilitator. The children were invited to ask questions, any questions they had in their minds. Even the more wacky, strange or funny ones were taken seriously, and with consideration. I think this was important because it made the children feel free to ask what they wanted (and not what they thought the adult wanted to hear). The children were thrilled to do this and they asked a lot of very interesting questions. Even the younger ones asked impressive questions. It was breathtaking, those brilliant questions and how they led to deep discussions about history, physics, and spirituality, etc. The satisfaction and pleasure they had was so obvious, it's hard to explain the magic of it. The same thing for the democratic circle about what they would like to suggest for our free school. Of course Jerry with his vast experience, intuition and psychology of children is a kind of master in doing this with the kids, but I think the process itself gave the children in this situation empowerment and I saw them excited and proud of themselves. ”

- MARIKE REID-GAUDET

# Auroville's School Education Program

## A Holistic Approach

BY DR. KALPANA VENGOPAL AND PRIYA KUMARI

The Auroville schools, located near Pondicherry, India, are based on the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Adept Mirra Alfassa, who later became known as The Mother. They provide education of the whole person and for a whole life, guided by the eternal truths of human aspiration for perfection and progress. Education at Auroville represents a shift in the educational paradigm, where curriculum is individualized and learning is linked with life experiences. The approach creates a love for learning and aims at personal growth of the learner.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was educated both in India and England. On his return to India, he was saddened by the British Raj in his motherland. This led him to become a very prominent figure in India's struggle for independence. As a result, he was imprisoned. While in prison he had a divine vision which assured him that India would attain independence and that he could leave the movement to devote himself to the cause of spirituality. He founded an ashram at Pondicherry (a French colony), which later became famous as "Auroville," meaning the international village. He became an important philosopher, yogi, and teacher. He developed Integral Yoga, the yoga of the whole being which forms the basis for Integral Education. For the remainder of his life Sri Aurobindo worked tirelessly for the self transformation of the individual and the world. He was a prolific writer and some of his famous works include *The Essays on the Gita*, *Savitri*, *The Life Divine*, and the *Synthesis of Yoga*.

Mirra Alfassa worked closely with Sri Aurobindo. It was under her initiative that schools were started at Auroville based on the philosophy of Integral Education. She would take care of all residents of the ashram, and was hence called "The Mother" by Sri Aurobindo. She is universally known as The Mother by his followers.

### LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The schools of Auroville are nestled among trees in the midst of nature. The buildings are simple open structures. Most of the time, children work in the shade of the open spaces in groups and move indoors only if required. There is a large pond to one side of the school and on the other are agricultural, horticultural and medicinal farms. There are well ventilated halls for other activities. Solar energy is widely used and electricity is used minimally only in the laboratories. There is

virtually no plastic and most –if not all materials- are made of natural elements. One rarely finds manufactured toys in Auroville classrooms. Students use seashells, rocks, pebbles, tree branches & bark, twigs, pieces of wood, dried flowers and clay, which they bring to life with their imagination. Large open spaces are used for play and games both indigenous and modern sports.

The children, teachers and the head work together – planning, executing and decision making (shared responsibility as they put it). It includes working for school celebrations, field trips, community work and even the menu for the week. The school is maintained (cleaning and beautifying, maintaining records and filing information) by children and teachers. Parents are found to be working here as volunteers or helpers. The school is open to the members of the community who share their experiences and expertise with children. At Auroville, there is a genuine sense of community among students, teachers and parents. The school is seen as a place where students and adults work toward a mutual goal.



A student sitting on a rock in the pond that runs the length of the interior of Udavi Gentillesse School in Auroville. Photo by Jean Eisele.



Lunchtime in the Kindergarten at Aikiyam, Auroville. Photo by Jean Eisele.

The classrooms are small and consist of mixed-ability and mixed-age students in small numbers of fifteen to eighteen. The teachers and volunteers are a part of each group and work with them as members of the group. Children are free to move from one group to another and co-opt into a group.

### LEARNER AND LEARNING

At Auroville, children work on themes (cutting across different disciplines), in groups. For most part of the work session, the teacher observes as the group works and intervenes only occasionally to direct and guide. Much of what is learned is experiential and collaborative. Children freely express, question, agree and dissent. There are no instructions as to what is right, wrong, correct or incorrect. The teacher motivates the group to probe into the effects of decisions and actions, to reflect on their past experiences and connect them to the present and the challenges ahead, and to foresee difficulties. They use different media to express themselves: writing, poetry, songs, skits, painting, models, charts or simple experiments. Some work on their own while others help, but all heads are together to recreate meaning of what is learned. The group then reflects on their experiences in the process of learning. Very often children express their wish that they continue to work in their group as they were having fun and enjoyed the task. The children also maintain a reflective diary in which they write their experiences.

### CURRICULUM

The curriculum is not a rigid one that binds teachers or the system. It emerges as a product of interaction between the learner and the teacher. There are no fixed textbooks or schedules. Teachers make weekly work plans and maintain a work diary. Activities include clay modeling, painting, gardening, cycle riding (to explore the environment and habitat), music, literature, theatre, nature walks, sky watching, silent sitting, sports, yoga, reflective diary writing, field trips, community work and vocational courses in carpentry, horticulture, agriculture, construction and designing, tailoring and herbal medicine. Children are introduced into the world of work at a very early age. They learn to find joy in being creative and productive. The products are put on sale in the Auroville exhibitions and fairs and are greatly sought for by the

*Continued on page 6*

FROM THE

# Editor's Desk

BY RON MILLER

This issue of *Education Revolution* has an international flavor. You'll read about inspiring learning experiments in Mexico and India, a celebration of the Spanish pioneer of democratic education, a report on initiatives in Canada, and the story of a Japanese homeschooler. These narratives not only come from diverse corners of the world, but also reflect the great diversity of educational understandings that we call "alternatives." Add in the other articles, about a holistic school in Washington state and a Waldorf charter school in California, and the range becomes even wider.

As Paul Freedman suggests in his piece, a holistic (or alternative, or democratic) view of teaching and learning emphasizes individuality, intimacy, and spontaneity. There is no all-embracing ideology driving the educational alternatives movement. What we want, essentially, is to disassemble the educational monoculture of modern schooling, to break it up into local, personal, community-rooted endeavors. Learning should start with learners, not with standards or mandates. Education should address the evolving needs of a community's time and place, not the demands of corporate and political elites.

With each new issue of *Education Revolution*, I find new hope in the evidence that thousands of people around the world are taking their education back. If only we could reach millions of parents, and hundreds of thousands of discouraged teachers, and maybe even a few influential scholars and researchers, with the galvanizing stories and crystal-clear manifestos that find their way into this publication. It is just so *obvious* to me, reading these accounts of authentic learning, that a free and diverse network of educational alternatives is far superior to the standardized model of factory schooling. A decentralized learning network would promote a more truly democratic culture, one where citizens actively participate in their common affairs. It would promote a more respectful and sustainable relationship to the natural world—more specifically to bioregions and local places. And it would, quite simply, promote more happiness.

Compare these effects with the "outcomes" touted by policymakers and think tanks, such as higher test scores, better preparation for employment in the corporate economy, and higher national rankings. Isn't it *obvious* what any sane human being would prefer once he or she understands the choice? As the first item in our News Reports section puts it, *dubbb!* ●



A girl doing math with pebbles at Annai Creche, in Pondicherry. This school is run by a former student of Auroville schools. Photo by Jean Eisele.

community and Auroville visitors.

Learning goals are fixed by the child and the teacher. The teacher and the child together evaluate the progress and they maintain a profile and plan the future course of learning. The curriculum allows learners to actively construct their own knowledge. Active engagement involves inquiry, exploration, questioning, debates, application, experimentation and reflection leading to new ideas and new meaning. Collaborative learning provides room for negotiation of meaning, sharing multiple views and multiple perspectives.

Teaching-learning takes place on a theme related basis, which cuts across all subjects, by using the project work approach. The curriculum provides for centering processes like the “self-journey” practiced in the morning for about half an hour. Each child sits quietly by oneself anywhere in the open space of the school, not engaged in any external activity. They enter these experiences in the reflective diary. Children say they experience calm and silence while they dream, listen to the sounds in nature, watch nature closely and feel one with everything around them. Children also participate actively in the development activities in the community like awareness campaigns, trading community goods at the fairs, offering services to the sick & aged, helping during disasters & crises, participating in adult education programs and community meetings.

## TEACHER

The Auroville teacher is seen less as a person of authority who leads and controls but rather as a friend, a mentor, a facilitator or an experienced traveling companion (as expressed by students). They lead a life close to nature, respond to its beauty, strongly believe in the need to be creative, aspire to bring out the best and share this with all. They are always surrounded by children. Children feel free even to dissent with them. The children address them by their names and a suffix brother/ sister “Anna / Akka” and there is no feeling of hierarchy in their relationship.

Teachers join in during group work as one of the group members. They are innovative and creative and encourage children to be so. They find it challenging yet interesting to creatively facilitate each child’s learning. Their relationship with children extends beyond the school – in the bus while travelling, in the market place and in the community they live. They respect the child and accept each one for who he or she is. This they say is possible because they love these children.

