

EDUCATION REVOLUTION

The Magazine of Educational Alternatives



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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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THE MAGAZINE OF EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

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Being There

By JERRY MINTZ

From February 6th to 11th I was brought to Puerto Rico for some intense consultations by Nuestra Escuela. While I was there I visited six schools in 4 1/2 days and met with committees that are organizing the International Democratic Education Conference in 2012. I helped start democratic process in two schools, started three table tennis programs and gave a public talk. It was a very busy week! I told my host, Justo Méndez Arámburu, I wanted to work hard and he took me seriously. People were waiting for me at 9 PM for my first meeting before I had even put my bags in the hotel room!

The first school I visited was the original Nuestra Escuela started by Justo, now in Caguas, just outside the capital of San Juan. The school is for dropouts and students who had previously had great difficulty in school. It is a private school but



contracts with the government to educate the students. Justo's school has been so successful that the education department has given Justo four other schools that they gave up on.

The inspiration to Justo to start the school was his daughter who was killed in a car accident at the age of 15. In a dream about her, she said they had to start a school for students who had few options. Although others in his family were in education he had not previously been in the field. So he started the school several years ago with his wife as his partner. Graduation, unlike other schools, is on his daughter's birthday in September. The students know why.

The first thing that struck me was the routine Justo and

the staff have of hugging every student and staff member. It creates a very positive tone for the day. I started out by having a long discussion with students and staff from the school. They emphasized how important the initial three-day retreat is for new students. Leadership students participate along with staff members. I then gave a table tennis workshop, teaching about 20 students in two hours to start off their table tennis program. I then met with staff members and had other meetings.

On the second day I went to an even rougher area to see another branch of the school in Loiza, the first school the government had given up on and handed to Justo. It is a major gang area. Justo told me that he made the mistake of starting off with the students from one gang in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Then one day a student from one gang planned to come over to kill a student in the other one. When Justo heard about this he closed the school. The students begged him to reopen it, but he said he wouldn't unless the group was mixed and the gangs pledged to leave the school alone. An agreement was made with the gangs and he reopened the school.

At that school I met with a dozen students. In our discussion they decided that they wanted to establish democratic process at the school. So we went through the establishment of the process over the next hour. Justo, who was at the meeting, was amazed. He said he had tried to establish that process before but without success. The first meetings have already taken place.

Justo then asked me to go through the same process with the school in Caguas. As a result of this they have established a democratic meeting. We have the meeting on DVD for people would like to see it.

On Wednesday I visited a public Montessori school, established by an amazing woman who wanted to make this kind of learner centered education available to poor children. They are doing a great job but are struggling with the imposition of standardized testing which is antithetical to their philosophy. This brought home to me the need for us to establish our own alternative standards. I did get to meet the founder who is working on establishing 20 more similar programs. I told her about the Consortium schools in New York State that have been able to have the standardized tests waived. She said she would follow up on that.

On Thursday I visited Espacio A, a democratic free school which was started by one of our school starters, Ginny Marxuach. At Espacio A, we showed the Summerhill Drama, and I helped establish a table tennis program, teaching about half the students. In the evening we had a very nice turnout for

FROM THE

Editor's Desk

BY RON MILLER

Welcome to this double-length issue of *Education Revolution*. When I announced my decision to retire a few months ago, my AERO colleagues Jerry Mintz and Isaac Graves suggested that we close this chapter of the magazine's life with a grand finale. So the magazine is packed with provocative writings from many of the leading voices in the educational alternatives community, as well as those of young activists (including Isaac himself) and other good folks doing much good work. This issue contains persuasive accounts of the education revolution that is unfolding.

Education Revolution will continue, at least online. It will remain the leading forum for ideas and practices that significantly challenge the assumptions underlying modern schooling. You will find inspiration in these pages. And you will find more inspiration, plus great conversations, new friends, and a lot of fun, at AERO's annual conference in Portland this August. Don't miss it!

