

Education Revolution

THE MAGAZINE OF EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES



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Volume 22, Number 3

Strategies for Educational Change



INSIDE

Commentaries on the 2010 AERO conference • A Declaration of Educational Rights
Education in a post-carbon society • News and book reviews

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Education Revolution

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 of students at the Democratic School of Hadera, Israel, by Jerry Mintz.

Being There

BY JERRY MINTZ

People sometimes ask what we do at AERO during the summer. Here is a brief rundown.

We certainly didn't get to take any time off! We had our biggest and perhaps the best AERO conference in June. Just when we were looking forward to an even bigger and better AERO conference in Albany next June we discovered that the Crowne Plaza will be undergoing renovations next June and they didn't have any other times during the summer. We started checking other local options but didn't find anything.

So, our search now took on the scope of the whole country.

Meanwhile Isaac moved the leftover books from the AERO conference back to the AERO office in Colorado. But Isaac was now planning to move to Portland, Oregon to be near his sister. On the way he drove to a social activists' conference in California. Then he finally drove up to Portland. That was a lot of driving!

In the Long Island office we immediately started making the DVDs from the AERO conference. We eventually made 24 high quality DVDs of the keynotes and workshops. The DVD service gives us an amazing price because, by complete coincidence, the owners are related to one of our school starters—in Turkey!

The biggest problem that we faced was that we only had a month's more funding coming out of the conference. So our top priority was to raise enough funding to continue AERO into the winter, when we expect some foundation grants. We contacted a new AERO member who had given us a big boost as we approached the AERO conference and he agreed to offer a \$10,000 grant if we could match it. We then organized the Sustain AERO Campaign. We contacted our members and readers through the listserve, the e newsletter, by phone, and through a mailing. Finally, just recently, we were able to meet the match with over 85 donations from 30 states and six countries.

Another major related project was the promotion of our newly published book, *Turning Points: 36 Visionaries in Education Tell Their Own Stories*. We started contacting independent bookstores, libraries, colleges and universities. We also established a network of distributors. We have a dozen already, but would like to have them in all parts of the USA and other countries. This is a big gamble on our part, publishing such a high level, professional book. But if it is successful it will not only help support AERO, but could open the door for AERO to publish other books.

Of course there were a lot of very individual activities. For example, Ramchandra Bhusal, founder of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram/orphanage in Nepal came to visit as he worked on his own fundraiser for the orphanage. Both he and his youngest sister, Kamala, stayed at my house. People at the conference will remember that Kamala led the morning yoga. Ramchandra then

went to Canada for some talks and ended up back here for a talk we arranged for him at Brooklyn Free School. We were then very surprised when Kamala introduced us to a young Nepalese man she has been communicating with for years. He had just flown over from studying in Ireland. Then she asked Ramchandra for his blessing as they wished to marry! We then had the ceremony the next day at a Hindu temple in Queens, hours before Ramchandra was to fly out!

FROM THE

Editor's Desk

BY RON MILLER

This summer's AERO conference demonstrated the expanding reach of educational alternatives. There was a stronger presence of public school educators, people of color, and younger activists than we have seen before. There was more discussion of social and political issues. While the term "democratic school" has been used in our network primarily to mean democratic practices and student freedom within schools, there is now a more explicit concern for our role in promoting a more democratic, equitable society. This was never entirely absent, as one of our most important philosophical ancestors, John Dewey, insisted on the close connection between democratic principles in school and society. Yet it is true that until recently, discussions about educational alternatives have tended to emphasize personal freedoms more than social justice. Now they are becoming more balanced.

This is a welcome development and I hope it will continue to unfold. It is a very encouraging sign that the broader progressive movement is beginning to recognize the importance of fundamentally rethinking the assumptions underlying modern education. To nourish a genuine democracy, it is necessary, as progressive activists have insisted all along, to fund schools equitably, respect diverse cultures, and engage young people in critical consideration of social issues. But we must go further, and activists are beginning to acknowledge that the "deschooling" or "unschooling" critique of institutionalized learning has much to say about

Another big project was the organizing of the online courses for the coming year, for school starters and Ron Miller's course in the History and Theory of Educational Alternatives. One exciting new change is that, for the first time, another school starters class will be given in Spanish, led by Mari Luce Fernández.

The attempt to find a new location for the AERO conference continued throughout the summer, but eventually we worked it out. The next AERO conference will be at the Red Lion in Portland, Oregon, with pretty much the same arrangements and prices we had this year in Albany! People on the West coast have been begging us for years to have an AERO conference there, so they now have their wish. The conference will be from August 3rd to the 7th. This works out well because the International Democratic Education Conference will be in England next year, in early July. So we can get there and back in time for the AERO conference.

Those who know me well know that I am a passionate table tennis player and I have played in several tournaments

this summer. I also teach table tennis as a volunteer coach at a democratically run table tennis club at a local Boys and Girls Club. In fact this year I was named by the US Olympic Committee as the Volunteer Coach of the Year.

Sometimes those worlds come together and they have this summer. A young table tennis player whom I've known since he was ten years old, playing in our club's New York State championship, became the youngest player to win the United States Men's Championship, at age 15! His parents have asked me to supervise his homeschooling this year as he travels around the world, playing for the US team, and following his dream to make it on the US Olympic team in 2012.

So, as we move toward the end of the summer, having successfully dodged financial problems, the loss of our conference site and Hurricane Earl, we thank our AERO members, readers, and supporters for helping us keep working toward the Education Revolution. ●

educating for democracy. Emerging groups like the Education Circle of Change, Institute for Democratic Education in America, and the activists who participated in the U.S. Social Forum just before our conference (see Anthony Meza-Wilson's stirring report on p. 14) are initiating a promising new dialogue between the ideals of student-centered learning and those of economic, racial and social justice. Dewey would be pleased.

Still, I think that AERO, and this magazine, need to remain the hub for the diverse range of nontraditional learning approaches that rarely have influence on public school practices, even among the most progressive reformers. Where else can the liberating and illuminating perspectives of free schools, Waldorf education, Quaker and other spiritually rooted approaches, Montessori philosophy, homeschooling, community-based learning, bioregional/ecological literacy approaches, integral and holistic education, and other countercultural movements come together to learn from and support each other? These radical alternatives provide important existential, moral, and spiritual insights into the nature of learning and human development that are different from, and complementary to, a concern for social justice. They raise questions about education that go beyond the distribution of political, economic or social power, to the core of the modernist worldview. A real revolution in education will happen when these perspectives begin to inform the public, the professional education establishment, and policymakers. We are not there yet—unhappily, we are still a long way from there—so there needs to be a network like AERO to keep this countercultural flame alive until the mainstream is ready to consider it.

I made this point in my dialogue with Kirsten Olson a couple issues back, when I wrote that school reformers who try to “tweak the system” without addressing fundamental questions about the worldview that produced that system

“are not interesting to me, or relevant to the work we need to do.” The points we raised in our dialogue—our disagreement over movement strategy—speak to the different roles that different organizations can play. To be sure, AERO members can be inspired by (and participate in) the Social Forum, or by the *Rethinking Schools* activists, or by many of the new attendees at our own conference, to address the persistent scourge of race and class inequity in our society. But we should not do so to the exclusion of the countercultural visions that, unfortunately, are not likely to gain much traction in the realm of public school politics. These radical ideals are more freely embraced in independent schools and nonschooling situations, and that is where they need to be nurtured until the larger culture is more ready to receive them. If AERO doesn't stand up for these alternatives, who will?

While this concern might be considered exclusionist or elitist, as Meza-Wilson points out, this strategy is not about privatizing education. It is, rather, a frank recognition that the existing institution of schooling is rigged to serve the dominant culture and that most genuine alternatives will need to be cultivated in independent educational laboratories. How we make democratic alternatives widely, publicly available is a critical strategic question, and AERO certainly ought to partner with activists who are addressing it. But I don't view political struggles with mainstream institutions as the core of AERO's mission.

This is an important discussion, and I invite readers to continue it, in the pages of this magazine or through AERO's online forums. This is a crucial moment in the educational alternatives movement, and the strategic choices we make now will greatly affect the impact of our efforts. ●

Post-Carbon Schools

Back from Hell

BY DAN ALLEN

This is an abridged version of an essay published by the Post Carbon Institute at <http://energybulletin.net/51502>. PCI is a national think tank examining the implications of fossil fuel depletion and envisioning a transition to a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable world. See their home page at www.postcarbon.org/.

The teetering behemoth of Industrial Civilization is literally crumbling around us. Accelerating decay is becoming apparent everywhere: mounting job losses and financial ruin of families; bankruptcy of nations, states, and municipalities; increased social atomization and break-down of communities; un-checked looting of both our natural and financial resources by rapacious corporate entities; debilitating price-spikes and shortages of many key natural resources; a cresting of profound absurdity in the political realm; and mounting environmental degradation coupled with an ominous incipient climatic destabilization.

What will arise from the ashes of industrial collapse? It may range from horrific to beautiful. (One can dream!) At best, it will probably be all those things at once. And since the ‘Time of Great Turbulence’ shall soon be upon us, I thought maybe it would be a good idea to use this tenuous period of calm to start thinking about what our schools should look like in the post-carbon era — on the off-chance that we can cobble together some sort of livable, non-totalitarian, post-carbon civilization in this country; i.e. one in which real schools exist.

Writers such as David Orr and Wendell Berry (and others) have previously written eloquently on the subject of a saner form of land-based education. This essay is my humble contribution.

What prompted me to the topic of post-carbon schools was a faculty meeting last week at the high school where I teach. Such meetings are almost always ineffectual-but-harmless exercises in rah-rah team building — boring, sometimes ludicrous, but tolerable. This one, however, was different. This one had very ominous and explicit undertones of...well...evil. It was, so to speak, a meeting from hell.

Now, before I describe the meeting, let me explain what I mean by “hell.” Whether or not you believe in the Christian version of Hell, I think it’s useful to think of the earthly ‘hell’ as the collection of very undesirable traits that persistently crop up in the human realm: violence and war; soul-crushing work and debilitating poverty; intolerance and hatred; physical and emotional abuse; atomization of individuals and

destruction of communities; degradation of the biosphere; political repression and brutal totalitarian regimes. Nasty stuff like that — “hell on Earth.”

The chief proprietors and disseminators of earthly hell have, of course, been the monied corporations that have risen to supreme power both nationally and globally over the past 100 or so years. These profoundly sociopathic entities have been given (by themselves) the full constitutional rights of citizens. And they have used these rights in predictably sociopathic ways — to dismantle opponents, communities, local economies, democratic structures, and ecosystems with a cold, relentless efficiency.

The work of these corporations is, of course, well advanced at this stage. They have penetrated deep into every human organizational structure and every square centimeter

There are some areas that have, so far, somewhat resisted complete envelopment by the corporate sphere — public education being one of these. But did I mention these corporations are relentless?

of this Earth — smearing their soul-destroying, hellish defecations on everything they touch. But their work is not yet complete. There are some areas that have, so far, somewhat resisted complete envelopment by the corporate sphere — public education being one of these.

But did I mention these corporations are relentless?

A MEETING FROM HELL

At the faculty meeting, our school superintendent outlined a techno-utopian vision for the future of our high school. The vision essentially involves teachers ceding control of the classroom to students and their computers. After some general, perfunctory guidance from the teachers, the students will “dive” into the Internet and enact a “personal education plan” that fits their needs and wants. After all, these kids are “wired differently” than us (we are told), and no longer learn in the same ways as previous generations.