## CONCLUSION

The Auroville schools exemplify the vision that Ron Miller has described: “When we look beneath the surface, the everyday practices, of various kinds of alternative schools, we find a common vision of the human being, a sense of awe and reverence for the creative spirit that animates the unfolding of a human personality. When education begins with this reverence, with this respect for the individual personhood of every learner, it cannot be standardized. It cannot be managed in undemocratic, authoritarian ways. It does not become obsessed with measuring ‘outcomes’ or bureaucratically mandating what every child must ‘know and be able to do.’”<sup>1</sup> Auroville’s education program is one such effort to break the constraints on imagination, creativity, and growth and enable young children as well as their teachers to pursue their deepest and highest possibilities.

**Education at Auroville  
represents a shift in the  
educational paradigm, where  
curriculum is individualized  
and learning is linked with  
life experiences.**

## NOTE

1. Ron Miller, *The Renewal of Meaning in Education: Responses to the Cultural and Ecological Crisis of our Times*. Brandon VT: Holistic Education Press, 1993.

**Dr. Kalpana Vengopal** is on the faculty of the Regional Institute of Education, National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in Mysore, India. Her areas of interest include holistic education, education for peace, educational psychology, and early child-care & education. She is currently doing research in the area of holistic education. **Ms. Priya Kumari** is on the faculty at Amrita School of Education in Mysore. Her areas of interest also include holistic education, education for peace, educational psychology, and early child-care & education. She is currently doing research in the area of holistic education and Indian philosophy. ●



# Reclaiming our Freedom to Learn

BY GUSTAVO ESTEVA

Years ago, we started to observe in villages and barrios, particularly among indigenous peoples, a radical reaction against education and schools. A few of them closed their schools and expelled their teachers. Most of them avoided this type of political confrontation and started instead to just bypass the school, while reclaiming and regenerating the conditions in which people traditionally learned in their own ways.

The people in the villages know very well that school prevents their children from learning what they need to know to continue living in their communities, contributing to the common well-being and that of their soils, their places. And school does not prepare them for life or work outside the community. In many communities in Oaxaca and Chiapas, Mexico, parents no longer delegate their children's learning to school.

They know by experience what usually happens to those who abandon their communities to get "higher education." They get lost in the cities, in degraded jobs. A recent official study found that only eight percent of graduates of Mexican universities will be able to work in the field they graduated in. Lawyers or engineers are driving taxis or tending stalls. In spite of such awareness, people still hold the illusion that higher education offers something to their children. They don't feel comfortable depriving their children of such an "opportunity."

## LIFE WITHOUT TEACHERS

We once did a thought experiment in which we took a suggestion of author John McKnight—imagining a world without dentists—and applied it to the teaching profession. For a few minutes many apocalyptic descriptions circulated around our table as we imagined a world without teachers or teaching. But then something radically different started to come into our conversation. We imagined a myriad of ways in which the people themselves would create a different kind of life.

One of the most important conclusions of our conversation was the explicit recognition that we learn better when nobody is teaching us. We can observe this in every baby and in our own experience. Our vital competence comes from learning by doing, without any kind of teaching.

After the exercise, a very practical question came to the table. We have learned, with the Zapatistas, that while changing the world is very difficult, perhaps impossible, it is possible to create a whole new world. That is exactly what the Zapatistas are doing in the south of Mexico. How can we create our own new world, at our own, small, human scale, in our little corner in Oaxaca? How can we deschool our lives

and those of our children in this real world, where the school still dominates minds, hearts and institutions?

The most dramatic lesson we derived from the exercise was to discover what we were really missing in the urban setting: conditions for apprenticeship. When we all request education and institutions where our children and young people can stay and learn, we close our eyes to the tragic social desert in which we live. They have no access to real opportunities to learn in freedom. In many cases, they can no longer learn with parents, uncles, grandparents—just talking to them, listening to their stories or observing them in their daily trade. Everybody is busy, going from one place to another. No one seems to have the patience any more to share with the new generation the wisdom accumulated in a culture. Instead of education, what we really need is conditions for decent living, a community.

Our challenge thus became to find ways to regenerate community in the city, to create a social fabric in which we all, at any age, would be able to learn and in which every kind of apprenticeship might flourish. In doing this radical research, we surprise ourselves, every day, when we discover how easy it can be to create alternatives and how many people are interested in the adventure.

So we created our university, Unitierra. Young men and women without any diploma, and better yet no schooling, can come to us. They learn whatever they want to learn—practical trades, like urban agriculture, video production, or social research, or fields of study, like philosophy or communication. They learn the skills of the trade or field of study as apprentices of someone practicing those activities. They also learn how to learn with modern tools and practices not available in their communities.

As soon as the young people arrive at Unitierra, they start to work as apprentices. They discover that they need specific skills to do what they want to do. Most of the time, they get those skills by practicing the trade, with or without their mentors. They may choose to attend specific workshops, to shorten the time needed to get those skills.

Our "students" have been learning faster than we expected. After a few months they are usually called to return to the living present of their communities to do there what they have learned. They seem to be very useful there. Some of them are combining different lines of learning in a creative way. One of them, for example, combined organic agriculture and soil regeneration (his original interest), with vernacular architecture. He is not offering professional services that allow

him to move towards the middle class standard of living by selling services and commodities. He is learning how to share, like peasants, what it means to be a cherished member of his community and commons, as has been done through time immemorial—before the modern rupture.

## DISCIPLINE AND FREEDOM

In Unitierra we are not producing professionals. We have created a convivial place, where we all are enjoying ourselves while learning together. At the same time, both the “students” and their communities soon discover that a stay at Unitierra is not a vacation. True, the students have no classes or projects. In fact, they don’t have any kind of formal obligation. There are no compulsory activities. But they have discipline, and rigor, and commitment—with their group (other “students”), with us (participating in all kinds of activities for Unitierra), and with their communities.

Our “students” do not belong to communities. They are their communities. Of course, they can enjoy themselves and have very long nights of *pachanga* and many fiestas. But they have a responsibility to their communities, that is, to themselves. And hope. That is why they can have discipline, and rigor, and commitment.

Our “students” have the internal and social structure that is a fundamental condition for real freedom. If you don’t have them, if you are an individual atom within a mass of a collective, you need someone in charge of the organization. The

**The people in the villages know very well that school prevents their children from learning what they need to know to continue living in their communities, contributing to the common well-being and that of their soils, their places.**

workers of a union, the members of a political party or church, the citizens of a country—all of them need organizers and external forces to keep them together. In the name of security and order, they sacrifice freedom. Real people, knots in nets of relationships, can remain together by themselves, in freedom.

“True learning,” Ivan Illich once said, “can only be the leisurely practice of free people.” In the consumer society, he also said, we are either prisoners of addiction or prisoners of envy. Only without addiction or envy, only without educational goals, in freedom, can we enjoy true learning.

In Unitierra we have been fruitfully following a suggestion of Paul Goodman, a friend of, and source of inspiration for, Ivan Illich. Goodman once said: “Suppose you had the revolution you are talking and dreaming about. Suppose your

side won, and you had the kind of society you wanted. How would you live, you personally, in that society? Start living that way now! Whatever you would do then, do it now. When you run up against obstacles, people, or things that won’t let you live that way, then begin to think about how to get over or around or under that obstacle, or how to push it out of the way, and your politics will be concrete and practical.”

We call Unitierra a university to laugh at the official system and to play with its symbols. After one or two years of learning, once their peers think they have enough competence in a specific trade, we give the “students” a magnificent university diploma. We are thus offering them the social recognition denied to them by the educational system. Instead of certifying the number of ass-hours, as conventional diplomas do, we certify a specific competence, immediately appreciated by the communities, and protect our “students” against the usual discrimination. Most of our graduates are surprising us, however, by not asking for any diploma. They don’t feel the need for it.

We are also celebrating our wise and our elders with modern symbols. We thus offer diplomas of Unitierra to people who perhaps never attended a school or our university. Their competence is certified by their peers and the community. The idea, again, is to use in our own way, with much merriment and humor, all the symbols of domination. Or rather, as Illich says, to misuse for our own purposes what the state or the market produces.

Our diplomas have no use for those who wish to show off or to ask for a job or any privilege. They are an expression of people’s autonomy. As a symbol, they represent the commitment of our “students” to their own communities, not a right to demand anything. Nonetheless, 100 percent of our “graduates” are doing productive work in the area they studied.

But playing with the symbols of the system is not only an expression of humor. It is also a kind of protection. What we are doing is highly subversive. In a sense, we are subverting all the institutions of the modern, economic society. In packaging our activities as one of the most respected sacred cows of modernity—education—we protect our freedom from the attacks of the system.