This article marks the end of my career as an educational researcher and activist. When my first article, "Montessori in the Humanist Tradition," came out in 1981, I hoped to contribute something to a new literature of educational critique, which I and a few colleagues called "holistic" education, that built on the visionary insights of the radical education and human potential movements of the 1960s. Now, nine books and dozens of articles later, I have said everything that I am able to about this topic, and I find that I am not interested in writing about anything else. The time has come to move on.

I hope my work has provided encouragement and a foundation for a new generation of educational revolutionaries to address the huge challenges that face our increasingly complex and troubled world. I am encouraged by the new efforts and organizations that are rising among younger activists. The vision of a human-scale, life-affirming, democratic, ecologically rooted and open-hearted education remains alive. I hope this next generation of visionaries will remember that you stand on the shoulders of moral heroes who were not afraid to question the educational and cultural assumptions of their times—Rousseau and Pestalozzi, Froebel and Alcott, Montessori and Steiner, Dewey, Ferrer, Holt—and so many others. I hope you will study and remain rooted in this brilliant legacy.

By the time you are reading this I will be the proprietor of Shiretown Books, a charming little shop in the delightful Vermont town of Woodstock. I am looking forward to the life of a small town shopkeeper and businessperson. It will call on different skills and sides of my personality than the work I have been doing all my adult life. I'm very eager to settle into the community life of the town and work on local issues with my neighbors. Still, as you might imagine, the store will carry an unusually wide (and radical) selection of thought-provoking books about education, and will also specialize in some of my other interests, such as sustainability and cultural critique. I'll even carry a few anarchist titles. I don't know yet whether such books will actually sell, but it'll be fun to try, and I hope to make the store a "salon" for book discussions, poetry slams, and other enlivening events. So I'm not completely giving up the work of sharing good ideas and stimulating great conversations. Stop by if you're ever in the area.

Well, I guess that's it. The time has come to say farewell. Thank you to all my colleagues and friends, readers and students, teachers and parents who have made my profession over these last thirty years so rich and rewarding. Peace.

a talk I gave about the free school philosophy and the long term results with students who experience it. I also demonstrated organic curriculum with the students.

While I was in Puerto Rico I also had several meetings with students and other adults who are organizing the International Democratic Education Conference, which we will help with, in March, 2012. It looks like it will be a wonderful gathering.

It was eye opening being in a place that is a territory of the United States but not a state. There is a wide split in Puerto Rico about whether it should remain as a commonwealth, become a state, or even an independent country. Nevertheless, the students and schools were still subject to much of the miseducation that afflicts so much of the mainland, such as imposition of No Child Left Behind concepts. On the other

hand, it was great to see that the education department could recognize the significance of the Nuestra Escuela program and throw their support behind it. Technically the school is private with contracts with the education department, which pays on a per student basis.

Also, the city of Caguas, where Nuestra Escuela is located, and its mayor have decided to work with Yaacov Hecht of Israel, founder of the Democratic School of Hadera, to expand these concepts in their city. The IDEC will be held in one of its downtown buildings at no charge.

I had a great, hard-working time. I am amazed at the work Justo and his team is doing. I think it is unique and should be emulated. I look forward to going back for the IDEC next March, if not before. ●

The World Becomes What You Teach

BY ZOE WEIL

What is education for? Is it to gain knowledge? To learn to think clearly and creatively? To produce mathematically, technologically, scientifically, and verbally literate people? Members of a workforce? Engaged citizens who shape democracy? Entrepreneurs and business leaders? Healthcare workers, architects, artists, engineers, legislators, and other professionals? Contributing members of society? Solutionaries for a peaceful, sustainable, and humane world?

Education should have as its goals all of the above, yet in our society, “solutionaries for a better world” is strangely absent from our educational discourse. I believe it should be the centerpiece.

While we continue to fight wars; allow a billion people around the world to go hungry; watch slavery escalate across the globe; pollute our water, land, and air; cause our climate to change in potentially catastrophic ways; institutionally

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abuse and kill billions of sentient animals in our farming, fur, and research industries; destroy habitat causing massive loss of biodiversity, and overpopulate our world with more people than the earth can possibly sustain over time, educational goals remain relatively stagnant. We’ve added IT to our course offerings and some global studies and social justice electives but really not much more. Yet, in today’s world, we need global citizens ready and able to address entrenched, dangerous, and escalating problems through new and positive economic, political, technological, industrial, and energy systems.