You could almost hear the delighted cackling of the computer and software manufacturers, profiteers of globalization, and high-salaried, non-teaching administrators as they tallied up their future profits, signed off on another round of firings, and collected their bonuses. You could, of course, not hear any sounds from the corporations themselves, those sociopathic, immortal “citizens” to whom we have ceded almost complete earthly power — for they are, as Wendell Berry says, merely “piles of money with the sole intention of becoming bigger piles of money.” But I did perhaps catch a whiff of brimstone in the air.

Had I had my wits about me (and a strong urge to be singled out for harassment or firing perhaps) I would have stood up and said this: *Enough! This is balderdash! Nonsense! Your program simply amounts to replacing key parts of the public educational system that currently generate no profit for corporations with lower-quality modules that WILL generate profit. Well we're not buying! We will not sit mutely while corporations and their high-salaried minions corrupt what little soul is left of our educational system. Teachers cannot be replaced by computers. Books cannot be replaced by the internet. Knowledge cannot be replaced by information. And not everything in this world should be for sale. Shame on you!*

A SANER POST-CARBON EDUCATION

Humans are curious creatures indeed. We are capable of the most heart-wrenchingly beautiful acts, and the most depraved,

horrific atrocities. Modern industrial civilization, in the name of corporate profits, has systematically discouraged the beautiful and encouraged the depraved — with predictable end results. If we are to re-make our civilization in the post-carbon era, we must reverse this perverse prioritization. We must re-work our organizational structures to consciously and actively promote the ‘beautiful’ and discourage the ‘depraved’ at every level — individuals, families, communities, schools, national and local economies, and in the political realm.

I humbly suggest we adhere to three basic cornerstones to support the framework of a saner post-carbon educational system; cornerstones based on the essential features/tendencies of the human species that we must consciously promote. I propose these: morality, community, and stewardship of the environment (or the Land Ethic).

By morality, I mean the mental and behavioral patterns of our species that are most admirable: honesty, kindness, empathy, generosity, thrift, frugality, and forgiveness, among others. These ideas must be woven through every lesson in every unit in every subject taught in every grade of our schools — not as asides, or occasional features, but as key, indispensable parts of everything we teach. Our students should be bathed in morality daily. Nurturing a strong sense of morality in our youth is not only the sole path to ensuring a livable future, it is our only barrier protecting against the ever-present monstrous side of our nature. To neglect or pervert morality, as we have done, is to court and eventually ensure apocalypse.



EXPLORATIONS
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Instead of high school...

A personalized, experiential, meaningful education
that integrates academics with explorations that teens design themselves...
with the guidance of an adult learning coach...web-based.



By community, I mean the patterns of inter-dependent human interactions at the local level that bind us together in a common goal: the goal of thriving mentally and physically, as best as possible, in our everyday lives at our chosen place of residence. Factors contributing to strong communities include well-developed inter-personal and conflict-resolution skills, lack of “globalization” distortions to the local economy, strong knowledge of (and sensitivity to the health of) local ecosystems, strong basic skill set for supplying basic necessities, robust mechanism for transferring knowledge down generations, etc.

The key factors that contribute to strong communities must be made explicit to children at a young age and consciously nurtured throughout their schooling years. Threats that tend to rip communities apart must also be made explicit and consciously guarded against.

We have lived for so long without coherent communities in our atomized industrial deserts that a strong conscious effort must be made to reinstate community-friendly patterns

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that were, for ages, second nature to everybody. The fossil-energy safety nets that have “protected” us (smothered us?) for several generations will soon be gone, and it is only through the creation and conscious maintenance of strong communities that we can hope for resiliency in the trying times ahead.

For the third cornerstone, “stewardship of the environment,” I simply mean a conscious and unwavering application of Aldo Leopold’s Land Ethic by every person to our chosen localities. This Land Ethic, as discussed by Leopold in his masterpiece, *A Sand County Almanac*, involves the extension of our ethical sphere to include not just humans, but all members of the local biotic community, including soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land. Leopold summarizes the ethic thusly: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

ENSURING KNOWLEDGE OF BASIC SKILLS

I am tempted to stop here with the three cornerstones, but there is something else weighing heavily on my mind concerning the education of our children.

I love my high school students to death. Despite their occasional misdeeds, they are great kids. They make me laugh; they make me think; and (almost) every day they renew my oft-wavering faith that everything might just turn out semi-OK in the end. But I have to admit, I’m more than a little embarrassed for them. These are 17 and 18 year-old biological-adults who have the life skills of 7-8 year-olds. Confronted with a rapidly approaching physical/cultural paradigm shift, they are as helpless as the plump beetle larvae I sometimes reveal when splitting firewood during the winter – full of potential, but helpless to deal with an unexpectedly-changed reality.

They have essentially zero knowledge about how one might secure the basic necessities of their species without, say, a credit card. Left to their own devices, these biological adults cannot obtain food, water, shelter, or manufacture any of the countless items they would need for even basic survival in their everyday lives. It has reached the bizarre extreme where several generations of Americans are wholly disconnected from the sources of every single material thing they depend on to function as biological organisms. This, of course, will no longer be possible as the fossil-fuel-based sources of our material things abandon us. It must change, and it will change.

In light of this change, a fundamental part of our children’s post-carbon education must include hands-on experience with the essential life skills required of their species. This is not to say that every kid must become an expert gardener, seed saver, nutritionist, chef, composter/soil-builder, forester, miller, architect, and carpenter, etc., etc. But every kid should have learned the basics of each of those ‘basic life skills’ jobs (and many others) by actually doing them under some guidance.

In addition to helping kids ‘find their true calling,’ incorporating this type of education with the more traditional classroom forms would arm our entire population with a basic skill-set. Such skills would ensure a strong resiliency within our population, enabling us to weather even severe disruptions to our infrastructure with minimized misery.

What will follow the demise of industrial civilization? We do not know. But one thing is certain: if we do not start putting “first things first” and reprioritize our educational system in the post-carbon era, a tragic replay of our current cultural, economic, and ecological disintegration is guaranteed.

In short, we must reclaim our education and culture from the grip of earthly hell and begin planting, so to speak, the seeds of heaven: morality, community, and environmental stewardship. Long live the sacred!

Dan Allen is a high school chemistry teacher in New Jersey. He is also a concerned father, organic farmer, and community garden organizer. He is at danallen1968@yahoo.com. ●

Declaration of Education Rights

A Light in the Darkness

BY JIM STRICKLAND

Ever since December 10, 1948 when it was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has stood as an international moral beacon of human dignity and freedom. The Universal Declaration was never meant to be the final word on human rights, nor was it intended to impose a single model of right conduct on all nations. The Universal Declaration was written to be a living document, reinterpreted and reinvented by each succeeding generation, a common standard that can be brought to life in different settings in a variety of legitimate ways.

Education today is in dire need of just such a common ethical standard. Not a legally binding prescription, but a moral compass by which we can guide our practice, develop our programs and policies, and evaluate our results. In our ongoing efforts to provide the education our children deserve and our world so desperately needs, we need a mutual commitment to values that will inspire us and keep us from drifting off course. In education, as in all areas of life, if we don't decide where we are going, someone will be happy to decide for us!

It is in this spirit that I submit the following suggestion for a **Declaration of Education Rights (DER)**. These 12 articles were inspired from a variety of sources, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Alternative Education Resource Organization www.educationrevolution.org, the Institute for Democratic Education in America (www.democraticeducation.org), and the Institute for Educational Inquiry's *Agenda for Education in a Democracy* (www.ieiseattle.org). Each article is followed by comments which note the source and/or clarify the article's intent or implications.

This list is intended to provide an initial framework to generate thoughtful discussion and new ideas. As input is received, the DER will be revised and republished for review. Once a solid document is developed, it will be widely circulated to groups around the country for their review and hopeful adoption. Imagine the long-term impact of its official adoption by not only education groups and schools districts, but state and federal departments of education as well!

Please review these articles carefully and share them with your respective groups. For starters, your input and suggestions can be sent to me directly at livedemocracy@hotmail.com.

Declaration of Education Rights

PREAMBLE

Whereas a healthy, sustainable democracy requires the thoughtful and effective participation of its citizenry...

Whereas optimum political, social, and economic participation requires certain fundamental skills, habits, knowledge, capacities, and conditions...

Whereas it is the responsibility of democratic society to intentionally foster the development of the essential skills, habits, knowledge, capacities, and conditions essential to its continued vitality and to that of its citizens...

Now, therefore, this Declaration of Education Rights is proclaimed as a common standard of achievement for the continuous growth and self-realization of all people in the context of democratic community.

Article 1

Everyone has the right to participate meaningfully in their own education and the educational decisions that affect them.

COMMENTS: The right to participate in the decisions that affect you is a basic principle of democracy. The Institute for Democratic Education in America www.democraticeducation.org applies this concept to education in their stated mission "*to ensure that all young people can participate meaningfully in their education and gain the tools to build a just, democratic, and sustainable world.*" John Dewey also emphasized the importance of participation – "*There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process, just as there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active co-operation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying.*" (*Experience and Education*, p. 67) This article implies access to self-directed learning opportunities whenever possible.

Article 2

Everyone has the right to an education directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.



Eleanor Roosevelt was instrumental in creating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

COMMENTS: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26. This right guards against overly narrow definitions of education that see education primarily as a means to the economic and political ends of the powers that be.

Article 3

Everyone has the right to an education that acknowledges and respects their cultural, religious, and/or ethnic heritage.

COMMENTS: Every educational system is based on a particular set of beliefs, assumptions, and cultural perspectives. Without overt acknowledgement and respect for the cultural, religious, and/or ethnic heritage of the student, there is real danger that these important sources of personal and cultural identity will be undermined.

Article 4

Everyone has the right to an education that fosters the skills, habits, knowledge, and capacities necessary for effective participation in a social and political democracy.

COMMENTS: From the Institute for Educational Inquiry's *Agenda for Education in a Democracy* (www.ieiseattle.org). Democracy by definition depends on the thoughtful and effective participation of its citizens.

Article 5

Everyone has the right to an education that fosters the skills, habits, knowledge, and capacities necessary to lead responsible and satisfying lives.

COMMENTS: From the Institute for Educational Inquiry's *Agenda for Education in a Democracy*. This emphasizes the second part of the dual role of education noted by John Goodlad in *Democracy, Education, and the Schools* (Roger Soder, Ed.) – “The mission of schooling comes down to two related kinds of enculturation; no other institution is so charged. The first is for political and social responsibility as a citizen. The second is for maximum individual development, for full participation in the human conversation (with the concept of conversation expanded into a metaphor for the whole of daily living).”

Article 6

All public educational institutions shall unambiguously reflect the values of democracy in their policies, practices, curriculum, organizational structures, and outcomes.

COMMENTS: As Marshall McLuhan noted, the medium *is* the message. Dewey also emphasized the critical importance of the lessons we learn indirectly by way of the educational environment – “Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future.” Democracy can only really be learned by a process of immersion. To be effective and sustainable, the *means* used must be aligned with the *ends* desired.

Article 7

K-12 education shall be free, as well as equitably and adequately funded. Technical, professional, and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of capacity.