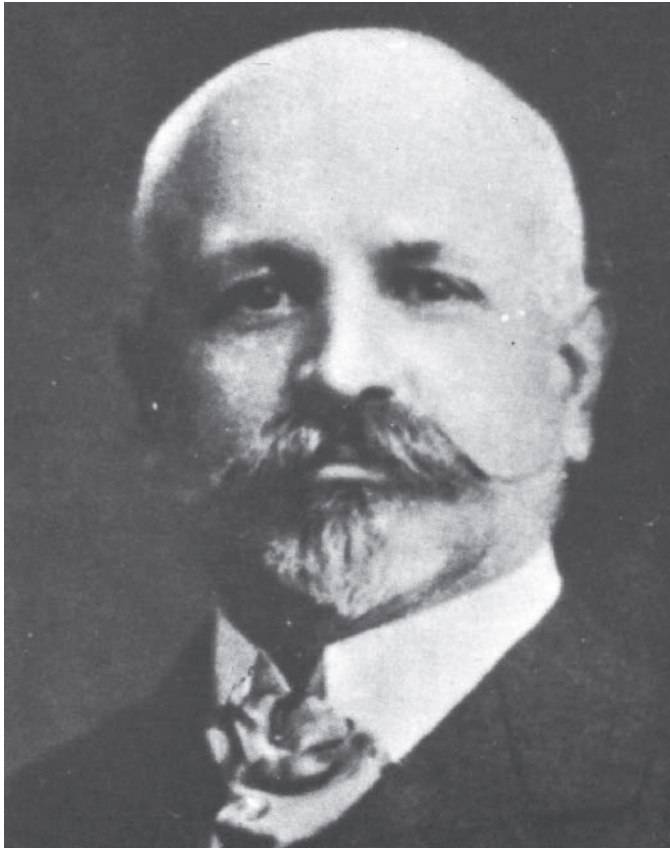
In my place, every I is a we. And thus we live together, in our living present, rooted in our social and cultural soil, nourishing hopes at a time in which all of us, inspired by the Zapatistas, are creating a whole new world.

**Gustavo Esteva** is a grassroots activist and deprofessionalized intellectual. Author of many books and essays, former advisor to the Zapatistas, and member of several independent organizations and networks, Mexican and international, he lives in an indigenous village in Oaxaca, in southern Mexico.

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# The Centenary of the Execution of Francisco Ferrer i Guàrdia

BY JON THOREAU SCOTT



Francisco Ferrer, 1859-1909.

**"A**im well my friends. You are not responsible. I am innocent. Long live the Modern School." That was purported to be what Francisco Ferrer i Guàrdia exclaimed just before he was executed by a firing squad at the Montjuich fortress on a hill overlooking Barcelona, Spain. The date was Oct. 13, 1909. Ferrer, the founder of Modern Schools in Spain at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, had been convicted of organizing the *Setmana Tragica* or "Tragic Week" that rocked Spain earlier that year. He had little or nothing to do with the events that took place and no evidence was allowed on his behalf at his trial. As Anatole France put it, "His crime was organizing schools."

The "Tragic Week" of 1909 was actually a spontaneous uprising of citizens and soldiers who objected to the invasion of Morocco by Spain and to a proposal for a military draft by the King. Anarchists opposed to the war, and to the education system in Spain run by the Catholic Church, burned churches

and convents in Barcelona and so Ferrer, who was also opposed to the church-run schools, was accused of plotting the uprising.

The execution of Francisco Ferrer provoked a worldwide denunciation and response. There soon followed the establishment of Ferrer Modern Schools in many countries with at least twenty in the U.S. The Modern School in Stelton, New Jersey that I attended started in New York City in 1911 and was the longest lasting of those in the U.S. before it closed in 1953.

The Centenary of Ferrer's execution was commemorated on Oct. 13, 2009 by the Francisco Ferrer Foundation (FFF) of Barcelona, Spain, and by the city of Barcelona. I was one of five former pupils of the Stelton Modern School to attend the event, along with Styra Avins, Rina Garst, Steve Shapiro and Bob Vinik. We were invited to attend the Centenary by the FFF on the suggestion of Julius Purcell, a free-lance writer. Julius, his wife Sarah and friend John Barrass guided us through the older parts of the magnificent city of Barcelona and introduced us to many of the important people who were involved in the Centenary.

## THE LIFE OF FRANCISCO FERRER

Francisco Ferrer i Guàrdia was born in 1859 to a devoutly Catholic family on a farm near Barcelona. Influenced by an uncle at the age of twenty the young Francisco worked for the radical Republican, Manuel Ruiz Zorilla. They joined with General Villicampa in a failed uprising to replace the monarchy with a republican form of government in Spain. They both fled to Paris where Ferrer worked as Ruiz's secretary.

In Paris, Ferrer affiliated with a group of anarchist thinkers, including Louise Michel, Sebastian Faure and Paul Robin, who founded schools in the Paris region that were based upon writings of Rousseau and Froebel, and anarchist thinkers such as Tolstoy, Bakunin, Proudhon and Kropotkin. Today these schools might be called "free" or "democratic." Robin, who was the director of an orphanage in Cempius near Paris with some 600 pupils, explained his pedagogy as follows:

Let the child make its own discoveries, await their [sic] questions, treat and answer seriously, with reserve, so that the child's spirit continues its own efforts, so that you do not impose your own ideas upon them [sic], banally transmitting an unthinking and stupid routine.<sup>1</sup>

The schools of Michel, Robin and Faure were closed by the authorities, purportedly because they were all



Jon Scott and Rina Winokour Garst declaring “Visca l’Eskole Moderna” at ceremonies in Barcelona.

coeducational, a practice banned in France at the time. The educational practices of Ferrer were very much like those of the Paris educators, especially that of Robin. Ferrer would later write:

All the value of education rests in the respect for the physical, intellectual, and moral will of the child. Just as in science no demonstration is possible save by facts, just so there is no real education save that which is exempt from all dogmatism, which leaves to the child itself the direction of its effort, and confines itself to the seconding of its effort.<sup>2</sup>

Ferrer was also a teacher of Spanish in Paris. One of his pupils was the wealthy Mlle. Ernestine Meunier, who was impressed with Ferrer’s ideas on education, and left him a sizeable amount of property and money. It was this fortune, well managed by Ferrer, which allowed him to start the first *Escuela Moderna* (*Eskole Moderna* in Catalán) in Barcelona in 1901 and to help found hundreds of schools in Catalonia and other parts of Spain. He used his printing press to provide books and other literature for these schools and *ateneos*. The latter were centers formed by the unions for adult education, but were also places for children to meet and play; there were

libraries for the youngsters. Although the original school in Barcelona was closed by the authorities in 1906, many of the hundreds of schools remained in operation until the late 1930s when Francisco Franco became the dictator in Spain following the bloody Civil War. In the 1930s they were called “Nature Schools.”

### REMEMBERING FERRER

The day before the Centenary we visited the Montjuich fortress that is now a museum owned by the City of Barcelona. There are plans to extend it into a peace museum. On Oct. 13 the Centenary celebration was held at a monument dedicated to Ferrer that was erected in 1990. Joan-Francesc Pont, current President of FFF, was the Master of Ceremonies and invited us to be among a large number of speakers. That evening we were guests of honor at the marvelous *Salo de Cent* (City Centre), built in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, where Barcelona Mayor Jordi Hereu read an act commemorating Oct. 13 in memory of Ferrer’s unjust execution. Former Director of the FFF, Gemma Martin, Mistress of Ceremonies, introduced several important speakers.

One of the speakers was Pasqual Maragall i Mara, Mayor of Barcelona from 1982 to 1997 and later President of the Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalonia) from 2003 to 2006. He spoke to the large gathering in English in honor of those of us who did not understand Catalán. Maragall comes from a well-known family in Catalonia and was largely responsible for getting the Olympics to Barcelona in 1992 and for the placement of the Ferrer Memorial near the Olympic site in 1990.

On Oct. 14<sup>th</sup> we were given a tour of the offices and archives of the FFF by Director David Prujá i Cárceles. President Joan-Francesc Pont conducted video-interviews of us for the FFF archives.

The next day we visited the *Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat*, a teacher education group that provides instruction in evening classes for teachers. *Rosa Sensat*, essentially a teacher's college, started as a clandestine group in 1914 when Spain was a monarchy. Rosa Sensat was one of the original organizers and died in 1962. The group was reorganized in 1965, also as a clandestine group, by Angeleta Ferrer Sensat, daughter of Rosa, when the dictator Franco (who died in 1975) still ruled the country. In their literature they state:

The main aims of Rosa Sensat include: to widespread [sic] theories and pedagogical practices which enhance the global development of children and are based on the respect for the child's personality and freedom, and which promote their active participation - and that of their families - in their own learning; to aid the on-going training of teachers, grounded on experimentation as well as on theory, always through joint and individual reflection and debate; to pursue a public and democratic school with all its members, teachers, families and pupils actively engaged on its running and pedagogical line, a school which is deeply inbred in its own roots and country.<sup>3</sup>

This sounds a lot like Ferrer! Because the FFF and *Rosa Sensat* both seem to have an interest in promoting child-centered education, I am sending subscriptions of *Education Revolution* to them in the hope that it will lead to discussions



Mayor Jordi Hereu of Barcelona speaking at the City Center building, opening the ceremonies commemorating the death of Ferrer. Former Mayor Pasqual Maragall is in the white suit.

of forming schools that will be organized with the principles of freedom in education in mind like the schools promoted by Ferrer i Guardia. We do not know why there were no free schools in Spain patterned after Ferrer's Modern Schools following the death of Franco in 1975, but we will be asking Jerry Mintz to help us find out. Can there be another *Eskole Moderna* in Barcelona?

I will also discuss the Centenary in a presentation at the upcoming AERO conference and will report on any progress to organize schools like the Modern Schools in the Barcelona area.