There is a name for education that seeks to successfully confront the profoundly important and interconnected issues of human rights, environmental preservation, animal protection and related subjects of media, globalization, and

economics – it’s called humane education. Humane education invites students to examine their daily decisions, future work and careers, community, and engagement through democracy and changemaking with this question in mind: *How can I, through all my life choices, do the most good and the least harm to myself, other people, other species, and the environment?* This is the MOGO (most good) principle, and it represents an underlying value that enables learners to become active participants in the creation of a sustainable and humane world.

Picture this: A group of middle school students learning about modern-day solutionaries in school, watching clips from *The New Heroes* PBS series that profiles such people as Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Mohammad Yunus, who drastically reduced poverty in Bangladesh through microcredit and is now dramatically reducing it throughout the world through the advent of the social businesses he promotes. After learning about the possibilities of these new economic ideas, the students come up with community-based solutions to poverty in their own regions.

Or this: A group of high school students taking an issue presented by the media and government only in either/or terms (e.g. either we save the Northern spotted owl and loggers lose their jobs *or* we protect loggers’ rights and the owls become extinct), and dividing into four groups: two representing the “sides” offered by the media and politicians, one that is charged with listening to these perspectives and then with coming up with solutions that serve both groups, and a final one whose task is to engage the community, industry, and government in implementing the suggested solutions.

Or this: A group of parents, teachers, administrators, and students at an elementary school figuring out how to make their school green and humane at all levels. Together, these constituents address the building, grounds, energy sources, and cafeteria, so that through a truly exciting and deeply educational endeavor, they either build or retrofit their school so that it is solar powered, sunlight-filled, with productive gardens and compost systems, non-toxic, non-wasteful, and even regenerative through its solar contribution to the grid and its profitable sales of foods from the garden to the community.

Or this: A group of learners becoming adept at analyzing media messages, fully able to distinguish fact from opinion and recognize the ways in which they are being manipulated by both commercial messages and biased news sources. But even more, these learners are then able to examine the hidden

impacts of products, foods, clothes, and technologies on other people, other species, and the environment, becoming so skilled at such analysis that they cannot look at any object without pausing to reflect upon and assess its effects on themselves and others in an effort to make wiser and more humane decisions and create new, healthy systems of production.

These scenarios are the fruits of humane education. Humane education enables learners to understand the effects of their choices and draw connections between something as simple as buying a Fiji water bottle and global warming, resource depletion, and chemical contamination, or between a new pair of athletic shoes and human rights violations in sweatshops, animal cruelty associated with the leather and testing of the dyes, and environmental degradation connected to the resources involved in everything from the raw materials through production to distribution. This might seem like a potentially negative approach until you watch the students come up with practical, ethical, and viable solutions to each of the problems they encounter in current systems of production and distribution.

Quality humane education includes four elements that enable learners to become enthusiastic solutionaries for a better world. They are:

- ❶ Offering accurate information about the challenges of our times so students have the knowledge on which to base solutions
- ❷ Inspiring the 3 Cs: curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking so learners have the capacity to derive innovative solutions
- ❸ Instilling the 3 Rs: reverence, respect, and responsibility so learners have the motivation to seek solutions
- ❹ Providing positive ideas and tools for problem-solving so learners will come up with meaningful solutions

Because traditional public schools are required to follow standardized curricula and meet federal and state learning results, and because humane education has yet to become the foundation of government-funded schooling (though it hopefully will), it is currently difficult for public schools to *fully* incorporate humane education into the existing curricula and subject categories. There are plenty of teachers and administrators who bring humane education to public schools, and more are beginning to do so all the time, but they face obstacles to humane education's complete integration into schooling.