COMMENTS: Adapted from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26. The emphasis on higher education being equally accessible to all *on the basis of capacity* implies (but does not explicitly guarantee) the removal of economic barriers to such participation when appropriate.

Article 8

Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education in which their children participate.

COMMENTS: From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26. The UDHR version reads, “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.” The wording was changed to reflect an understanding of education not as something that can be given or imposed, but as something that requires the free participation of the learner.

Article 9

Everyone has the right to an education that acknowledges and respects the interconnectedness of all life, and that promotes the building of a just and sustainable world.

COMMENTS: This *ecological literacy* is increasingly being recognized as essential not only to our quality of life, but to our very survival as a species and to the long-term health of our planet. The latter portion is taken in part from IDEA's mission statement (see comments on Article 1).

Article 10

Education shall be compulsory through age 12 and freely available on a voluntary basis until age 18. No child under the age of 18 shall be denied access to a free and appropriate educational program for any reason.

COMMENTS: The UDHR states that elementary education shall be compulsory, presumably to ensure the basic educational foundation required for optimum self-development and for effective political, social, and economic participation. After age 12, the emphasis shifts from *compulsory participation* on the part of the individual to *compulsory service* on the part of society, with participation being optional at the discretion of the learner. This acknowledges the fact that coercive educational techniques are inherently counterproductive to *"the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms,"* as well as to the health and viability of democracy itself.

Article 11

Given that education is an ongoing process that extends far beyond the bounds of formal schooling, everyone has the right to live in an educative community that purposely contributes to the continuous growth and well-being of all its members.

COMMENTS: This highlights the difference between *schooling* and *education*, and promotes a vision of education as a community responsibility. Implied is the need to continuously advocate and work for the creation of truly *educative* communities.

Article 12

No one shall be denied access to employment or postsecondary education, or be discriminated against in any way solely on the basis of having achieved or failed to achieve K-12 academic credentials.

COMMENTS: It is unethical to use educational credentials as a criterion for employment unless those credentials can be clearly shown to be necessary for the successful performance of the particular job being sought. Given the broad and varied nature of high school graduation requirements, this cannot be said to apply to the high school diploma. This article also makes more feasible the development of and participation in alternative approaches to learning that do not result in a high school diploma.

Jim Strickland lives in Everett, WA with his wife Dana and three children. He is a public educator in nearby Marysville where he works to promote democratic, non-coercive, and place-based learning. Jim is also the Western Region Coordinator for the League of Democratic Schools, a project of the Institute for Educational Inquiry (www.ieiseattle.org). He welcomes your comments and ideas at livedemocracy@hotmail.com. ●

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My First Year at AERO

BY JENNIFER A. GROVES

Appealing keynoters have always been a factor for me in deciding whether to attend a conference. I've been to many conferences where a great speech has truly affected my work. I came to the AERO Conference because I wanted to hear Herb Kohl. I had always loved his books and been inspired by his ideas. It's significant that he writes about people and experiences rather than data, strategies, or theories; his books are always refreshing. He's also one of an aging group of progressive educators whose work and message I know must continue. Knowing John Taylor Gatto was on the schedule was an added draw. In addition to gaining insight and inspiration from these two speakers, my expectations for the conference included learning about what's going on in the world of alternative education, something I didn't know too much about.

The first day at the conference, I attended Herb's taped speech. Herb spoke of teachers having the "precious responsibility of dealing with young life." He posed the question, "Do people understand what it means to be a teacher?" And said educators should be "smart enough to expose their kids to wonderful, beautiful things." We don't often hear the word "beautiful" in conversations about teaching, learning, and schools. Kohl's remarks reminded me of Jonathan Kozol, who asked, "Where is the standard on teaching about the beauty in the world?" Kohl urged us to open children up to the beauty and struggle that is life, and support them. How can teachers keep this larger purpose in mind as they go about daily tasks, often adhering to prescribed curriculum? Who gives us the permission to decide what's important enough to teach? These questions ran through my mind as I reflected on Herb's purposeful words.

Throughout the day I met other attendees. I talked with Julie, a parent from Pennsylvania who was part of a group starting a new school. I met Jody, who lives near my hometown in Vermont. She and I ended up being in many of the same workshops and so had the opportunity to check in on each other's learning throughout the weekend. Lastly, I met Carol Black, an unschooling parent, who was there to screen her film, "Schooling the World." Ironically, Carol lives down the block from me in our small town in rural Colorado. We spoke frequently at AERO and have continued our conversations about alternative education here at home. These were some of the most meaningful and real moments at the conference, as they are for me at any conference—connecting with colleagues, sharing stories, and supporting each other on our journeys to improve education.

SHARED VISION AND RESPECTING DIFFERENT VOICES

I sense that AERO has changed and grown at a high rate in recent years. Perhaps it is still evolving and elaborating on its

mission as it grows. As fast as it may be growing, I am curious about what structures are in place to organize the collective thinking and actions of AERO members and move the entire organization forward in a tangible way. At a conference where so many great minds come together, I believe there are structures, or protocols, we could put in place that would help focus discussions and honor our knowledge and opinions. "Protocols" are agreed upon guidelines that structure a conversation. They are used to promote collegial relationships and reflective practice. Using time frames and specific questioning tools, protocols help groups remain on focus, tap into thoughtful responses, and arrive at conclusions. Protocols help a group get to the "heart of the matter." I've used protocols successfully, many coming from the National School Reform Faculty's website: <http://www.nsrharmony.org/resources.html/>.

Could we have used protocols to move our conversations forward in a manner that might lead to more concrete actions and growth? Could these protocols also provide structure to conversations, given our differences, so that people were given

Can we identify our similarities and shared goals for the world of alternative education?

My observations at AERO led me to believe that there were people with many goals and visions present in the room at any given time.

an equal platform and more voices were heard? The night of Matthew Davis's keynote was one time I felt that adhering to the schedule and using protocols could have helped identify issues for further discussion, document thinking, and honor the audience as a whole. After Matthew's keynote, many attendees had feedback and comments. The fact that these comments went on well past the start time for the screening of "Schooling the World" felt disrespectful. I understand the "heat of the moment" feeling of responding to Matthew. But I think this feedback time could have been modified. How could we have gathered the emotions and content of the room and respected people's contributions, while at the same time not letting the train run off the track?

A protocol might have been useful here. Maybe each person wanting to speak could have been allotted one minute to respond to either Matthew's speech or the comment of another attendee. Another alternative might have been to extend the comments for Matthew for only another 30 minutes and then schedule an additional meeting time the next day for the conversation to continue. This way the whole schedule would not have been abandoned and people who came for Carol's film would have been granted a more prompt start time.

The commentary after Matthew's speech got me confused as I felt pulled in so many different directions by people's comments that, when a colleague asked, I found I couldn't describe much of the feedback with any clarity. This brings me to my next subject, common vision. With a room full of people from different backgrounds, experiences, opinions and goals, it is important to acknowledge the common reasons we are here.

Can we identify our similarities and shared goals for the world of alternative education? My observations at AERO led me to believe that there were people with many goals and visions present in the room at any given time. I often found myself wanting some common ground with my colleagues. Occasionally I found animosity when I contributed an idea or related an experience. Could AERO have employed structures that helped to acknowledge the varying goals and experiences of conference attendees and from there agree on protocols of how we held conversations throughout the weekend?

Sometimes I felt as if people judged me because I had only taught at public schools and they had opinions about the way it was at public school that I, and my experience, disagreed with. I didn't like feeling like I had to defend my experience. Can't we agree to disagree? And aren't we here to have respectful discussion? I was frustrated that some people had absolute and unrealistic beliefs (to me) about public school. Can we not agree to listen—which is something we're trying to promote in our classrooms and school settings? We don't all have to think the same way—far from it. But we can learn from each other and learn why we think the way we think.

LEARNING THROUGH REFLECTION

Too often, especially at conferences, we pack it all in, hustle back home, unpack our belongings, but never get to really unpack our thinking. We often hear that learning is in the doing. The "doing" is necessary, but more accurately learning takes place in the *reflection* on the "doing." I think attendees would benefit from a lighter schedule with more time designated for reflection. I found sometimes I needed a few hours to myself to do so and had to miss sessions in order to create this much needed processing time.

Reflection always seems to get the short end of the stick in any workshop, conference, or class. Can we do better? And how? What would purposeful reflection look like? The conference schedule was full, and with sessions held all day and at night as well, there was not as much down time. Would it have been possible to schedule reflection sessions in



Author and activist Herb Kohl. Photo by Isaac Graves.

the mornings, so that after a full day and a good night's sleep, people could assemble their ideas from the day before and process their learning together?

I heard many people talking about starting schools and initiating projects. Lots of burgeoning ideas were out there. I think the reflection piece may be even more essential at a conference like AERO since people are really trying to get ideas off the ground and plans in motion. Reflection leads to new understandings and realizations, and can help ensure positive movement forward.

The collective wisdom, energy, and expertise that I felt at AERO were both inspiring and comforting. I'm glad to know everyone is out there, doing his/her part. My suggestions and opinions here stem from what I think can help organizations and what I have experienced as helpful tools in my work as an educator. I look forward to attending AERO next year and to helping the world of alternative education move forward with integrity, organization, and momentum.

Jennifer Groves received her Master's Degree in Early Childhood and Elementary Education from Bank Street College. She taught in the primary grades for ten years at both public and private schools. She is currently a private tutor and educational consultant in Telluride, Colorado. Email: jen-groves89@hotmail.com. ●

Impressions from the recent NADEC and AERO Conferences

BY KEN JACOBSON

Leading up to this year's North American Democratic Education and AERO conferences there was a lively chat line debate as to what message could be sent to President Obama about alternative education. Unfortunately, that debate did not really carry over to sessions or conversations. Several threads, however, seemed to play out at both conferences: the evils of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the evil of coerciveness especially in schools and/or education in general, and the theoretical antidote to both being free children. However, from that discussion it was clear that there is no ideological and/or practical unifying consensus on even those widely agreed issues. Accordingly, I will use this article not to try to find common denominators from the conferences around which a broad consensus might be reached, but to make an argument for the need for such a consensus on the fundamental question of relationships between adults and non-adults.

Is non-coerciveness really possible in relationships and interactions between adults and those author and friend from the Vancouver IDEC Bruce Scott has labeled "littler but not lesser?" In fact, is there a consensus definition of non-coercive? The very idea of school as a state mandated institution that must be attended until a particular age is, as John Taylor Gatto has often pointed out, coercive on its face. Being an adult with "responsibility" for young people whether at a school, no matter how "alternative," or at home, brings power. I did not hear candid discussions of adult power at either conference. To me, those questions (and that definition) are at the core of the project in which we are engaged.

Mary Leue's Sunday morning discussion on *tikkum olam* (meaning "to heal the world") did introduce a highly relevant educational/social philosophical context. This idea is the theme of *Turning the Titanic*, a volume she's edited and published. Mary said that it was important to figure out how to "say

to people, 'wake up, be somebody in the world who cares.'" To do that, one participant suggested, might require us to heal ourselves first, while another participant offered it might require a community. For Mary, caring encompasses, as the book's subtitle implies, "school and community." So caring can be learning to live within A. S. Neill's dictum of "freedom without license," and/or it can be a strong environmental or political consciousness.