**The execution of Francisco Ferrer provoked a worldwide denunciation and response. There soon followed the establishment of Ferrer Modern Schools in many countries with at least twenty in the U.S.**

#### NOTES

1. "The Anarchist Encyclopedia: A Gallery of Saints and Sinners" [www.recollectionsbooks.com](http://www.recollectionsbooks.com)
2. In Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*. Mother Earth Publishing Assn, 1911.
3. From [www.decet.eu/partner/rosasensat.html](http://www.decet.eu/partner/rosasensat.html)

**Jon Thoreau Scott** attended the Ferrer Modern School in Stelton, NJ from 1934 to 1946 (age two to fourteen). The family moved to an organic farm in Columbia County, NY and Jon attended high school there. He later obtained a B.S. in Biochemistry from Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. After three years in the USAF, travel, and two jobs he completed a Ph.D. in Meteorology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1963. He taught and did research for thirty five years at the University at Albany in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences and retired in 1996. He is the Secretary/Treasurer of the Friends of the Modern School [www.friendsofthemodernschool.org](http://www.friendsofthemodernschool.org). Jon lives on a mini-farm in Altamont, NY in a passive solar home. ●

# Education Should be a *JOURNEY*, not a Race

## A Waldorf-inspired Charter School

BY MEGHAN MULQUEEN

Journey School is a K-8 Public Charter School in Aliso Viejo, California utilizing Waldorf teaching methods. The idea for the school began with a small group of parents and students who shared a vision that education should be a *journey* and not a race. Together they founded the first public charter school in their school district. On September 13, 2000, Journey School opened its doors.

The mission of Journey School, as stated on their website, is to educate K-8 students in southern California by offering Steiner (Waldorf) based educational methods in a public school setting. Journey School is dedicated to the optimal

computers, videos, media screens in the classroom; everything is presented from the live person. It is very play based; it is a natural product. For example, in the kindergarten you would see wood cut, silk, cotton. The dolls are without faces so that the child can thus form their own internal pictures to create the external story. There is not an early thrust into intellectualism but there is the focus on the worthy model, the model being the teacher and on cultivating the imagination.”

When asked why she chose a Waldorf-inspired education for her children, Journey School parent Patty Wallace said, “I wanted an education that honored the individual rather than the masses. I wanted something different than the current ‘one size fits all’ system. I like the fact that the Waldorf approach is developmental, age appropriate, spiritual, inspiring and creative. I appreciate the attempt to teach the whole child: head, hands and heart.”

At Journey School, the intention of the teachers to educate the hands, head and heart plays an important role in the formation of the teacher-child relationship. Shaheer Faltas, the Administrator of Journey School, supports this concept in saying that “We believe that teachers are leaders and we believe that students follow adults who are worthy of imitation.” Hellene, who has been a Waldorf teacher for numerous years, says “What stands out most about the Waldorf-inspired approach is the respect and support of the individual’s childhood. The work of the teacher does not stop when you reach the classroom. It is more than curricular preparation; there is inner work that happens on the part of the teacher as to support the child’s growth emotionally, mentally, and intellectually. The goal of the teacher is to remove hindrances that get in the way of a child’s growth in all capacities.”

**Waldorf methods, in sharp contrast to traditional public education, encourage a learning pace dictated by the students themselves and an integration of the arts into lessons.**

development of the intellect, social-emotional well being, and physical capacities of each student, by presenting core academic subjects artistically. Waldorf methods, in sharp contrast to traditional public education, encourage a learning pace dictated by the students themselves and an integration of the arts into lessons.

In her article “Waldorf-Inspired Public Schools are on the Rise” on the website [www.edutopia.org](http://www.edutopia.org), Malaika Costello-Dougherty observes that although traditional Waldorf schools are private, the number of public schools inspired by Rudolf Steiner’s methods are growing. The schools are fueled in part by the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and the charter school movement. In the United States, there are about 44 Waldorf-inspired public schools, most of them K-8 charter schools located in the West.

Hellene Blake, a kindergarten teacher at Journey School, believes that “Waldorf-inspired education attracts the parent that is looking to protect the inner life of the child and the true childhood, which we are constantly in battle with in our highly media-based technological world. There are no

### THE RHYTHM OF A WALDORF SCHOOL DAY

A typical day at Journey School includes the facilitation of connections across disciplines that encourage and challenge children to learn from a variety of subjects and approaches. Here is how Richard Martin, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Journey School, describes his typical day:

The two hour morning, or “main lesson” period, begins with a verse, followed by physical movement such as recitation and/or music to promote coordination as well as sensory integration, and to wake the children up. This is usually followed by a short period of math and/or grammar practice. The rest of main lesson is devoted to

intensive study of the current academic unit or “block.” The year is divided into three and four week “blocks,” each dedicated to a particular academic subject, which becomes the focus of all main lessons for that period. The rest of the day is divided into four 50-minute periods. Some are devoted to academic skills practice, others to “specialty” lessons such as a foreign language, handwork, games (PE), or instrumental music.

Examples of specialty lessons could include a variety of music, movement, and knitting or other craft activities, which facilitate neurological connections in the mind and actually facilitate literacy. Strings, art, painting, language, handwork, woodwork are all highly complicated and fun games which encourage children to healthily interact.

Shaheer Faltas commented that “it is our job as adults to teach children how to take care of their bodies in every way. Cutting out sugar, eating organic vegetables, playing instead of watching TV, reading, writing, talking instead of texting. We attempt to introduce technology at an age appropriate time during the middle school years. This occurs in the early years so that children learn how to relate to each other. Then, in the later years they are able to use technologies in ways that benefit themselves and the world.” He said that “children need rhythms because life in 2009 is fast paced. What children need are adults in their lives who establish a living container which communicates to them: It is going to be ok, you are safe.”



A seventh grade student at Journey School, performing in the class play-- “Robinhood: The Courtship of Allan A’dale.” Photo by Hellene Brodsky Blake.

Faltas said that the tradition and rituals that make up rhythms allow children to predict what is going to take place so that they are not surprised by their teachers’ expectations. Furthermore, Faltas feels that the reason why children across America resist learning is because the stability and structure that children need in order to thrive is absent. “There is a

**“I wanted an education  
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says one parent.**

myth,” he claims, “that children in Waldorf schools are not intellectually and academically prepared. Children who have participated and remain in a Waldorf school that is healthy and thriving outperform peers in other systems academically and ethically. Tests have shown that their decision-making capabilities, their creative problem-solving capacities, their ability to connect cross culturally as well as their ability to interact with others is extremely high.”

Graduates of Waldorf schools, according to Faltas, “have awe and reference for the world around them and for people. They dance through life. They are interesting people. They are humble in understanding and recognizing that we are part of a much larger world in which they chose to be cognizant of the beauty found in all of Creation. They bestow dignity upon other people and things and feel that dignity being returned back to them. We are not an anything goes lax approach. We really challenge the children in every facet of life. It is a rigorous education.”

For more information on the Waldorf approach or Waldorf-inspired charter schools, please visit [www.allianceforpublicwaldorfeducation.org](http://www.allianceforpublicwaldorfeducation.org), [www.steinercollege.edu](http://www.steinercollege.edu), or feel free to contact via email Shaheer Faltas at [Administrator@journeyschool.net](mailto:Administrator@journeyschool.net).

**Meghan Mulqueen M.A.** has a Master’s in Spiritual Psychology, a B.A. in Environmental Policy and is currently studying to obtain her Master Teaching Credential to become a Preschool teacher from the state of California. In her spare time she likes to read, hike, dance, do yoga, and paint. ●

# Permaculture and Holistic Education

A Match Made in Heaven... and Earth

BY PAUL FREEDMAN

After some years of study and practice in the field of holistic education, with much time spent digging deep into philosophical and theoretical foundations of this field, after helping to found a small elementary school, based on these principles, and now serving for the past eight years as this school's Program Director, I feel my roots are firmly enough established that I am able to begin to raise my head and look up and out. In so doing, I notice the resonance and commonalities between the microcosm of holistic education and the macrocosm of what seems to be a much wider global shift towards holism. In particular, recently I have felt drawn towards the holistic design principles and practices of permaculture. In my initial delving into this beautiful agricultural philosophy I everywhere see similarities and analogues to holistic pedagogy.

Fifteen years ago, as a progressive mainstream educator, I intuitively wished to bring kids into the "real world" and beyond the classroom's four walls. At that time my impulse to include environmental education in my classroom practice drew me to lead my students on nature walks, building projects, or field-based craft work or science studies beyond the classroom's four walls. Eventually I found my way to the Center for Ecoliteracy, and the wonderful work of David Orr, Fritjof Capra, Zenobia Barlow and others ([www.ecoliteracy.org/](http://www.ecoliteracy.org/)). It made so much sense to follow this lead and begin to grow food with kids and in so doing integrate so much math, scientific observation, and practical work in the hands-on care of living organisms, to feed ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

As part of my work in the field of eco-literacy I became familiar with the concept of place-based education, and the work of David Sobel and others.<sup>2</sup> Place-based education called my attention to the need to design curriculum specifically attuned to the particularities of specific children in a specific place and time. This provided a stark contrast to the national standards movement. It also tied together a strong environmental ethic with an eye towards developing a sense and practice of local social and eco-justice within the educational project. Students in my classes adopted local beaches, intertidal communities or small pieces of land, to study and care for.

Currently, I see all of these ways of engaging students with the larger biotic community embodied in the field of permaculture. Permaculture, initially springing from the work

of Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970's, is the study and practice of design principles that apply a holistic and integrated perspective based on natural ecology to human settlements and perennial agriculture.