While it's my personal goal that all teachers will become humane educators who infuse relevant global issues into their subjects, and all public schools will offer humane education courses taught by trained humane educators (who are hired in the same numbers as math teachers), until we see leaders in Washington, DC and in state governments who recognize the need for more relevant public education for a healthier world, non-traditional schools are in the unique position to become leaders and groundbreakers in humane education.



Students at Adventurijn, a democratic school in the Netherlands, advocated for a national Peace Day, and brought their idea to their nation's Parliament.

Non-traditional schools have always been models for new educational initiatives and approaches, whether in the practice of innovative pedagogies, the building of green facilities, and the development of holistic curricula. We now need a movement among non-traditional schools to create the models of humane education that all schools and school districts will be eager to emulate. It is these humane education schools that will graduate deeply knowledgeable, wise, creative, compassionate solutionaries who relish the roles they will play in the unfolding of a better world.

Because the world becomes what you teach, it's crucial to teach for a better world. We need teachers and schools to make living sustainably and peaceably the very purpose of education. The only way to make this happen is to commit to bringing the many challenges of our time directly into the classroom where their relevancy to each subject is made clear, and the goal becomes creative solutions that work for all. When we do this, we enliven our subjects with meaning and purpose and hold our students accountable for the future we will co-create.

Zoe Weil is the president of the Institute for Humane Education (IHE), which offers a distance-learning M.Ed. degree and certificate in humane education. IHE also offers workshops throughout the U.S. and Canada and online courses for teachers, parents, and the general public. Zoe is the author of *The Power and Promise of Humane Education*, Nautilus Silver Medal Winner *Most Good, Least Harm: A Simple Principle for a Better World and Meaningful Life*, *Above All, Be Kind*, and *Claude and Medea*, the Moonbeam gold medal award winner for juvenile fiction, about kids inspired by an eccentric teacher to be clandestine activists righting wrongs wherever they see them. ●

At the Least, Do No Harm

A Polemic Against Schooling

BY JOHN TAYLOR GATTO

On October 16, 1959, the eminent historian Bernard Bailyn told a specialized audience of professional historians at Williamsburg, Virginia, that forced institutional schooling didn't evolve naturally from American roots. It was a foreign intrusion, imposed by such stealth means that its sudden appearance "troubled high-minded people." That was over half a century ago and Bailyn was hardly a conspiracy nut, so if the authorities you rely upon to oversee the contents of your mind haven't brought this interesting piece of information to your attention by now, it's likely they'd rather you not know it.

But if your high school, your college, your rabbi or priest, Fox, PBS, and the *New York Times* have led you to accept a narrative of schooling which doesn't include the possibility its operation isn't in your own best interests, it might be possible that that other important things you hold as fact are only falsehoods, too, carefully conditioned into your head. When you are compelled to rely on corporate agents for vital information, which among these can you trust?

Aristotle would tell you what a school will not. You live in a sea of lies, misinformation, half-truths, spin, and narratives created by special interests to suit their own agenda—the only trustworthy witness is yourself. And that only if you've paid the price to develop a critical, dialectical mind, have become accustomed to the discipline of close, patient observation, and are fully aware of every coherent argument on all sides of an issue—something that Fox, PBS, the *New York Times*, Harvard, or the Pope won't bother to provide you because all have an axe to grind. John Stuart Mill taught this explicitly, too.

Beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic, a critical mind, one not easily fooled, one unimpressed by expertise, one fully aware of what really matters and what does not, is the principal factor differentiating education from schooling. In its nature, schooling as you know it would not be possible if its clientele was aware of this. Can you understand now why Aristotle, Mill, and many other powerful minds of history are banished from institutional schooling?

Think of the harm school causes by restricting access to powerful texts at the very moment the consciousness is most able to benefit from them. Texts are more than books. They include all systems of information that contain potential to change profoundly the way you encounter the world and organize its variety. Orthodox schooling aims to create orthodoxy and so is hostile to history's most powerful texts

because they stimulate intellectual power and imagination. Both are poisons to orthodoxy.