By choosing this very broad context to frame her 40 years as part of the Albany Free School community, Mary brought home the importance of both the microcosm of "fixing children," (however we define that task...and there was no consensus on that point) and the macrocosm of fixing all our environments. Yet, without recognizing and honestly addressing core power dynamics, healing may be difficult. Even though "education" is the legally mandated, becoming independently thinking community members is really not the kind of learning the law and NCLB envision.

I came to the conferences with an opinion that the most vital environment for students was not school, but their home. For my PhD research, I spent almost two years working with over 90 ten and 11 year-old students in Oxfordshire, England and in a New England town. I interviewed a large number of parents and children. That research clearly shows that we parent (more or less) the way we were parented. The more that coercive power was used by our parents, the more, often despite our best efforts, we exercise the same kind of power with our children. Ironically, children are not passive recipients of our coercive largess, whether with teacher or parent using a whole series of tactics they fight back very effectively redistributing adult power to themselves. Despite "if...then" threats, they persevere. In the end they win. The teachers I observed spent an average of 50% of classroom time trying to maintain order; the parents I interviewed all admitted that eventually they relent. However, adults often end up angry and frustrated, and the children are often unhappy. Paradoxically, when they grow into adult roles, the former rebels will do more or less the same kinds of things their parents did; and their children do more or less what they did.

Consequently, I felt (and still largely do) that without some sort of acknowledgement by parents that children can be treated as equals; that their opinions are as important as adults; that they should not be forced to do what they don't want; and that parents use health and safety concerns as a rationalization to exert unnecessary power: that meaningful change may well not be possible. In fact, I believe that children are born equal, born thinking independently, and are constantly battling adults who are trying to condition them to accept something else, to be someone else.



Youths at the 2010 AERO conference. Photo by Kelly B. Taylor.

In opposition to those data, is it fair to say that exposure to the freedom, equality and community that places like the Free School afford their students partially inoculates students from coercive environments allowing them to be much less in the need of healing, far more ready to care in the world than students not lucky enough to have that exposure? There are little data available on this question. Anecdotally, the behavior of the large number of non-adults at the conferences looked very much like the power redistributive behaviors of students I worked with on my research. Notwithstanding their presence in large numbers, they had very little to do with the proceedings. From littlest to biggest they hung around together. Several scheduled student only sessions at the NEDEC failed to materialize.

Two points seem relevant here: first, there needs to be a reason for the lack of integration. One might be that the adults haven't convinced the non-adults they've forsworn their inherent power. Second, there were several sessions at AERO in which students participated. Did students initiate and adults mentor/facilitate?

**I believe that children are born equal,
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someone else.**

If not, would my Sudbury friends consider that coercive? That is, if one core principle espoused by the "movement" is non-coerciveness what does it take to make that a reality?

A question I find very interesting that was not part of either conference's discourse is: Does exposure to equality, freedom and community make a difference in how those students parent? Do they break the pattern of parenting the way they were parented? Are their children free of the need to battle their parents over power? Unfortunately, there really isn't a lot of data on that subject either. Rick Posner's session, at which alumni from the Jefferson County Open School (an alternative school that has been publicly funded for the last 40 years) told their stories did not address that question, nor does his book *Lives of Passion, School of Hope* which tells those stories in detail. Even though there is a section devoted to parents' and families' relationships to the school, we don't see the graduates' relationships with their own children. With how much freedom and equality are they raising their children? We don't see whether those children are subtly (or not so subtly) coerced.

Posner's book makes it very clear that "success" in the world is not directly related to "conventional" public school education. However, focusing on that game, even if it leads, as it appears it does, to Mary's people who care, may well miss what I consider the real target: the extension of the idea of freedom without

license to all relationships between children/students and parents/teachers. That is, since the school is subject to NCLB, there is a curriculum and mandatory class attendance. Because adults seem to control the academic side of the school, even though there is a democratic behavioral structure can there be any doubt that there is some form of coercion.

Do democratic structures catalyze attitudes that promote independent thinking, creativity and intellectual confidence? I believe so. Even though Posner's session offered some data to support those convictions, there is a scarcity of such data. What I do know is this: if adults and children are always in conflict, and if the children win anyway, then a systematic method to lessen that conflict needs to make sense. If my belief is correct, and if the big failing with NCLB and the education it promotes is the lack of independent thinking, creativity and intellectual confidence, then public schools need to accept those democratic structures.

Will public school teachers and their unions accept the idea? If the trade off for unions is an end to NCLB, and strong teacher input in how and what they teach, then they might. Although, adapting teaching styles from "learn what I say," to "do you think this topic is interesting" will take commitment and practice.

Tom Ellis and I have started a discussion on that issue; perhaps it will blossom into a workshop at the 2011 AERO? If democracy and community lead to less coerciveness in the world, less reliance on the idea that might makes right (not just between adults and non-adults, but between majorities and minorities, humans and the environments; and between nations), then if we can universalize that model, aren't we closer to Mary's quest? As Pat Farenga pointed out, including home/unschooled and free schooled students, our "revolution" represents only 3% of the total school population in the US. Without public school support we (all 3% of us) really don't have much leverage.

Victor Hugo wrote: "All the forces in the world are not so powerful as an idea whose time has come." If we represent such an idea, then we need to give it all the help we can. As I see it, that help starts with adult attitudes: Can we really put our money where our mouths are? Are we adults ready under all circumstances to eschew our power? If we are, then there is a possibility that the goal for all schools will be to facilitate students on a lifetime path of independent thinking and commitment to community writ large: to "healing the world."

Ken Jacobson discovered teaching was his calling during a stint, between ages 23 and 25, as an instructor at Emerson College in Boston. However, he wasn't able to answer that calling until age 50, when family obligations lessened enough to allow him to attend graduate school. In the ensuing nine years, he earned an MA in anthropology and an MS in neuroscience at Brandeis, and a PhD in anthropology at UMass-Amherst. While doing fieldwork in England in 1999, a friend suggested he visit Summerhill. That brief visit catalyzed an epiphany in his attitudes towards non-adults that came to influence his research, writing, and the goals for his teaching. He attended the 1999 IDEC at Summerhill, and since then, has attended every AERO conference and several IDECs. ●

Movement toward Revolution

An examination of the US Social Forum and the state of the education revolution

BY ANTHONY MEZA-WILSON

Movements are not initiated by revolutionaries. They begin when large numbers of people, having reached the point where they can't take the way things are anymore, see some hope of improving their daily lives and begin to move on their own.

~Grace Lee Boggs from *Living for Change*

On Thursday, June 24th, 2010 at 1:00 pm in room D2-15 of Cobo Hall, the largest convention center in Detroit, Michigan, approximately 350 educators, activists, students, parents, and friends from across the United States and the world gathered to discuss the future of education.

At precisely the same moment in Ballroom A of the Crown Plaza Hotel in Albany, New York, Jerry Mintz led some fun opening exercises to kick off the 2010 AERO conference.

Why were these events separate?

The first event was entitled “Another Education is Happening: Education for Emancipation and Transformation People’s Movement Assembly” one of about 100 People’s Movement Assemblies (PMAs) to occur at the 2010 United States Social Forum (USSF), a movement building event that drew approximately 20,000 activists and organizers to Detroit. The Another Education is Happening PMA was just one part of a larger series of over 50 workshops at the USSF aiming to transform education, including workshops on: popular education, youth rights, educational activism, democratic education, and scores of other related topics. Many of the readers of this publication are well acquainted with the second event, the AERO conference, which draws together members of the alternative education community from across the world to meet and discuss ways to offer liberatory alternatives to mainstream schooling.

I was present in Detroit along with representatives from The Boggs Educational Center (Detroit), the Institute for Democratic Education in America, Teachers for Social Justice (Chicago), The Education for Liberation Network, the Alliance for Educational Justice (Oakland), Rethinking Schools, and scores of other organizations working to transform education and liberate youth. I wish AERO could have been present with us as well.

As a democratic educator and teacher committed to fostering educational alternatives, I have been attending

AERO conferences since 2007. I have seen the strengths of the AERO community: hope for transformative educational change, practice enacting alternatives for decades, a firm commitment to a pedagogy that values the rights of the child, and a wonderful dedication to embracing uncertainty, wildness, and creativity. It would have been fantastic for the AERO community to bring these incredibly valuable qualities to the USSF.

The AERO community has a great deal to learn as well from USSF. The organizations that comprise the USSF community have an incredible focus on social justice that actively confronts the material inequalities faced by poor communities and communities of color in the United States.

When we take the values of justice, democracy, and equity that have inspired alternatives in education to form and invite in those who experience the most stark limitations to their freedom to lead the process of emancipation, this is where our meetings become movements and our revolutions begin.

Many of these same organizations have found ways to operate inside the public education system and with the cooperation and collaboration of governments and unions. As much as this could be seen as a reformist approach, for many of the communities present at the USSF it is a decision made out of an intensely practical concern for the necessity of educational access.

The tension between a separatist, exclusive, privileged, revolutionary,¹ primarily white and middle class movement and an inclusive, coalition focused, public, multi-racial, multi-class, activist movement, is the central tension that I would like to explore as a means of showing what we (AERO and USSF and I include myself in both of these “we”) have to teach each other. Jonathan Kozol called out free schools almost 40 years ago in his book *Free Schools* for claiming that oppressed communities should become more “enlightened” by eschewing the trappings of traditional institutional education in favor of a more free and humanistic approach.

Kozol referred to the free school as like “a sandbox for the children of the S.S. guards at Auschwitz.” Similarly, John Taylor Gatto, one of the featured keynote speakers at AERO this year, noted in his book *The Underground History of American Education* that there existed schools run on values of student participation, creativity, and progressive ideals in Prussia throughout the nascent stages of what we now see as the compulsory public education model. These schools were designed for the training of the elite within society and not for the emancipation of the oppressed.

I raise these issues out of love for the democratic education movement. There are many values that I hold dear, that I have learned of and grown through, that find their roots in free schools, democratic education, and unschooling; all of which are foundational to AERO’s theoretical focus. In being present at the US Social Forum I realized that AERO has a long way to go toward building what Dr. Vincent Harding claimed was the aim of education, “teaching people how to live together in a participatory multi-racial democracy.” I noticed some organizational values of USSF that could help bring together these two worlds, and perhaps create space for a truly revolutionary and emancipatory movement in education to emerge.

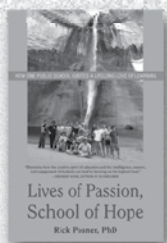
Empowering marginalized voices not keynotes and rock stars. The USSF made a deliberate point of highlighting the least heard voices in our communities (the poor, indigenous people, youth, communities of color, non-status workers,



John Taylor Gatto at the AERO conference. Photo by Kelly B. Taylor.

and others) and encouraging their central participation in the programming of the forum. This goes in hand with the fact that USSF is seen not as a conference where one comes to consume knowledge from the enlightened, but is a movement building process where we all come together to build the type of world that we want to see.

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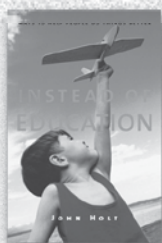
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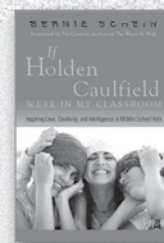
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Financial accessibility. USSF was a five-day event with over 1000 workshops and approximately 20,000 participants. The highest rate for registration was \$40 for an individual and \$150 for an organization. These rates were incredibly low given what the forum managed to make happen. The low price allowed for attendance by those who could not otherwise afford to be part of this movement, something to bear in mind when organizing a conference aimed to liberate.