Permaculture has two levels of relevance to the holistic educator. The first level, on which I will focus in this essay, is to notice the common principles, values, and analogous practices of the two fields, permaculture and holistic education. Each field is strengthened by the recognition and validation achieved through the articulation and naming of shared cross-discipline understandings. The second level is visioning and then realizing the possibility for integrating permaculture practices within the holistic school.

## PERMACULTURE'S GUIDING VALUES

In delving into a study of permaculture, one first is struck with the clear articulation of values. Much like holistic education, this approach to design and growing food is far from a value-neutral endeavor. Specifically, permaculture often espouses the values or ethics of "Earth care," "people care," and "fair share."<sup>3</sup> Essentially permaculture is infused with an ethic of care, and one that recognizes the interrelatedness of living systems and whole systems within other whole systems. Therefore we cannot reflect on the productiveness of our garden, without taking into account the entire homestead and all life – plant, animal and human--



Children, chickens and scarecrows at Salmonberry School. Photos by Paul Freedman.



that lives within or around it. We must then recognize how the homestead impacts and is impacted by the larger social community, the watershed, and so on. Things do not exist in isolation. If we fail to recognize this series of interrelationships we have a distorted view of health and wellness. The lens through which we must always look is one of care.

Both this concept of wholes within wholes, as well as the ethic of care that binds together any healthy system, will sound familiar to many holistic educators. The latter has been described in different ways, by various authors in this field, but perhaps none have expressed it more clearly than Nel Noddings. In *The Challenge To Care In Schools*, Noddings articulates a beautiful alternate vision of education,

**Place-based education called my attention to the need to design curriculum specifically attuned to the particularities of specific children in a specific place and time. This provided a stark contrast to the national standards movement.**

where traditional disciplines of study are dissolved and are supplanted by a conceptualization of spheres of care.<sup>4</sup> Noddings describes how schools might be places where children's natural inclination to care for others is nurtured. Within the school they learn to care for themselves, loved ones, other distant people, animal and plant life, even inanimate objects, and most radically within schools, they may develop a caring ethic towards ideas, and their own pursuit of learning. With all the dialogue in recent years focused on standards, global competition, achievement, assessment, percentile ranks, and so on, it is anathema, or worse irrelevant, to consider the possibility that students might actually care deeply for their work and learning. What a dramatic shift it is to envision the educational mission as one of drawing out humans' capacity to care.

Permaculture is largely a theory and practice of design. And the specific design principles which seem to have relevance to holistic education include the prescription to observe and then interact, to notice the relationship between individual and community, to stay small and slow, and to integrate rather than segregate.

The mandate to take time to observe before attempting to modify through intervention is critical to any nurturing task. In permaculture, this principle is directed toward individual growing practices within specific locations. The focus is on this particular place. The salient question is, what is working right here and now? What are the soil conditions, clay-to-sand composition, acidity in the soil, orientation of

the land slope in regards to the arc of the sun? This process of local observation takes time. Any attempt at remedy requires responsiveness and creativity, as permaculturists apply broad principles to specific local needs. The focus is on the microcosm.

The holistic educator similarly recoils from the concept of a movement towards national standards. She reviles the idea that detached policy-makers and bureaucrats are codifying age-tied learning goals for all children. The appropriate goal for *this* child can only be ascertained by talking with her, by watching her at work and at play, by taking into account her natural gifts, her preferred learning modalities, her interests and passions and even her family life, her community and her natural environment. One group of holistic educators who take seriously the mandate to observe the child are those inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. These teachers spend much of their time in observation. They take copious notes documenting how each child is uniquely developing and expressing his "hundred languages."<sup>5</sup> It is only after serious effort is made to see through a child's eyes that the teacher can hope to make appropriate intervention and teach a meaningful lesson.

In permaculture design practices, the grower's practice shifts dramatically away from the dominant contemporary agricultural practice of monoculture, towards a recognition of the interrelated nature of living communities. Where monoculture is an unsustainable practice that seems efficient at first blush, it quickly requires the increasing reliance on machinery, pesticides, fertilizers and fossil fuels that tend to deplete the life-giving nutrients in the soil and steadily decrease productivity. The permaculturist designs growing systems and speaks of "guilds," which are thoughtful clusterings of different biotic organisms that provide one another with needed elements and nutrients. Three or more plants are grown together providing for each others' needs.

## INTIMATE COMMUNITIES

Similarly, holistic education shifts away from the rugged individualism and zero-sum competition embodied in mainstream contemporary education, in favor of a model that elevates the importance of community. Parker Palmer's model of a "Community of Truth" is an excellent example of this vision.<sup>6</sup> The needs and learning of the individual are carefully balanced against, and strengthened through, pursuing the growth and learning of the community. It is through the focus on neither the individual learner, nor the authoritarian teacher, but through the shared inquiry around the living subject that transformational learning may emerge. In holistic learning communities, learners grow through the sharing and airing of their ideas within a caring community. They listen to and take in deeply the perspectives offered by peers. It is a symbiotic relationship where the individual's identity and integrity are not surrendered but are rather deeply respected and nurtured by the support of the community.

Permaculture design reminds us to stay small and slow. While modern society is predicated on the belief that the only healthy economy is one that grows, the more and the faster

the better, permaculture takes its cues from wild, natural living systems and elevates the importance of sustainability. The goals are not bigger, faster, more but rather healthy and vital and sustainable. Therefore the design principles suggest that whenever possible we keep things small and slow.

Holistic learning communities similarly are intimate places. They are designed on a human scale. They are not warehouses for youth, designed to hold, mold and transport widgets. They are home-like environments. They are built upon familial individual relationships. It is critical to the nurturing of children's unfolding that they are engaged in such intimate and personally relevant and responsive environments. Children are born into families and thrive in such family-like settings, where time is taken to recognize and validate their voices, their curiosities, their fears, and their passions. In our crazed drive to "race to the top" we have forgotten the mandate to hold children, to look in their eyes, and to preserve their learning environment as human and humane.

Finally, permaculture design strives to integrate rather than segregate. Therefore, on a permaculture farm, you are unlikely to see a field of strawberries, a large herd of cattle, or an isolated orchard of nut trees. Rather small garden beds are nestled in and among larger shrubs and a scattering of fruit trees. A pair of ducks may be seen wandering through a small pumpkin patch, feeding on slugs. Silk worms may be living in a mulberry tree that is surrounded by a small planting of comfrey. Mushrooms are being cultivated on the edge of a wetland where cattails are being harvested. Individual plants and animals work together in small-scale integrated systems that mimic natural ecology.

A holistic approach to education seeks to retain the wholeness of both learners and learning experiences. Edward T. Clark Jr. has written extensively on the concept of "Integrated Curriculum Design."<sup>7</sup> By this concept, learners and teachers are expected to bring all aspects of themselves, head, heart, hands and spirit to each encounter. And these live encounters will necessarily cross the lines of traditional disciplines. Transdisciplinary studies will focus on concepts of meaning and importance to all who are involved. Knowledge itself is seen as relational in nature when viewed through a holistic lens. The modernist insistence on objectification of one's learning, asserting that any subjectivity is necessarily corrupting of pure, rational, scientific inquiry, is replaced by a relational epistemology, where knowing necessarily admits to and embraces one's subjectivity, a deep connection to, and reciprocity with the living subject.

The ideas I present here just scratch the surface of the values and principles of both permaculture and holistic education. But as I delve deeper into this study, I find more and more similarities and analogies. Most exciting to me has been my school's foray into practicing some small elements of permaculture at the school site. We have connected with a local permaculture homestead and are soliciting the advice and wisdom of the growers and designers there to help us observe and assess our school site. We are beginning to use permaculture principles to redesign our school garden. We

are looking for ways to re-envision both outdoor grounds and indoor spaces to better align with some of the concepts articulated above. It is exciting and invigorating work that feels right. I see strong connections between holistic education and permaculture. Perhaps it is time for holistic educators to explore further afield and connect with other holistic movements, as we seek to realize this "self-organizing revolution."<sup>8</sup>

## NOTES

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**Paul Freedman** is the Founding Head, and an elementary classroom teacher, at The Salmonberry School on Orcas Island, WA (<http://salmonberryschool.org>.) His current work in applying permaculture principles to holistic education has been in conjunction with Douglas and Maria Bullock at The Bullock Permaculture Homestead (<http://www.permacultureportal.com/>). Both Salmonberry School and the Bullock homestead offer permaculture-based summer programs for students. The Bullocks also offer design courses and internships for adults at their farm. ●

# A Homeschooler's Adventure

BY KAI HIGUCHI

**M**y name is Kai. I am 12 years old. I'm from Tokyo, Japan. I am homeschooling. I have been homeschooling for three years because the Japanese schools are no good. I had such bad experiences in school that I couldn't go any more. The school tried to make me go. They talked to my mother and asked her "Why did you take him out of school?" There are many other children in Japan who don't go to school because the schools are so bad. It's hard to do homeschooling in Japan because the government can't understand the idea of homeschooling.

My mother searched for free schools in Japan. She found one in Tokyo that I tried. But it wasn't really a free school. It was not democratic but it was supposed to be. So she looked on the Internet and found the AERO homepage. Then she wrote to Jerry Mintz to see if there was a free school or democratic school near New York that I could visit.