Who controls the texts you access owns a big part of your mind. With books, you needn't be *forbidden* to read the dangerous ones; the easiest censorship is to prevent you from learning they exist—as you've been prevented from hearing about Vico, Hobbes, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, and any

Aristotle would tell you what a school will not. You live in a sea of lies, misinformation, half-truths, spin, and narratives created by special interests to suit their own agenda—the only trustworthy witness is yourself.

number of others in a serious way. Why should you read them if nobody bothers to tell you what might be gained from doing so?

And that isn't the only strategy to achieve the same end. A school system can hire teachers who themselves are unaware of, or unsympathetic to, potent texts. Or school policy might keep reading ability so basic and fact-driven that readers are lost in the subtleties of sophisticated prose, lost to its allusions, and even to its vocabulary.

Short answer tests are an efficient tool to keep the mind from thinking about the big picture. By grounding the texts in bits and pieces of disconnected information they prevent the kind of global concentration needed to understand ideas in context from developing. World-class universities like Oxford and Cambridge have held the short answer test in contempt for nearly a century.

Then there is the disinformation approach. Have you ever heard teachers who, in their humanity, acknowledge that great books are dull, but weakly defend them as something good for you? Have you heard adults or peers maintain that reading a summary from an encyclopedia, or from another source of abstracts, is just as good? There are many ways to cut the young off from the food growing intellects need to become

powerful, and to replace it with junk food like talking choo-choo trains.

The most important primary texts of them all are the books of mother and father, which school curtails prematurely. No scholar reads a Dead Sea scroll more scrupulously than children watch parents without seeming to. In this surveillance mode, bits of behavior are stored for reflection and imitation. When kids lose the keen edge off watching parents, it's because they've concluded wordlessly that what's there to be learned has already been learned. School artificially accelerates the arrival of that moment because it isn't possible to cut or stretch a student to fit policy assumptions until parents have been marginalized. The great problem schools have with black and Latino parents is that young and old in those families too frequently cling to one another, defend one another, withhold trust from those clerks on the state payroll we call schoolteachers.

Whole class instruction, the standard in force schooling arrangements, is a profound contradiction of the uniqueness family instruction confers. It contradicts the traditions of particular peoples, the dazzling clue of our unique fingerprints, and the breathtaking scientific discovery of the singular DNA code. DNA. One of a kind. Have you heard?

No two people are alike. School's job is to impose conformity drills for many years so that the superficial appearance of similarity can be used to control human behavior through the fiction of averages. Averages don't exist, of course; nobody is average in spite of the billions of "C"s conferred in classrooms every year. If you gamble based on averages you lose your shirt. Why should you teach that way?

The answer if you're a schoolteacher is that they order you to teach that way. From a school perspective people are more like interchangeable machine parts—a centralized hierarchically organized society of winners and losers requires us to treat them that way even if they aren't that way. School can't allow truth to impede progress. It has a mission to perform and that mission is to school, with all that implies. The extended synthetic family it aspires to become demands uniformity while dynamic families incline to singularity. That's why they aren't welcome in school.

Real families offer a safe field in which to practice self-expression but nothing about the classroom is safe; rather, it's relentlessly competitive, playing havoc with the safety required by the reserved, the shy, and the retiring. It should strike you as more than weird that school fails to acknowledge the essential nature of self-expression, self-confidence, and attractive personal style, skill at making friends, and other qualities essential to opportunity in any field, while stressing obedience, immobility, memorizing lists, and other methods of disconnection from full humanity.

In whose interest is such a bad bargain struck? As things stand, school is compelled to steal family time without offering compensation for the vital training lost. And if belonging to families good or bad supplies resources which school cannot, then belonging to a home place—not to the world at large—represents another high-value resource schools ignore. In drawing value from a home place what



Alternative schools demonstrate convincingly that education can liberate rather than suppress individuality and self-fulfillment. Photo courtesy of Denise Felice, Palm Beach Photographic Centre.

matters most isn't whether it's Palm Beach or Harlem, but whether you have a home place at all. To possess a turf of your own you have to embrace it uncritically, bestow loyalty on it, explore it, and learn from it all the time.