Structural orientation that fosters participation. The USSF shifts perspective from a conference that provides content to a movement where everyone present is a co-creator of the event. This allows the forum to be truly grassroots. The People's Movement Assembly process illustrates nicely how such a participatory structure might work.

The "Another Education is Happening: Education for Emancipation and Transformation People's Movement Assembly" came from conversations between several national organizations interested in building a movement to liberate

**The "Another Education is Happening:
Education for Emancipation and
Transformation People's Movement
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interested in building a movement
to liberate education.**

education. These organizations met prior to the USSF electronically and via telephone to set an agenda and format for the People's Movement Assembly. In short, the process during the social forum consisted of techniques used to draw out analysis from the present group and to create a plan for strategic action. In order to accomplish this task, a few speakers framed the issues for us: elder and longtime Detroit activist, **Grace Lee Boggs**, former speechwriter for Martin Luther King, **Dr. Vincent Harding**, Director of the Chicago Freedom School, **Mia Henry**, and Detroit Public Schoolteacher, **Julia Putnam**. Each of these folks spoke to the issues at hand from their own perspectives to set the scene. We followed with breakout groups where each group collected their fears and hopes around the future of education. We then came back together as a large group to combine and synthesize what emerged from the small groups into resolutions that were drafted and synthesized with resolutions from the 100 other People's Movement Assemblies that occurred at the 2010 USSF.

This is a very brief and inadequate explanation of the PMA process; to learn more see: <http://pma2010.org>. I include this process, in brief, to illustrate how the U.S. Social Forum has structured itself in a way that actively encourages

participation. It is a living embodiment of the type of pedagogical values present in many democratic schools and free schools who attend AERO's annual conference.

It would be fantastic for the AERO community to participate in the next educational People's Movement Assembly, scheduled to occur in 2013 (the U.S. Social Forum occurs every two years). Folks who attend AERO have experience in the day-to-day operation of schools based in democracy and youth rights, something that many in the fight for educational justice would be eager to discuss. The USSF participants care deeply about transforming society to be more directly democratic and to value the rights of all people. We are really one movement working together, and collaboration can create a space for growth for everyone involved. The USSF can help provide a space where we can build an educational revolution to truly emancipate all young people.

When our conferences become movements, they begin to gain a revolutionary potential. When we take the values of justice, democracy, and equity that have inspired alternatives in education to form and invite in those who experience the most stark limitations to their freedom to lead the process of emancipation, this is where our meetings become movements and our revolutions begin.

Note

1. I use the term revolutionary here, as I would assume *Education Revolution* Magazine uses it, as a term to denote a radically different approach to pedagogy rather than a curriculum and pedagogy that facilitate social revolution by directly challenging the power of dominant social institutions.

Anthony Meza-Wilson is a lifelong student and teacher dedicated to democracy and emancipation in education. He is an unschooler at heart and a university educated high school drop out. He has taught in democratic schools, organized community free schools, and enjoys rethinking learning. Currently he is pursuing a master's degree in Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia and volunteers with the Purple Thistle Centre. He likes wilderness, cats, and community. His email address is anthony.mezawilson@gmail.com. ●



News Reports

COMPILED BY CAROL MORLEY AND RON MILLER

National

Respecting children's development benefits adults as well.

In a recent doctoral dissertation at the Fielding Graduate University, Josette Luvmour explains how “any adult who is willing to learn in relationship with the child will learn about him/herself while learning about the child.” She asserts that conscientious parenting and child-centered teaching rooted in empathy for children’s experiences can be a transformational experience for adults. Luvmour describes the family (and by implication a learning community) as a complex system in which all members, including children, establish meaning. Her study is titled *Adult Development: Emergent Wisdom in the Family Context* and is available through amazon.com. Luvmour is co-founder of the Summa Institute in Portland, Oregon, which sponsors a Family and Professional Development Center, lab school, teacher training and research program, all revolving around the philosophy of Natural Learning Relationships, which Luvmour developed with her partner, Ba Luvmour. See www.summainstitute.org.

A School Prays for Help, *wsj.com*. LAKELAND, Fla.—When his budget for pencils, paper, and other essential supplies was cut by a third this school year, the principal of Combee Elementary School worried children would suffer. Then, a local church stepped in and “adopted” the school. The First Baptist Church at the Mall stocked a resource room with \$5,000 worth of supplies. It now caters spaghetti dinners at evening school events, buys sneakers for poor students, and sends in math and English tutors. The principal is delighted. So are church pastors. “We have inroads into public schools that we had not had before,” says Pastor Dave McClamma. “By befriending the students, we have the opportunity to visit homes to talk to parents about Jesus Christ.” Such alliances between churches and schools are igniting debate about church-state boundaries. “I have great concerns about churches who see public schools as, well, what shall I say, church membership,” says Harry Parrott, a retired Baptist minister who runs a local chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Short on money for everything from math workbooks to microscope slides, public schools across the nation are seeking corporate and charitable sponsors, promising them marketing opportunities and access to students in exchange for desperately needed donations. At Sikes Elementary, principal Ann Tankson hands out fliers urging families to flock to “McTeacher’s Night” at the local McDonald’s, where volunteer teachers flip burgers as “celebrity employees.” The

franchise gives a portion of proceeds to the school. “You do what you have to do,” she says.

What to Do When Your Child Hates School: School Negativity Can Be Evidence of a Healthy Brain. By Dr. Judy Willis, www.psychologytoday.com. If your child hates school it is probably not his fault, nor that of his teacher, but rather it can be evidence that his brain is functioning appropriately. Healthy brains protect their owners from perceived threat. School today is stressful, often threatening, as a result of the high-stakes standardized testing that challenges students, teachers, and school administrators. There is so much information mandated as required “knowledge” for these tests (that determine federal funding), that for many children school seems more like a feedlot, force-feeding them facts without adequate time or resources to make them interesting or relevant. The problem is worst when the district is required to stick to a rigid “teacher proof” curriculum that dictates tedious days of worksheets and nights of more of the same brain stuffing. Dr. Willis admits that we’re probably not going to change schooling significantly, so she advises parents how to coach their children to adapt to the boredom and stress they experience in classrooms.

From Many States Adopt National Standards for Their Schools, by Tamar Lewin, *NY Times*: Less than two months after the nation’s governors and state school chiefs released their final recommendations for national education standards, 27 states have adopted them and about a dozen more are expected to do so soon. The quick adoption of common standards for what students should learn in English and math each year from kindergarten through high school is attributable in part to the Obama administration’s Race to the Top competition. States that adopt the standards win points in the competition for a share of the \$3.4 billion to be awarded in September. The effort has been helped by financial backing from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to most of the organizations involved in drafting, evaluating and winning support for the standards. Implementation will be a long-term process, as states rethink their teacher training, textbooks and testing. States that adopt the standards are allowed to have additional standards, as long as the common core represents at least 85 percent of their English and mathematics standards. Those states that are not winners in the Race to the Top competition may also have less incentive to follow through in carrying out the standards.

The Obama Education Revolution, by Lindsey Burke, *Heritage.org*: Education Secretary Arne Duncan has said that one thing that has been learned from No Child Left Behind is that one-size-fits-all programs don't work. An astonishing assertion, coming from an administration that is now "orchestrating one of the biggest federal overreaches into education policy in nearly half a century And whose solution to raising academic achievement is to establish the most imposing one-size-fits-all policy imaginable." Race to the Top (RTTT) has inspired some much-needed reforms, such as New York raising its limit on the number of charter schools and Colorado reforming its tenure laws. In spite of the advances that have been made, "RTTT has started a new slide of federal control into local schools, ignoring the guardrail of normal legislative procedure and using the Education Department's gargantuan allocation of 'stimulus' dollars to impose national standards on states." The administration's "quiet revolution" requires states to 'garner union support to be eligible for a Race to the Top grant has blunted the potential for meaningful reform. The move to national education standards and tests will certainly do more to empower bureaucrats in Washington than parents. Sadly, that's anything but revolutionary."

The Problem with 'Race to the Top' is the Race, By Diana Senechal, *Washington Post*: While President Obama praises the rapid reforms occurring in education as a result of Race to the Top, the reforms that are taking place have not been fully tested or thought out, and may result in "wasted efforts and damaged lives." States must use test scores in teacher evaluations in order to be eligible for Race to the Top, an unreliable process. Professor Helen F. Ladd writes, "Even the most sophisticated approaches typically cannot distinguish the contribution of teachers from the classroom context, and they generate estimates of a teacher's quality that jump around from one year to the next, largely because of the small sample sizes for individual teachers." In addition, the reliability of the tests themselves is questionable. A further requirement is that states must adopt Common Core Standards in order to qualify, which requirement "impedes a thoughtful approach to the standards; it may obscure the strengths of the standards themselves." The Standards will undoubtedly need to be improved over time, and must be accompanied by a strong curriculum. "We need excellent curricula as sorely as we need anything in the schools—but we cannot rush to make it. Such curricula take years to develop, and they often build on older ones. A good curriculum requires both philosophical and practical insight."

From **Why Giving Your Child a Computer Can Make Their Reading and Maths Skills WORSE**, by Fiona MacRae, *DailyMail.co.UK*: Researchers warned that marks in math and reading tended to drop when youngsters used a computer at home. They also found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds performed particularly badly. This finding questions official drives to ensure that youngsters from poorer homes have access to the same technology as their better-off classmates. The U.S. study in North Carolina compared information on computer ownership and use with end-of-year test results for more than 150,000 pupils aged ten to 14. They were able to compare the same children's reading and math scores before and after they acquired a home computer. Researchers could also compare their scores to those of peers who had always had a home computer and to those who never had access to one. The negative effects on reading and math scores were "modest but significant." Researcher Professor Jacob Vigdor said: "Adults may think of computer technology as a productivity tool but the average kid doesn't share that perception."

End Them, Don't Mend Them; It's Time to Shutter America's Bloated Schools, by P.J. O'Rourke, *Weekly Standard*: On average, the United States is spending \$11,749 per student per year in the public schools, grades pre-K through 12. This is much more than the average \$7,848 that private schools cost, and much more than the \$7,171 median yearly tuition at four-year public colleges. And, that \$11,749 is much less than what is actually being spent. In Washington, D.C. \$17,542 is claimed as being spent for each student annually. "The real number is an astonishing \$28,170 – 155 percent more than the average tuition at the famously pricey private academies of the capital region." The figures above are from 2007, the most recent available; of course, they're higher now. "Are kids getting smarter? No." Test scores have remained essentially the same from 1970 through 2004. But, "there are other numbers that make better sense. As of 2006 ... 4,615,000 people were employed full-time by some 13,000 school districts. Of these ... there are 300,000 'clerical and secretarial staff' filling out No Child Left Behind paperwork and wondering why 64,000 'officials, administrators' aren't doing it themselves; which they aren't because they're busy doing the jobs that 125,000 'principals and assistant principals' can't because they're supervising 383,000 'other professional staff' who are flirting with the 483,000 teachers' aides' who are spilling trail mix and low-fat yogurt in the teacher's lounge making a mess for the 726,000 'service workers' to clean up."