About two years ago I went to New York with my mother to meet Jerry and visit Brooklyn Free School. I liked it when we visited. Then I visited again the next year and spent a week at Teddy McArdle Free School in New Jersey. I also saw the Albany Free School. At that time all I could say was "I don't speak English." My mother wanted me to come again last year for a longer time so I could learn to speak English. So last year I came to New York by myself two times and had long visits to Brooklyn Free School. I wanted to come back and visit again this year.

On October 7, I got on a plane in Japan to New York. It is about 13 hours. I didn't get sleep. When I got off in New York, Jerry was waiting for me. But they stopped me at customs because they thought I didn't have the right visa. This was because I said "I'm going to school at Brooklyn Free School." They didn't understand that I was a homeschooler and was just going to visit. They brought me to a room to ask me a lot of questions. I didn't understand a lot of them. Six or seven people asked me questions. I was scared and worried.

Jerry was outside in the terminal waiting for me. Nobody told him what was going on. Finally he asked someone where I was. They said they wouldn't let me come out. Three people finally told him. Jerry told them about my homeschooling but they didn't understand it. They kept on asking me questions for about five more hours. They called my mother but couldn't understand what she said. They told her she had to come to New York to get me and bring me back to Japan. They wouldn't let me hear the conversation with her.

My mother called Jerry and gave him the office numbers to call and told him what they told her. Jerry kept on trying to get me out. He called Alan at Brooklyn Free School and had him call the immigration office. He even called the newspaper and got them to call the office.

After midnight they told me I had to sleep in the airport. They told Jerry to go home after 7 hours. Jerry went home and sent a fax to his senator. They let me talk to Jerry on the phone before he left. After that I felt very alone. I cried for about ten minutes. I thought they were going to send me back to Japan

They took me to Terminal 4 and put me in a room with a crazy 12 year old Spanish boy and his mother. They didn't have a home. His mother spoke English a little bit. She said her son had mental problems. I couldn't get to sleep even though it was more than 20 hours after I left Japan.

The Japanese office called my mother and told my mother it was her fault and she had to come get me right away or they put me in foster care and maybe send me to Chicago. This scared my mother. She bought a ticket to come to New York right away for \$3000. My mother doesn't have much money. I don't know how she got the money. She called Jerry and told them what they said.

At 7 in the morning Jerry called the immigration office at terminal 4. Jerry said they didn't seem to know what was going on, so Jerry told the immigration man. He came to talk to me. He asked if I spoke English. He asked me my name, how old I was, and why I came to New York. I understood that I had to say I was visiting, not going to Brooklyn Free School. He asked me what I did at Brooklyn Free School. I told him I was learning English and playing tag and fighting with Wayne but he's my friend. I think that's it. He seemed like a nice guy.

Later he called Jerry back and asked him if he could come to Terminal 4. He said he had looked at everything and decided to let me come into this country. He also asked Jerry to call my mother and let her know. Jerry called her by Skype and she was so surprised he had to say it again and then she was crying.

Then Jerry went to the airport. The man brought Jerry back to the room where I was. Then he brought us outside to the terminal. I wanted to get out of there. I was happy. ●



# News Reports

COMPILED BY CAROL MORLEY AND RON MILLER

## National

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### From **Why Don't Students Like School? Well, Duhhh; Children Don't Like School Because They Love Freedom,**

by Peter Gray, *Psychology Today*: In a new book, *Why Don't Students Like School?*, cognitive scientist Daniel T. Willingham argues that students don't like school because their teachers don't have a full understanding of certain cognitive principles and therefore don't teach as well as they could. They don't present material in ways that appeal best to students' minds. Presumably, if teachers followed Willingham's advice and used the latest information cognitive science has to offer about how the mind works, students would love school. Talk about avoiding the elephant in the room! Ask any schoolchild why they don't like school and they'll tell you: "School is prison." They may not use those words, because they're too polite, or maybe they've already been brainwashed to believe that school is for their own good and therefore it can't be prison. But decipher their words and the translation generally is, "School is prison." Willingham surely knows that school is prison. He can't help but know it; everyone knows it. But here he writes a whole book entitled "Why Don't Students Like School," and not once does he suggest that just possibly they don't like school because they like freedom, and in school they are not free.

Everyone who has ever been to school knows that school is prison, but almost nobody says it. It's not polite to say it. We all tiptoe around this truth, that school is prison, because telling the truth makes us all seem so mean. How could all these nice people be sending their children to prison for a good share of the first 18 years of their lives? How could our democratic government, which is founded on principles of freedom and self-determination, make laws requiring children and adolescents to spend a good portion of their days in prison? It's unthinkable, and so we try hard to avoid thinking it. Or, if we think it, we at least don't say it. At some level of their consciousness, everyone who has ever been to school knows that it is prison. How could they not know? But people rationalize it by saying (not usually in these words) that children need this particular kind of prison and may even like it if the prison is run well. If children don't like school, according to this rationalization, it's not because school is prison, but is because the wardens are not kind enough, or amusing enough, or smart enough to keep the children's minds occupied appropriately.

But anyone who knows anything about children and who allows himself or herself to think honestly should be able

to see through this rationalization. Children, like all human beings, crave freedom. They hate to have their freedom restricted. To a large extent they use their freedom precisely to educate themselves. They are biologically prepared to do that. Children explore and play, freely, in ways designed to learn about the physical and social world in which they are developing. In school they are told they must stop following their interests and, instead, do just what the teacher is telling them they must do. That is why they don't like school.

Children who are provided the tools for learning, including access to a wide range of other people from whom to learn, learn what they need to know--and much more--through their own self-directed play and exploration. There is no evidence at all that children who are sent to prison come out better than those who are provided the tools and allowed to use them freely. How, then, can we continue to rationalize sending children to prison? I think the educational establishment deliberately avoids looking honestly at the experiences of unschoolers and Sudbury Valley because they are afraid of what they will find. If school as prison isn't necessary, then what becomes of this whole huge enterprise, which employs so many and is so fully embedded in the culture?

From **Obama Wants More School, Shorter Break,** by Libby Quaid, *AP*: Students beware: The summer vacation you just enjoyed could be sharply curtailed if President Barack Obama gets his way. Obama says American kids spend too little time in school, putting them at a disadvantage with other students around the globe. Obama says kids in the United States need more school because kids in other nations have more school. While it is true that kids in many other countries have more school days, it's not true they all spend more time in school. Regardless, there is a strong case for adding time to the school day. Researcher Tom Loveless of the Brookings Institution looked at math scores in countries that added math instruction time. Scores rose significantly, especially in countries that added minutes to the day, rather than days to the year. In the U.S., there are many examples of gains when time is added to the school day. Charter schools are known for having longer school days or weeks or years. For example, kids in the KIPP network of 82 charter schools across the country go to school from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., more than three hours longer than the typical day. They go to school every other Saturday and for three weeks in the

# National

summer. KIPP eighth-grade classes exceed their school district averages on state tests. In Massachusetts' expanded learning time initiative, early results indicate that kids in some schools do better on state tests than do kids at regular public schools. Regular public schools are adding time, too, though it is optional and not usually part of the regular school day. Several schools are going year-round by shortening summer vacation and lengthening other breaks.

**Over-Punishment in Schools**, *NY Times*: New York City joined a national trend in 1998 when it put the police in charge of school security. The consensus is that public schools are now safe. But juvenile justice advocates across the country are rightly worried about policies under which children are sometimes arrested and criminalized for behavior that once was dealt with by principals or guidance counselors working with a student's parents. Children who are singled out for arrest and suspension are at greater risk of dropping out and becoming permanently entangled with the criminal justice system. It is especially troubling that these children tend to be disproportionately black and Hispanic, and often have emotional problems or learning disabilities. School officials in several cities have identified overpolicing as a problem in itself. The New York City Council has taken a first cut at the problem by drafting a bill, the Student Safety Act, that would bring badly needed accountability and transparency to the issue. The draft bill would require police and education officials to file regular reports that would show how suspensions and other sanctions affect minority children, children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Detailed reports from the Police Department would show which students were arrested or issued summonses and why, so that lawmakers could get a sense of where overpolicing might be a problem. Most important, the bill would create an easily navigable system under which parents, students and teachers could file complaints against school security officers. This provision comes in response to a 2007 report by the New York Civil Liberties Union, which said students were being roughed up for minor infractions like talking back or walking the halls without a pass. The Police Department and the Department of Education are sometimes stingy with data. But the City Council is on the right track when it says that the disciplinary system could benefit from greater transparency. Lawmakers who are negotiating with the city over the language of the bill should keep this basic point in mind.

**From No Child Left Behind; New Evidence that Charter Schools Help Even Kids in Other Schools**, *wsj.com*:

Opponents of school choice are running out of excuses as evidence continues to roll in about the positive impact of charter schools. Stanford economist Caroline Hoxby recently found that poor urban children who attend a charter school from kindergarten through 8th grade can close the learning

gap with affluent suburban kids by 86% in reading and 66% in math. And now Marcus Winters, who follows education for the Manhattan Institute, has released a paper showing that even students who don't attend a charter school benefit academically when their public school is exposed to charter competition. Mr. Winters focuses on New York City public school students in grades 3 through 8. "For every one percent of a public school's students who leave for a charter," concludes Mr. Winters, "reading proficiency among those who remain increases by about 0.02 standard deviations, a small but not insignificant number, in view of the widely held suspicion that the impact on local public schools . . . would be negative." It turns out that traditional public schools respond to competition in a way that benefits their students. One of the most encouraging findings by Mr. Winters is how charter competition reduces the black-white achievement gap. He found that the worst-performing public school students, who tend to be low-income minorities, have the most to gain from the nearby presence of a charter school. Overall, charter competition improved reading performance but did not affect math skills. By contrast, low-performing students had gains in both areas, and their reading improvement was above average relative to the higher-performing students.