A home place without some dangers to confront isn't nearly as effective as a teacher, because to arrive at independent maturity without having faced your deepest fears, including your own mortality, is to enter adulthood seriously crippled, with a cowardly spirit certain to limit your opportunities.

If you think of places as training grounds—as real educational resources—then beloved places offer the warm familiarity which allows you to concentrate on building your natural strength, repairing your natural weaknesses. But strange places like schools, full of confusing tensions, distractions, unfathomable agendas, undermine concentration.

Those who lack beloved home places because they move too often to commit deeply—as is often true of military kids or the children of ambitious executives—frequently develop false, shallow personalities which adapt to any occasion at hand. The behavioral exterior may be quite charming, but the appearance of sincerity is always feigned, skin-deep, phony. These are people almost constitutionally unable to keep promises or commit deeply, even to themselves. And yet, it's in the nature of schooling to ignore the value of place,

to encourage infinite adaptability, to sing praises for the chameleon.

Throughout the 20th century, a secular religion of placelessness circulated across America out of the rapidly spreading university network. Sometimes called “universalism,” the religion preached that local realities are inconsequential, that progress lay in discovering universal principles. The new

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academic discipline of Sociology was a prominent outcropping of the universalism gospel—all behavior can be evaluated against derivations from theoretical averages. Universalism was an enemy of the particular. It was committed to standardized

thought, dress, behavior, and decision making; committed to steadily increasing centralization of command exercised globally; the nuisances of national borders, national languages, and free will choices are targeted by universalists wherever found as obstacles for elimination.

Universalism holds that peoples and places are pretty much the same. To know one is to know all. Here is a different perspective from which to see the fatal mistake institutional schooling makes in teaching that our uniqueness matters far less than our commonality. Trapped in school pens like fish, semi-homeless, semi-placeless children struggle against odds to find an identity to wear. To offer universal identity as a solution to their agony is to commit a crime against humanity, I think, by locking most of the student-victims into a mediocrity they might otherwise avoid, condemned to be Stepford people. ●

John Taylor Gatto was a public school teacher in New York City for 30 years. In March, 2008, the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard credited him with inventing the expression “dumbing us down” to describe the hidden function of institutional schooling, and spreading it around the world through international lectures (and through his 1992 book of that title).

This article is an excerpt from a draft of the introduction to John Taylor Gatto's next book, *The Guerilla Curriculum*.

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“You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train”¹

Reflecting on What It Means to Educate Students to
Become Democratic, Global Citizens in the 21st Century

BY DAVE LEHMAN

From Cairo, Egypt to Madison, Wisconsin, the people share their voice. I currently am living in Wisconsin, working with two public elementary schools in Racine, and the four high schools in Madison, helping the principals and teachers of these schools to share their work and hear all voices in addressing issues of equity and diversity, helping them to become true learning communities working more democratically. Recently I was among the thousands of demonstrators descending on the State Capitol – nurses, sewage cleaners, fire-fighters, university students and professors, and teachers from throughout Wisconsin – gathered to voice our protest to the wholesale elimination of the bargaining rights of all state employees. But, for me, the most inspiring part was the students – elementary through high school, who, day after day, linked arms, filled the streets around the Capitol, and voiced their opinions – young democratic citizens in action!

With this as a backdrop, I would like to consider some ideas about what it means to educate our young people to become democratic, global citizens, and to provide a brief description of how one school has been trying to do this for the past thirty-six years. I begin with Carl Glickman² talking about “closing the participation gap”:

“There are strong indicators that participatory democracy in America is in a state of grave decline.... Connections to civic and religious groups are fewer; people are less connected to family and friends; more Americans live alone; people are less informed about public affairs; and trust in key institutions is low. Disturbingly, the decline in all these categories has been most pronounced among people with the least education.”

Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Conner³ notes that “... the average American is more likely to know the five members of the Simpsons cartoon family than the five freedoms of the First Amendment.” In a similar vein, Paul Woodruff⁴ is of the opinion that “the United States seems to be moving away from ideal democracy” and asks, “Are Americans ready for democracy?”