Bill Gates: Charters Should Lead Innovation, by Dakarai Aarons, *EdWeek.org*: “The nation’s charter schools should use their freedoms to boldly innovate and create promising strategies and practices that can be used by all schools,” Bill Gates told an audience of charter school operators recently. “Charters have the potential to revolutionize the way students are educated, but to deliver on this promise, it’s important that the movement do even more to hold itself accountable for low-performing charters.” In an interview following his talk, Gates said the charters have lived up to their promise of creating innovative, high-quality education for students, but he thinks that charters should be risk takers in the areas of creating teacher-evaluation structures and using technology, which must be made available to students everywhere. “The movement has to keep trying new things,” he said.

Last Day of ‘Rubber Rooms’ for Teachers, by Jennifer Medina, *NY Times*: Temporary Reassignment Centers, also known as Rubber Rooms, have served as holding cells for the 700 or so public school teachers and administrators who have been accused of violations and who are awaiting decisions on their cases from the Department of Education or hearing officer. The teachers receive full pay while they wait, but they do not work. They arrive at 8 a.m., are escorted to the Rubber Room by security, and stay until 2:50 p.m. Beginning this fall, the Rubber Rooms will be eliminated and the personnel who have been accused of incompetence or wrongdoing will “perform administrative duties or be sent home if they are deemed a threat to students.” Transgressions range from excessive tardiness to sexual harassment of students. Editor’s note: some of these teachers have been in the program for as long as 10 years. The cost to taxpayers is \$10 million a year. Teachers who are sent home will no longer collect a paycheck.

Research Finds Vouchers Boost High School Graduation Rates, *Education News*: A study by University of Arkansas researcher, Patrick Wolf, found that students in Washington, D.C. who used federally-funded vouchers to attend private schools were more likely to graduate than those who did not. The impact of the voucher program on student achievement was less clear. “Overall, test-score gains from the program were not statistically significant at conventional levels in either reading or math.” According to Wolf, “In the area of education, the statistics indicate that how far you go is more important than how much you know, and D.C. students went further with the assistance of a school voucher.” The report focused on outcomes Congress required the researchers to evaluate. They included graduation, achievement, and satisfaction and safety ratings. “Parents rated their child’s schools safer and were more satisfied with them if offered a scholarship, while the program had no impact on student reports of school safety and satisfaction.” Congress voted to end the program last year.

The Last American Skill, by Bill Costello, *MakingMinds-Matter.com*: Research published by Newsweek in an article called “The Creativity Crisis” shows that creativity is declining in the United States for the first time. Allowed to continue, the country’s economic and national security will be at risk. The Torrance Test of Creative Thinking has been used in the US for 50 years; the recent results indicate that creativity scores in the US began to decline in 1990 after having risen for decades, and they continue to decline significantly. Six possible solutions are: 1. Invest more in higher education; 2. Create more programs that encourage creativity; 3. Teach creativity at all education levels; 4. Establish a national innovation system; 5. Allow more skilled immigrants to become permanent residents; 6. Provide tax incentives that reward creative efforts.

International

UNITED KINGDOM

Too Much Homework and Television Leaves Just One Hour a Day for 'Children to be Children', *DailyMail.co.uk*

co.uk: A poll of 2,000 parents with children under age 13 suggests that homework, extra lessons, after-school clubs and television are all preventing youngsters from enjoying playtime. 51% said children were under too much pressure, 20% believe their children don't have enough time to just be children, 11% believe their lives are too structured, and 66% said homework, extra lessons, and after-school activities leave too little time left to play. The poll was commissioned by The British Toy and Hobby Association (BTHA) and Play England.

FRANCE

From British lecturer Peter Gumbel attacks French education culture by Kim Willsher www.guardian.co.uk:

A British teacher at one of the leading universities in Paris has produced an extraordinary indictment of France's admired schools. In his new book *On Achève Bien les Ecoliers? (They Shoot Schoolchildren, Don't They?)*, Peter Gumbel attacks a classroom culture that brands students "worthless" and that he says is counterproductive and contrary to France's republican ideals. "Why is France the only country in the world that discourages children because of what they cannot do, rather than encouraging them to do what they can?" Gumbel writes. "I believe France is missing a key element of what's wrong with the school system, an element that is immediately apparent to any foreigner who comes into contact with it: the harshness of the classroom culture. It's a culture you can sum up as *T'es nul* (You're worthless). You hear these words all the time in France." According to studies, more than six out of 10 French schoolchildren complain of being anxious, four in 10 have difficulty sleeping, and more than two in 10 have a stomach or headache at least once a week. "These studies show that, while French children score quite highly in European studies on their ability and performance, when asked they rate themselves below countries with low levels of literacy," he said. "So even when they have the ability, their self-esteem has been knocked out of them." Philippe Meirieu, a professor in education science, admitted: "Our way of testing and evaluating [pupils] discourages creativity and the personal involvement of the pupils. This is the cause of the relative passivity they show and that Peter Gumbel deplores."

CHINA

From Fewer Students Sit College Entrance Exam in

China, by Chen Jia, *China Daily*: The decreasing birth rate and the rising popularity of overseas studies have combined to drag the number of candidates for this year's make-or-break college entrance exam below 10 million - for the first time since 2007. A total of 9.57 million, mostly high school graduates, are sitting for the three-day exam, 650,000 less than last year. It is the second straight year of decrease, according to the Ministry of Education. The peak was in 2008, when 10.53 million sat the exam. The decreasing number of college entrance exam candidates has intensified competition among Chinese universities to lure the best brains. Top universities are attracting students who score high in the exam with financial rewards.

Premier Wen Says Rote Learning Must Go by Ben

Blanchard, Reuters: Chinese schools have to get their students to be creative and think for themselves, Premier Wen Jiabao told officials, in reference to the rote-learning deeply ingrained in the national education system. Students in China perform well in exams and tests in which they are required to memorize answers, but rate less well in creativity and critical thinking, hampering the country's ambitions to move its economy up the value chain. "Students don't only need knowledge; they have to learn how to act, to use their brains," Wen told a meeting on July 13 in a lengthy speech carried by the official Xinhua news agency on Tuesday. "We must encourage students to think independently, freely express themselves, get them to believe in themselves, protect and stimulate their imagination and creativity," Wen said. China's ruling Communist Party keeps a tight grip on what can be taught in schools and allows no dissent on sensitive subjects like Taiwan and Tibet, suggesting any change in policy would be hard to enact and fraught with difficulties. Wen did not suggest how Chinese schools were supposed to alter their teaching methods to encourage freer thinking, but said education reform was vital if the country was to get rich. ●



Book Reviews

Touch in Schools: A Revolutionary Strategy for Replacing Bullying with Respect and for Reducing Violence

by Sylvie Héту and Mia Elmstätér

Montreal: Ur Publications, 2010

www.Lulu.com

REVIEWED BY MARY LEUE

The importance of touch has always been understood by human beings, yet many cultures including our own remain unchanged in their highly suspicious attitude toward touch as an element in educational and other programs for children. I suspect this may be, at least partly, because such programs are organized and led by adults *for*, rather than *with* children - and most adults connected with education and care-giving seem to have a very hard time mentally distinguishing touch from sexuality, in an era in which news of sexual predation is always popular. That's really too bad. In his foreword to Sylvie Héту's and Mia Elmstätér's new book, *Touch in Schools*, Joseph Chilton Pearce cites an item from two decades of research by the Institute of HeartMath as follows:

... stunning and extensive research graphs show the "electricity of touch" which is eminently applicable to those aspects of child-and-school covered here. When people touch each other in simple gestures of friendliness, the electro-magnetic fields produced by their brains go into synchronous coherence with the e-m fields of their hearts. The overlapping of two such coherent fields strengthens the coherent orderliness of both persons' heartbrain systems, moving them toward a unity of mind, heart, and body integral to learning and creativity, and is the very fabric of social bonding. In this state of heart-brain coherency, relationships are silently established and strengthened, new learning can take place without stress, a feeling of calm can prevail which profoundly affects people of all ages. ...

Sylvie Héту and Mia Elmstätér have both been Instructors in IAIM, the International Association of Infant Massage, for many years, and have been Instructor Trainers since the 1980s. As members of the Education Committee they educate Instructors and train Trainers globally. Together and independently they have created films and programs to support parent educators, teachers and older children, as well as parents and babies. Thus, their new book comes

already credentialized, as it were - which is fortunate for the possibility of their message receiving attention among child-serving agencies of all sorts - perhaps, even, a few public schools, where their process is so greatly needed.

Their program - MISP, the Massage In Schools Program - being demonstrated graphically in this book has already been adopted in some twenty countries and/or territories on every continent, as the authors proclaim proudly on a final summary page in the book.

The book, then, is easily credentialized, which is wonderful. But even more wonderful is the book itself. Starting with the design of the book's covers and extending throughout, this book is an absolute charmer! The authors employ photographs on literally almost every other page - images of children being massaged or massaging other children - children of all ages, all colors and racial origins, in all sorts of settings. The joy, the serenity on the faces of these children is a confirmation of the value of peer massage that sinks in a lot deeper than an essay on the subject ever would! That might not be an asset for all books that have been published with the object of influencing the beliefs of school personnel and/or parents, but I suspect this one is likely to be the exception that breaks all such rules!

In this case, one picture IS worth a thousand words - and 51 pictures (the number of illustrations in the book plus the cover image!) are worth all the gold in Fort Knox! I can't see how many officials, teachers or parents could possibly counter - let alone refute the "argument" they carry - of the visual impact of that accumulated visual massage!

The other ingredient in this book that sinks in way beyond the mere visual dimension the in its impact is the use by the authors of children's handprints throughout the book that carry the critical opinions of the "research population" - the kids! Here are a few samples: "After massage, my teacher doesn't yell at me." Boy, aged 10. "I feel cosy, cheerful and warm." Girl, aged 6. "Since we've been doing peer massage, everyone takes better care of our school, we don't leave rubbish around, and we are proud of our school." Boy, aged 12. "Massage makes me behave better." Boy aged 10. "I give my mum massage at home. She says I'm very good and she really likes it." Girl, aged 7. "I never knew I could give and receive at the same time." Boy aged 8.

Topics covered in the section headings are such things as

Part One: Philosophy

Part Two: Putting the Truth on the Table

Part Three: The Massage in Schools Programme

Part Four: For All the Best Reasons

Part Five: Making It Happen ... Applications

There is ample information in this book concerning implementation of the MISP program, plus a reference to studies that have been conducted on the effects of this program on schools and so on that have already introduced it. Such information is available on the MISP website at www.messageinschool.com.

There just weren't any questions I thought I needed answers to that weren't included in this book. And that's saying a great deal, because I read it initially with a skeptical eye, thinking, well, that's a great idea, but, thinking of the wide-spread fear of taboo-breaking among adults where anything unorthodox in school is concerned, how would they ever get anyone to accept their program as a real program in a real school?

The authors do not fail to bring together data like the current violence exploding in schools or the ubiquitousness of playground bullying of children against younger or weaker ones. The subtitle: "A revolutionary strategy for replacing bullying with respect and for reducing violence" sounds a clarion call for a long-needed reform in schools that has been by-passed for far too long! My final judgment is that well, if *anyone*, any *program*, any *book* can sway the policy-makers of school programs, this is the one that might do it!