**From Federal Researchers Find Lower Standards in Schools**, by Sam Dillon, *NY Times*:

A new federal study shows that nearly a third of the states lowered their academic proficiency standards in recent years, a step that helps schools stay ahead of sanctions under the No Child Left Behind law. But lowering standards also confuses parents about how children's achievement compares with those in other states and countries. The study was the first by the federal Department of Education's research arm to use a statistical comparison between federal and state tests to analyze whether states had changed their testing standards. It found that 15 states lowered their proficiency standards in fourth- or eighth-grade reading or math from 2005 to 2007. Three states lowered standards in both subjects at both grade levels. Eight states increased the rigor of their standards in one or both subjects and grades. Some states raised standards in one subject but lowered them in another, including New York, which raised the rigor of its fourth-grade-math standard but lowered the standard in eighth-grade reading, the study said. "Over all, standards were more likely to be lower than higher," in 2007, compared with the earlier year, said Peggy G. Carr, an associate commissioner at the department. Under the No Child law, signed in 2002, all schools must bring 100 percent of students to the proficient level on states' reading and math tests by 2014, and schools that fall short of rising annual targets face sanctions. Facing this challenge, the study found that some states had been redefining proficiency down, allowing a lower score on a state test to qualify as proficient.

## National

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From **The Influence Game: Bill Gates Pushes Education Reform**, by Libby Quaid and Donna Blankinship, *AP*: Not content with shaping education directly through schools, the biggest player in the school reform movement has an eye on moving education policy. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has spent around \$200 million a year on grants to elementary and secondary education. Now the foundation is taking unprecedented steps to spend millions to influence the way the federal government distributes \$5 billion in grants to overhaul public schools. The federal dollars are unprecedented, too. President Barack Obama persuaded Congress to give him the money as part of the economic stimulus so he could try new ideas to fix an education system that most agree is failing. The foundation is offering \$250,000 apiece to help states apply, so long as they agree with the foundation's approach. Obama and the Gates Foundation share some goals that not everyone embraces: paying teachers based on student test scores, among other measures of achievement; charter schools that operate independently of

local school boards; and a set of common academic standards adopted by every state. Some argue that a private foundation like Gates shouldn't partner with the government. "When you team up with the government, you compromise your ability to be critical of the government, and sometimes you compromise your ability to do controversial and maybe unpopular things with your money," said Chester E. Finn Jr., president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Another concern is that as a private foundation, Gates doesn't have to disclose the details of its spending like the government does. The big teachers' unions dispute some of the goals shared by Obama and the foundation. They say student achievement is much more than a score on a standardized test and that it's a mistake to rely so heavily on charter schools and tests. Secretary Arne Duncan welcomes the foundation's involvement. Duncan's inner circle includes two former Gates employees. The administration has waived ethics rules to allow them to deal more freely with the foundation.

## International

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### UNITED KINGDOM

From **Archbishop of Canterbury Attacks 'Oppressive' Education System**; By Graeme Paton, *telegraph.co.uk*: The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, has launched an extraordinary attack on the "oppressive" system of state education in England. He said that an "obsession" with repeatedly testing and assessing children undermined their personal, spiritual and emotional development. Dr. Williams insisted that the focus on examination results and targets categorized pupils as "successes and failures" at a young age and damaged the morale of teachers. The comments were made in a speech to head teachers of a new generation of Anglican secondary schools. The Church of England now sponsors 27 academies – independent state schools, backed by churches, charities, entrepreneurs and universities – with plans for eight more. Dr. Williams suggested that the schools were successfully addressing the needs of individual children in the face of an education system that "seems to have lost a great deal of its liberating potential. We have in the past few decades created an extraordinarily anxious and in many ways oppressive climate in education at every level in the search for proper accountability. This search is laudable in itself, but its outworkings have been unhappy: an inspection regime that is experienced by many teachers as undermining, not supportive, an obsession with testing children from the earliest stages, and in general an atmosphere in most institutions of frantic concern to comply with a multitude of directives. All of this gives a clear message about the priority of tightly measurable achievement over personal or spiritual or emotional concerns."

From **Second Expert Calls for School Starting Age to be Raised to Six**, *DailyMail.co.uk*, The school starting age should be raised to six to help eradicate illiteracy, an education expert said yesterday. The number of pupils with reading difficulties would decline significantly if formal schooling started two years later, according to Professor Greg Brooks of Sheffield University. He is the second leading academic in less than a month to call for the school starting age to be raised. Professor Robin Alexander, who led a six-year independent inquiry into primary education, concluded in October that England's starting age is among the lowest in Europe. Pupils must legally start at five but the vast majority now begin at four. Professor Alexander said this was a relic of the Victorian age. Professor Brooks, an adviser to the Government on adult literacy and numeracy, has reinforced Professor Alexander's view and warned that some children 'do not get' reading if forced to start at four. Children would have reached a level of maturity that would enable them to grasp reading more easily if they began at six, he told MPs. 'We induct children into formal school too young in this country,' Professor Brooks told the Commons science and technology select committee.

From **Thousands of Nursery School Children Branded Racist by Teachers ... Before They Know What the Word Means**, by Laura Clark, *dailymail.co.uk*: As many as 40,000 youngsters a year are being wrongly branded racists as new rules force schools to investigate every playground spat, according to a new report. Children in nurseries and primary schools are being disciplined over racist insults even before they know

# International

what the terms mean, it claimed. A growing army of diversity 'missionaries' may be fuelling tensions instead of easing them, warned the report from the Manifesto Club civil liberties group. These race advisers and bureaucrats are said to be increasing the divide between white and black youngsters by forcing them to see the world through the filter of race. The report said a child had been severely disciplined for calling two other children a 'chocolate bar'. Another child had been punished for calling a boy 'white trash'. Report author Adrian Hart said: 'The obligation on schools to report these incidents wastes teachers' time, interferes in children's space in the playground, and undermines teachers' ability to deal with problems in their classrooms. 'Worse, such anti-racist policies can create divisions where none had existed, by turning everyday playground spats into "race issues". 'There are a small number of cases of sustained targeted bullying, and schools certainly need to deal with those.' Under rules introduced in 2002, schools must monitor and report all racist incidents to their local authority. According to the report *The Myth of Racist Kids*, around 280,000 incidents have been reported in England since full records began. Many involve pupils still at primary school, it said. One teacher told researchers that anti-racist interventions had led to 'an absolutely awful atmosphere around the school'. 'Children who used to play beautifully together are starting to separate along racial lines,' the teacher said. The Manifesto Group is calling for 'adult politics' not to be projected on to children and compulsory reporting of racist incidents to be abolished.

## AUSTRALIA

**Kids Become Depressed Without Play Time**, *news.com/au*: A loss of playtime in early childhood is creating an epidemic of Australian children suffering depression and mental illness, an adolescent psychologist says. About one in four young people battle a mental illness before they reach the age of 18. Adolescent psychologist Dr. Michael Carr-Gregg says it's important children learn resilience in their early years and this can be done effectively through play. "Children teach themselves to crawl, stand and walk through repetitive practice play," Dr. Carr-Gregg said. "At the preschool level, children engage in dramatic play and learn who is a leader, who is a follower, who is outgoing, who is shy. They also learn to negotiate their own conflicts." Play not only promotes social skills but children who receive an enriched, play-oriented parenting and early childhood program have higher IQs at age five than other children deprived of such experience, Dr. Carr-Gregg said. An unintended consequence of technological development is that children have moved indoors. "Children who might once have enjoyed a pick-up game of football now watch the game on TV, sitting on their couch," he said. An increase in the number of working parents has contributed to children spending their free time in adult-oriented activities instead of childhood play, he said. ●

## IDEC 2010

IDEC 2010 will be held in Israel from April 6-13. It will be run by the Institute of Democratic Education in Tel Aviv.

The conference will have three parts:

- 1 Tuesday April 6 to Thursday April 8, a conference including lectures by leading educators from around the world, an exhibition of unique schools and various tours.
- 2 Friday April 9 to Saturday April 10: open space weekend dedicated to the community of democratic schools.
- 3 Sunday April 11 through Tuesday April 13: educational field trips in Israel. The three-day Jerusalem tour will include a meeting with spokespeople from both sides of the Jewish-Palestinian conflict, and a visit to Hope Flowers School in Bethlehem.

You can register at <http://www.2010.e-idec.org/registration>.

The person to contact with any queries is Ayala Luyckx, [ayalal@democratic.co.il](mailto:ayalal@democratic.co.il)



**TED SIZER** (June 23, 1932 - October 21, 2009)

*From George Wood, *The Forum for Education and Democracy**

It is with great sadness that we at The Forum share with you the news of the death of our friend and mentor, Ted Sizer. Ted lost his battle with cancer on Wednesday, October 21 while at home with his family.

In 1984 Ted founded the Coalition of Essential Schools and launched a wave of school restructuring based on engaging all young people in challenging and engaging tasks in order that they might learn to use their minds well. He dared to challenge the conventional wisdom that seat time equaled learning, that grades actually measured performance, and that students should be sorted for instruction by perceived ability. With his inspiration new schools were launched, programs developed, and literally hundreds of thousands of students found themselves in schools that treated them as learners.

In 2003 Ted, along with his wife Nancy, and colleague Deborah Meier, launched The Forum. Recognizing that the schools he loved and cared about were facing unfriendly state and federal policy agendas, he wanted to create a way to bring the lessons learned from the field to the policy debates in Washington. It was his time and generosity that gave The Forum life, and he served as a valued advisor up to his death.

Ted Sizer knew schools. Whenever he visited one he made a simple request: could he please have a student show him around first. Ted knew that to really see a school required seeing it through the eyes of the students. They told him the stories that would fill his books and his writing. Most importantly, he heard them long to do great things in an institution that often treated them as if they were only there to kill time.

Ted Sizer knew and cared about teachers as well. When he wrote about the teacher Horace in his widely praised *Horace* book series, it was not with a haughty or judgmental tone. Instead he wrote about teachers with respect, and fought for school structures that would empower and enable them to do their best work.

We will miss Ted Sizer and his tireless voice of reason. The image that will be forever etched in my mind is of Ted, head resting on one hand, the other hand busy taking notes, listening intently to whomever was speaking. And then, in his ever so thoughtful way, cutting to the heart of the matter at hand and insisting that we speak plainly, forcefully, and, yes, lovingly, about what is essential about schooling: the careful cultivation of every child's mind.

While Ted Sizer's voice has been stilled, his ideas and dreams live on through the work of the many educators and students whose hearts he touched. We are all better for having known him, and we thank his wife Nancy and his fine children and grandchildren for sharing him with us. Rest in peace, dear friend.





# Book Essay

## Foreword to *Einstein and Zen: Learning to Learn* by Conrad P. Pritscher

By Carlo Ricci

**W**hat made Einstein such a brilliant Being? Are there ways that we can approach Einstein's brilliance? What are the implications of Einstein's thought for schools and society? What is the connection between Einstein and Zen and what can that mean for the rest of us? In this hopeful book Pritscher brilliantly gives us insights to help all of us approach the wisdom we have come to define as Einstein. Through what he calls Einsteinian mind openers, Pritscher shares with us what we can all do to strive to be like Einstein. The insights are a great and exciting gift for all of us who take the time to read this inspiring and life altering book. For this reason, this book is for educators but even more correct would be to say that this book is for everyone and anyone who wants to strive to be like Einstein or to help others understand how they too can strive to be like what has become synonymous with wisdom and genius: Einstein.

In a more holistic sense this book is about more than mind but also about empathy, compassion and kindness and so much more. Ultimately, the book offers all of us a better way to live by using Einstein and Zen as models of hope toward which we can and should all aspire. Why should we aspire toward this? Because "the community, to Einstein, is more important than the individual. It is posited that this benefit of the community rather than the individual is at the heart of "kind compassionate thought." And so, who would dare argue against a kinder, more compassionate world?

When Pritscher first asked me if I would be willing to write the preface I was thrilled to be asked and even more thrilled that Pritscher wrote another book about Einstein and education. As I was thinking about how to approach this I started to read the book and highlight the passages that resonated with me. After reading the first page it was clear that this method would not serve. As I stood back and looked at my computer screen it was all highlighted yellow. This is a testament to the richness in every thought in this book.

This is a book that needs to be read and then reread over and over to ponder and truly contemplate the remarkable implications of what is being said. For example, how wonderful and how different would the world be if only

this thought were taken seriously: "When students are free they study what is remarkable, interesting, and important for them." For me, in part, this line opens up the possibilities of non-oppressive spaces for young people where they are all free to explore what they value and are passionate about. The result is that young people can truly unfold their inner genius—all this richness from just the first few lines of the text.

One substantive issue that gets explored and really resonates with me is how do we open our minds? With respect to schooling the question becomes how we move from a schooling system that believes in an artificially contrived system that plans opportunities for discovery learning, to an educational system that truly implements open inquiry. I see this as a move beyond a progressive model to one that approaches a more learner centered model where students get to decide what, when, how and when they want to learn—a democratic system where students are truly empowered.

One way to think about this difference between a progressive Deweyan model and one that moves beyond that is to focus on what John Holt wrote,

John Dewey [talked] about "learning by doing." The way for students to learn (for example) how pottery is made is not to read about it in a book but to make pots. Well, OK, no doubt about its being better. But making pots just to learn how it is done still doesn't seem to me anywhere near as good as making pots (and learning from it) because *someone needs pots*. The incentive to learn how to do good work, and to do it, is surely much greater when you know that the work has to be done, that it is going to be of real use to someone.<sup>1</sup>

This difference between Holt and Dewey makes it clear to me that Holt's authentic and genuine need to make pots results in greater control, freedom and benefit to the community at large which is, in part, what Pritscher is getting us to think about. As well, as Pritscher correctly points out, "There is a different quality to the inquiry concerning a topic or question if the inquiry is assigned by the teacher rather than a question or discrepancy chosen by the learner."

This book gets us to rethink a lot of things including schooling. We need a revolution in schooling such that schools go from being merely places where individuals get trained to places where schools become centers of education. We need to take seriously the notion of the plasticity of the mind,

realizing that there is no critical period for learning; in fact, the best time to learn anything is not when some external agent decides it is best for someone to learn it, but when the individual hungers for that knowledge. Take, for example, reading. Schools believe that children need to learn to read early and the earlier the better. My research around reading finds that there are other ways. Free schools and unschoolers or natural learners do not teach reading, so children do not learn to read at standard times. The result, they all learn to read when they are ready and they enjoy reading because reading is something they have decided to do and not something that has been imposed on them by force.

**We need a revolution in schooling whereby schools go from being merely places where individuals get trained to places where schools become centers of education.**

On this point, John Taylor Gatto writes about students at the Sudbury Valley free school, “In thirty years of operation, Sudbury Valley has never had a single kid who didn’t learn to read...So Sudbury doesn’t even teach reading yet all its kids learn to read and even like reading. What could be going on there that we don’t understand?”<sup>2</sup>

There are as many ways to learn to read as there are people learning to read and as soon as a standard formula or definition of how to learn to read gets imposed then those who struggle within that definition are disadvantaged and, even worse, labeled as having deficits that belong to them when in reality the deficits belong to the definition. As well, reading is not limited to a canon, but all reading is reading. Furthermore, there is already technology that favors speech and listening to writing and reading, and perhaps in the near future historians may be talking about tools that people called pens that they used to write on paper and then they were replaced by computer screens and keyboards and who knows what else. They will tell their young that books on devices that read them to us and computers that write what we speak are relatively new in our history.

What I have related is not fiction but current reality in its infancy; namely, there are devices that reads aloud to us whatever is on its screen and writes whatever is spoken to it. In a personal experiment I have converted my laptop to do just this and was amazed at the results and simplicity of it all. My point is that what we take as so fundamental and unchallenging in our own time may be replaced in another

resulting in a whole different set of skills and groups of people being valued and by extension devalued. To combat this we need to heed Pritscher’s words and ensure that kindness, compassion and love reign, which would result in everyone being valued and cared for.

In conclusion, Pritscher writes, “If one notices one is primarily ‘trained,’ that awareness can be an enormous step in one’s becoming educated.” This book helps us move beyond a training system and into a system where we can become educated.

## NOTES

1. John Holt, *Growing Without Schooling: A Record of a Grassroots Movement (Vol. 1) August 1977-December 1979 GWS #1-12*. Cambridge, MA: Holt Associates Inc., 1999, p. 121.

2. John T. Gatto, *The Underground History of American Education: An Intimate Investigation into the Prison of Modern Schooling* (Rev. ed.). New York: Oxford Village Press, 2003, p. 58.

This essay was published as the Foreword to *Einstein and Zen: Learning to Learn* by Conrad P. Pritscher, 2009, Peter Lang. Reprinted with permission. ●



# PROGRESSIVE RESOURCES from RETHINKING SCHOOLS



## RETHINKING SCHOOLS – THE MAGAZINE

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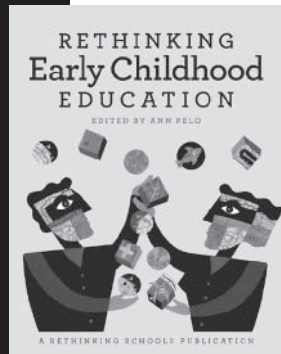
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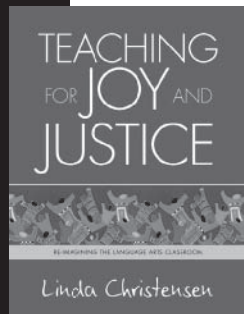
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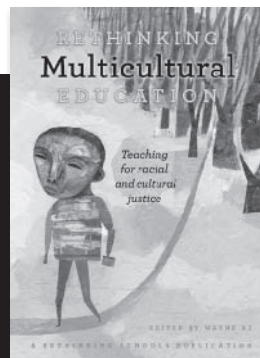
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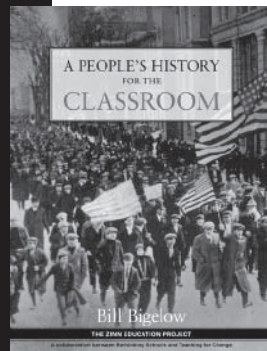
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