What Really Matters

by David H. Albert and Joyce Reed

Toronto: Natural Life Books, 2010

www.naturallifebooks.com/books/index.htm

REVIEWED BY BRENDA ROSE

There, on the cover, it says, clear as can be: "Two veteran homeschooling advocates!" This book is by homeschoolers so naturally it's for homeschoolers, right? Aren't all books by homeschoolers, especially homeschooling advocates, about homeschooling? Well, actually not, as the variety of books written by David Albert in the past has shown. And this book has stories of homeschoolers, it's true, but there are also stories of school children and classrooms and college and teachers and so much more. It's what these two homeschooling advocates discuss that's important – learning. What learning is *really* all about. And that encompasses much more than schools or teachers or classrooms or even homeschooling. It encompasses life. As Joyce writes in the opening chapter, "There is no separation between learning and living. . . Life is just the curriculum. Learning is our path through it." She and David then proceed to take us on a journey, through their memories and past experiences, into the present, possibly even "to infinity and beyond." This is a journey of life and living—lives that share, lives that rejoice, lives that are rich with the richness that comes from relationships, experiences, and adventure.

Written as a dialogue between the two of them, this book gives each the opportunity to share reminiscences, thoughts and ideas, then gives the other a chance to respond. They discuss their own educations, their children, and their lives. They carry the reader with them into philosophical discussions of beauty and love and the greater good, then into the mundane world of schoolish things like worksheets and hall passes. There is some talk of subjects such as math, reading, science, and art. They also delve into what David calls the "ugliness of school" – the part that society so often ignores, whether from ignorance or fear is unclear. And let me give a warning to the faint-hearted or slothful: The juxtaposition of so many views of life and society, from the lowest debasing of humanity to the grand possibilities of life lived holistically, splendidly, may send you whirling about in a glorious kaleidoscope of images, words, thoughts, and feelings until your head begins to spin. But spinning, as so many children will attest, is a lovely sensation!

David Albert and Joyce Reed do not hold back. They tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, at least as they believe it, from what they have seen and experienced and felt, and that is quite a lot and more than most people. They understand schools because they have been there, and they understand homeschooling because they have also been there. By sharing their lives with us they help us to see things as they see them, feel as they feel, and most of all to understand the importance of what they are saying.

Do I have any criticisms of the book? I have one, and that is the length. It is just too short. I read David's list of nine "elements of intelligence" and wanted to know more. I read right up to the end and then was left with questions unanswered. Joyce harkens back to Everett Reimer as she writes, "I think many people realize that our education system is broken, and that all the patching that has been tried in the past six or seven decades has made it into a very ugly mess indeed. No matter what our individual perspectives, we all understand that school as we have known it is dead. So what next?" What next indeed! I suggest you read this book and join the discussion, enrich the dialogue, then engage your family and friends and community.

This book is about homeschooling and so much more. It is written for homeschoolers, to offer them encouragement and help along the journey. It is written for others who care about the world and people and life, hopefully the business leaders, the government officials, the educators, the voters, the workers, and all who together make up society. Perhaps most importantly it is written for parents and children, people who are learning how to live together as a family, who may still have educational decisions ahead of them. To these I say, whether your family chooses public or private schooling, traditional or alternative schooling, homeschooling, unschooling, or non-schooling, as David so eloquently stated, "Remember that whatever is going on in school, at home you have the choice to make sure that love and listening are in no short supply. And, ultimately, that is all that really matters."

DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education

By Anya Kamenetz

White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2010

www.chelseagreen.com

REVIEWED BY RON MILLER

DIY U is an informative and provocative inquiry into the deficiencies of contemporary higher education and the many alternatives to traditional college learning that are proliferating today. Anya Kamenetz is a talented young (30) writer who gained much critical acclaim for her earlier investigative study *Generation Debt*. Here, she provides a comprehensive, well researched, and very thoughtful account of the history of higher education in the U.S. and the role it serves in the industrial economy, the politics of funding, ranking, and administering colleges, and the explosion of knowledge and learning opportunities produced by the Internet.

Kamenetz explores the tension between the increasing necessity to possess a college degree in order to find employment in the modern world, and the difficulty of access to higher education (only 30% of young people acquire a 4-year degree today). The cost of higher education has soared over the past few decades, leaving millions of students in debt (many to exploitative private lenders) and millions more without access at all. Traditional schools uphold their reputations by remaining selective rather than stretching to meet the growing need for degrees; the gap is only partially filled, Kamenetz points out, by community colleges and for-profit, online schools. Traditional colleges and universities tend to benefit middle and upper class students more than those who are working class or impoverished, maintaining rather than ameliorating class inequities.

“However,” Kamenetz writes, “as aspirations toward, and for, higher learning grow, the model of inexorably growing bureaucratic institutions of formal education is under extreme pressure.” She argues that “the ideal education is different for each individual, . . . taking place over a lifetime in multiple modes.” *DIY U* surveys the wide variety of informal, individualized learning opportunities that are being pioneered by “edupunks” (creators of open learning networks), “edupreneurs” (for-profit ventures), and many forms of online learning programs. The Internet “allows us to navigate ideas and accomplish tasks collectively without the restrictions of disciplines or hierarchies.” Higher education can be obtained much more efficiently, and much lower cost. Every student can pull together a “personal learning network” by tapping into search engines, social networking sites, blogs and email. “Yes,” says the author, “this kind of multichannel chatter divides your attention, but the overall effect [is] a kind of dazzlingly enhanced cognitive reality.”

At first glance, *DIY U* seems to belong to the literature of radical educational critique that has evolved since the

1960s—the writings that have helped inspire our educational alternatives movement. The cover image, showing a clenched fist holding a pencil, wearing a black wristband, explicitly evokes ‘60s-era student radicalism. The text quotes John Holt, Ivan Illich, and Paulo Freire, though only briefly. And the book’s publisher, Chelsea Green, generally puts out cutting edge work on cultural transformation. However, while Kamenetz does expose serious problems with higher education and endorses student-centered alternatives (and both these elements give the book much value), she does not seem to grasp the deeper moral, philosophical, or cultural analysis of modern schooling that we find in Holt, Illich, Freire or other truly radical critics. It is interesting to see how a perceptive and critical mainstream author comes close to what we in this countercultural movement have been saying for many years, but important to recognize the differences in emphasis.

To begin with, the students who were wearing black wristbands and armbands in the ‘60s, and the writers (like A.S. Neill, in addition to the others mentioned) who gave voice to their critique of schooling and universities, did not see education primarily as preparation for the job market; instead they harshly criticized the meaningless jobs and careers offered by industrial capitalism, and wanted to overhaul the entire society. While Kamenetz occasionally expresses discomfort with the unfairness and competitiveness of the system, she largely accepts the equation of education with vocational preparation and economic security. Admittedly, the economy is far less secure today than it was in the ‘60s, and she is genuinely concerned about the millions of young people who are economically and socially marginalized. She rightly calls for social policies, beyond expanding access to education, to “improve equality and prosperity.” But a truly radical critique, one that goes to the roots of educational and social problems, must look at the culture of corporate capitalism itself, and point the way toward more just, meaningful, and sustainable ways of earning our livelihoods.

One aspect of the modern worldview that is especially relevant to educational practice is what Theodore Roszak (the hugely insightful interpreter of the youth counterculture) called “the cult of information.” In several of his books, Roszak portrayed education as an existential, holistic encounter between young people and the world, precisely *not* simply a transfer of information or bits of knowledge.¹ Yet the technological revolution that Kamenetz celebrates for liberating learners from institutions is all about the efficient management and rapid transfer of information. From a holistic perspective (whether Roszak’s or those of many other thinkers—Dewey, Steiner, Krishnamurti, Parker Palmer, and so on), “dazzlingly enhanced cognitive reality” is a paltry substitute for genuine wisdom, deep understanding, or moral judgment.

In order to achieve cost efficiency and serve diverse (though all vocationally motivated) students, Kamenetz explicitly pulls apart the holistic quality of higher education, separating the social, cultural, artistic and political aspects of college life experience from the transfer of “knowledge” that

is presumed to be its most essential purpose. This can be done through computer screens and “personal learning networks” that glean bits of “cognitive reality” from Facebook and other random sources. The student radicals of the ‘60s sought to expand *consciousness*; the technological revolution provides access to *information*. The difference is crucial.

Kamenetz does not advocate the elimination of classrooms. She cites research showing that “hybrid” instruction (online combined with face-to-face meetings) is most effective, and acknowledges that “human beings get all kinds of benefits in motivation, creativity, and productivity from being around other living, breathing humans.” In other words, we are embodied, social creatures, not merely processors of information. And yet, reflecting the techno-faith of her generation, she then concludes hopefully that “over time, technology may get better at replicating the effects of proximity.” Really? This is a major redefinition of human nature, not to be accepted lightly. Are we whole, embodied beings who derive meaning from our experience in the world, or can we, in fact, get everything we need for our fulfillment through electronic images? Again, the difference is crucial.

What does “higher” education involve from a radical alternative perspective? How is the definition of higher education intertwined with the kinds of learning environments provided to younger students? How will the coming transition to a sustainable post-industrial culture redefine vocational preparation? There are no simple answers to such questions. Anya Kamenetz has shown us where conventional colleges and universities are falling short in our current society; it will take another, more boldly radical book to start exploring these deeper questions.

Note

1. See, in particular, the chapter “School: Letting Go, Letting Grow” in *Person/Planet: The Creative Disintegration of Industrial Society*. New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1978.

Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology

by Allan Collins and Richard Halverson
New York: Teachers College Press, 2009
www.teacherscollegepress.com

REVIEW ESSAY BY KIRSTEN OLSON

The revolution is here. Bring on the revolution!

In what may be one of the most balanced, clear-eyed descriptions of the educational revolution we are currently slashing through, Allan Collins’ and Richard Halverson’s *Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology* describes better than almost any recent book what the new world of education—as opposed to schooling—may look like in the future. This world—a flat, interactive, deeply-networked world—where kids all over the planet are figuring out what

they want to learn and how they want to learn it—is coming to look like the one homeschoolers and alternative schoolers have been creating for decades.

The book opens with scenes familiar to homeschoolers. Miguel and Rosa, a Latino couple in LA concerned about the negative cultural environment at their local elementary school, decide to homeschool their two girls using inexpensive laptops, neighborhood networks, and a curriculum devised by a Latino educational association. High school students get the credits and coursework they need from Colorado Online Learning or Florida Virtual School, without setting foot in a conventional high school building (hundreds of thousands of students are now doing this). Media Bridges, a community media center in Cincinnati, provides online media for the neighborhood and acts as a learning center and social justice incubator for children and adults of all ages.

Without personal vitriol or moral crusading, the authors lay out a straightforward, compelling case that we are involved in an educational transformation the likes of which we have not seen since the last educational revolt in the mid-nineteenth century, when Horace Mann rode horseback around New England proselytizing for common, compulsory schooling for all.

In essence, the authors say, the knowledge revolution is happening before our eyes, right now, whether we recognize it or not.

People around the world are taking their education out of school and into homes, libraries, internet cafes, workplaces where they can decide what they want to learn, when they want to learn, and how they want to learn. These stories challenge our traditional model of education as learning classrooms. These new learning niches use technologies to enable people of all ages to pursue learning on their own terms. (p. 3)

With clarity and attention to evidence, Collins and Halverson describe the *inevitability* of the new era, a revolution brought on by the invention of new tools. “[The internet] and computer...greatly extend the power of the ordinary mind in the same way the power tools of the Industrial Revolution extended the power of the ordinary body.” As personalized, customized, just-in-time, interactive education becomes the new model for learning, the decoupling of education from schooling transforms the landscape.

If a customized local learning network offers a viable alternative to the neighborhood elementary school; if high school students can get credit for coursework without attending high school; if exorbitantly expensive, four-year residential colleges and universities no longer guarantee high-status employment and advancement, then why are we in the game at all? The book describes how regular citizens, non-revolutionary folks, plain-thinking people just looking at their wallets, are increasingly wondering whether the hierarchical, batch processing, mass production, certified-at-school industrial model actually makes sense in our new world. Signs

of the revolution are everywhere, and cracks in the foundation of the mass production model of education grow more glaring every day. This book describes some of these fissures, and the steam rising from them, and nudges alternative schoolers to step up onto the scene with what they already know.

TENSIONS/CHANGES IN KNOWLEDGE

The decoupling of education from schooling—which is what the online world is doing—is nothing short of a crisis for conventional schools, which are built on models of *information scarcity* and their *legitimacy to certify knowing*. With our new networking tools, and broad access to information, who defines knowledge, how it is produced, and who is authorized to certify it, are increasingly up for grabs. (*Rethinking Education* describes a 15-year-old boy who becomes one of the most popular legal advisors at an online law site because of the clarity and straightforwardness of his answers to legal questions.) New ways of knowing, and new ways of demonstrating authority in knowing, are constantly emerging, and fluid, networked communities organized around interest pose a fundamental threat to classroom practice in the Industrial model. Fundamentally, *information abundance is the enemy of control*. With new tools come new assertions of independence from learners, who simply don't need old-fashioned command and control classrooms and teachers, and who are skeptical about the paradigms on which the hierarchical model is built.

Young people are becoming less and less willing to learn what somebody else thinks is best. They want to decide what is of value to them. They are beginning to demand that they decide what they need to learn. [Technological] enthusiasts believe that the ultimate effect of customization technologies will be to break the lockstep of school curricula. (p. 17)

As almost a third of Florida high school students currently enrolled in some kind of online learning demonstrates, formerly docile consumers will (and are) walking away from the old schoolhouse, no matter how attractively it is reconfigured, and no matter how classroom instruction is tarted up for more appeal.

What to do about this poses a terrible dilemma for teachers, one that comes up in every professional development session I run or every talk about schooling I'm involved in. What is the teacher's new role? How must the design of instruction be reconfigured? Will technology just go away, as some audiences say they hope, if we just ban cell phones from classrooms and get them to turn off their iPads? Not likely, this book suggests. Once again, in the conventional model, the teacher's authority came from knowing more than students, and filling them up with it. If the sheer amount of information available online doubles every two and a half days, as it does currently, few of us, especially teachers who have little time to devote to their own professional learning, can make exclusive or comprehensive knowledge claims.

Those dependent on the institution for employment

and a way of life—teachers, administrators, those inside the building, cannot help but react, often with panic, condemnation, and pain. As a participant at the AERO convention in June asked: “What will we do with all the teachers we don't need anymore? What are they going to do?” While *Rethinking Education* is quick to say that great teachers do much more than simply command and control and purvey knowledge, the problem of how the teaching profession redefines itself, and understands new lifeways and new definitions of the work, is increasingly the talk of forward-thinking practitioners.

Schools have repelled revolutions before, of course; their structures are especially designed for it. The K-12 institution of schooling is particularly robust, an accreted set of interlocking, self-sustaining practices, structures and beliefs that have managed to repulse incursions in the past. The typical responses to innovation in school have been to condemn the new technology (“kids online are wasting their brains”), to defang and co-opt it (“Tweet your way to classroom success!”); or to marginalize or “boutique” it (technology centers in comprehensive high schools)—all responses that can be witnessed in professional development sessions every day. But the profound cultural and social incompatibilities between the old world of knowledge and learning, and the pervasiveness and attractiveness of the online world, make simple co-opting or marginalization of technology impossible, *Rethinking Education* emphasizes.

So in a last gasp of empire, educational policy makers, state boards of education, teachers unions, and other authorizing bodies have responded to these threats by *tightening definitions of what they do*—ironically just as technology has OPENED the world to the learner. More rigid codifying of standardized bodies of knowledge, more intensive and punitive standardized testing, more arduous graduation requirements, and more insistence on school-based certification, are desperate responses by an imperiled institution, one that fears for the very heart of its legitimacy. “The standards movement can be seen as a conservative check on rampant customization,” this text notes.

Alliances between homeschoolers and technologists

Of course, homeschoolers, alternative schoolers and deschoolers have been educating outside of the mainstream, compulsory, monopolistic system for decades. *Rethinking Education* highlights the natural affinities between “technologists,” as this book calls them (those who are enthusiastic about the new ways the world is learning, and see its immense potential) and alternative schoolers. “Technology fits much more comfortably into the home environment than into the school environment,” as folks outside the institution know, and points the way to a broader and more politically-focused role for homeschoolers in a national education reform agenda. Much of what homeschoolers already know is being discovered by millions of others as they venture outside the classroom doors.

In a chapter called “The Seeds of a New System of Education,” the authors describe the incredible growth of

the homeschooling revolution, noting that the number had increased 29% in 4 years. More children are currently homeschooled in the U.S. than are enrolled in charter schools, and “children who are schooled at home score significantly better on standardized tests in every area.” Noting that home schooling is not just for the privileged or well heeled, the book sees the broad potential for homeschoolers to play a significant part in the transformation of mainstream education. “A possible future trend is for home schooling to become a mass movement if parents pool resources and begin to mix a variety of strategies for providing education.”

Who will benefit from the revolution? The authors don’t want to go on record too much about that, although at least they address this issue, unlike many technologists who can only see the upside of a new personalized learning era. They describe the differentials in access to technology that are deeply a part of American society, and the tendency towards commercialization and privatization of educational resources that ultimately tend to serve those who are already most privileged. They briefly unpack the vision of *wholly*

personalized learning, which may overemphasize careerism and individualism if not mindfully balanced, but given the highly competitive nature of most American classrooms, it is hard to see how serious a claim individualism is. (Also, the new vision of education rests on interactivity and finding and creating communities of interest.)

Read this book. It obviates the need to grind through many previous arguments about what is happening in education now, and is a platform to talk about what should happen next—what to do given the changing conditions for learning.

What are the new metaphors for schooling we need now? How can we create a new story about education that can help people in the business make the transition?

That’s what I’m thinking about now.

Kirsten also recommends this recent essay on homeschooling that deals with some of these issues: www.thedailyriff.com/2010/08/so-there-homeschooling-bites-back.php ●

A Stirring Manifesto for the Education Revolution

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Announcements



A program for children and adults called *Awareness Through the Body* (ATB) has found an enthusiastic reception among educators.

Developed by Joan Sala and Aloka Marti in Auroville, an international spiritual community in Southern India, *Awareness Through the Body* is a comprehensive sequence of exercises to raise awareness and enable individuals to become conscious of their own

perceptions and abilities so that they may become self-aware, self-directed people. The activities are creative and challenging but often fun as well. They combine both familiar and original approaches to develop concentration, focus, relaxation, a sense of accomplishment, well-being, and connection to self and others.

The sequential activities can be used as a complete curriculum in schools from kindergarten through high school, or various activities may be “borrowed” to enrich existing practices for classroom teachers, movement leaders, yoga and dance teachers, body workers, or therapists.

A series of groundbreaking workshops were offered in Vermont, New Hampshire, and New York in 2010. At various times in these workshops there were student teachers, classroom teachers, college professors, therapists, yoga and dance teachers, a musician, a nurse, and a gardener. Ages ranged from 22 to 80. Each spoke in his/her own way about how ATB could enrich their work and their own self-awareness. One participant said:

“It’s not just about coming alive to myself, to others, and to the elements, ATB is also about those surprise encounters with that still, inner place of joy and connection. Sharing what I learned has already had a noticeable impact on my students’ ability to concentrate and collaborate.”

New and follow-up workshops and consultations will be offered in the Northeast and on the West Coast in August and September, 2011. For questions or bookings, contact Margo MacLeod at margomacleod@gmail.com.

For more information on Awareness Through the Body and links to the YouTube Video and the ATB web site, check out: Matagiri.org/ATB.

The book *Awareness Through the Body* by Aloka Marti and Joan Sala provides a complete overview of the program, its history and philosophy, with activities described in detail and lavishly illustrated.

Announcements



The Intercultural Open University charitable education foundation for social change, established in 1981, has expanded to include post-doctoral programs. This truly unique Foundation has highly-credentialed volunteer faculty members from many countries who mentor learners in specialized research areas that address global issues. Under a faculty mentor's guidance every learner establishes an individualized curriculum relevant to their career and chosen area of specialization. The post-graduate program of study will be a one year program of individualized study and all graduates will be involved in the Foundation's new annual conference on social change.

The IOU Foundation's philosophy is based on providing outstanding self-directed, borders-free programs of study that truly engage the learner in the educational process. Those who study under an IOU Foundation mentor are highly motivated learners who want to achieve positive social change in communities across the globe.

IOU Foundation enables people around the world to conduct serious research in subject matters that are not always available at other institutes of higher education. For nearly thirty years, selected learners have studied under IOU's mentors to enhance their careers while tackling world issues such as human rights, peace, education and ecology.

IOU Foundation was created with the fundamental concept that education and research are crucial elements to solve global problems and that mentored studies devoted to social change should be accessible to everyone. IOU Foundation's programs are affordable and a limited number of scholarships are available.

The IOU Foundations faculty mentors consist of dedicated educators who have all devoted their lives to education and social change; each faculty member has more than 25 years of experience in distance education and learner-centered adult pedagogy. The faculty volunteers their time and expertise to learners who are committed to working for social change.

For more information, please visit www.ioufoundation.org.

PROGRESSIVE RESOURCES from RETHINKING SCHOOLS



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Rethinking Schools is the country's leading grassroots education magazine. It highlights the best social justice teaching in K-12 schools and articulates an alternative vision of schooling, grounded in the classroom and daily lives of students. Every issue is filled with honesty and hope. Four issues a year.

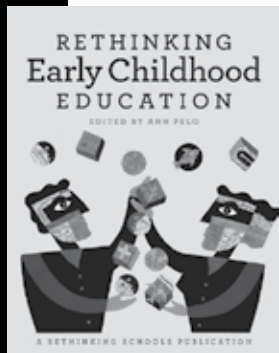
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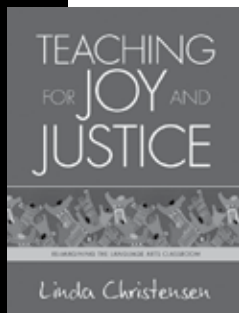


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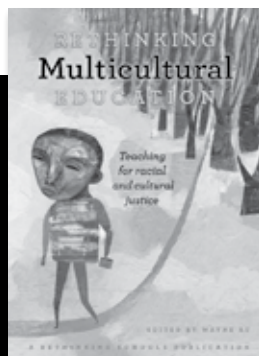
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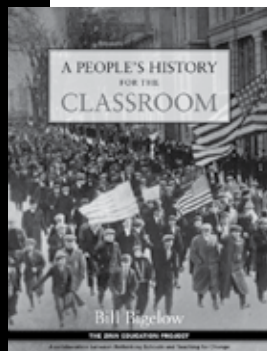
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