Justice O’Conner goes on to remind us that

“...our public education system [is] the only institution in the United States that engages 90 percent of the next generation of adults, is governed by public authority, and has the explicit mission to prepare people for the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship.... Public education is a vitally important solution to preserving an independent judiciary and maintaining a robust constitutional democracy.... And for each student who is educated in intellectually engaging ways, we will gain the greatest strength a democratic society must have: an informed and engaged citizen able to think freely and independently and contribute to society as a whole.”

“Democratic education is not a neutral project, but one that tries to predispose citizens to principled reasoning and just ways of being with one another.”

Walter C. Parker

Similarly, Walter C. Parker⁵, states that educating democratic, global citizens is up to us because

“educators are the primary stewards of democracy. They must do what no one else in society has to do: intentionally specify the democratic ideal sufficiently to make it a reasonably distinct curriculum target, one that will justify selecting from the universe of possibilities a manageable set of subject matters, materials, instructional methods, modes of classroom interaction, and school experiences.”

This introduction leads to the following essential question from Tony Wagner⁶: **“What, then, does it mean in today’s world to be an active and informed citizen, and how does a democratic society best educate for citizenship?”**

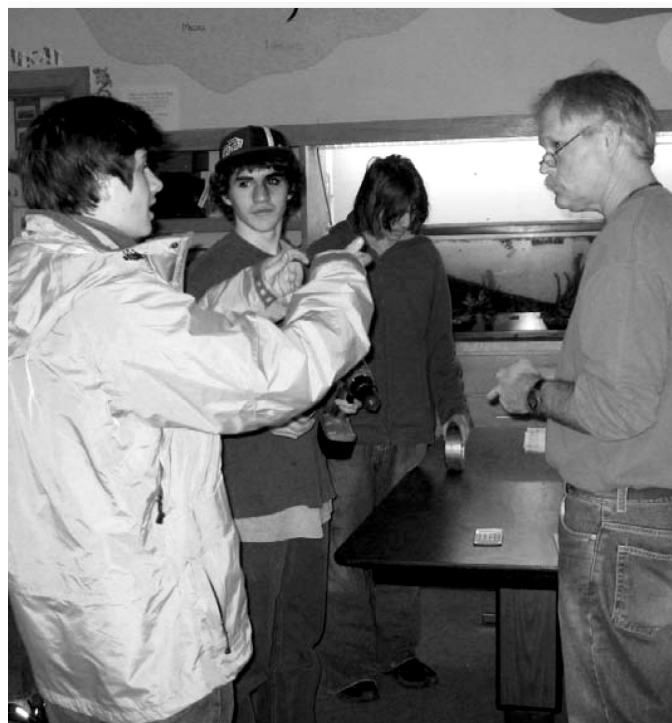
In answering this question, Parker⁷ makes the key observation that “Democratic living is not given in nature, like gold or water. It is a social construct, like a skyscraper, school playground, or new idea.... Democratic citizens are constructs, too.” People have to be taught how to be democratic, global citizens. In this regard, Chinese born Yong Zhao⁸, comments that “to live in the increasingly globalized world, citizens need to be able to competently negotiate cultural differences and manage multiple identities, comfortably interact with people from different cultures, and confidently move across cultures as well as the virtual and physical world.” From here he goes on to describe three crucially important skills and attitudes

- ❶ a global perspective – a deep understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all human beings;
- ❷ a set of global skills – cultural knowledge and linguistic abilities that enable them to appreciate and respect other cultures and people and interact with other people; and
- ❸ global attitudes – emotional and psychological capacities to manage the anxiety and complexity of living in a globalized world.

Walter Parker⁹ sees the following five assertions as crucial for educating democratic citizens:

“First, democratic education is not a neutral project, but one that tries to predispose citizens to principled reasoning and just ways of being with one another. Second, educators need simultaneously to engage in multicultural education and citizenship education. Third, the diversity that schools contain makes extraordinarily fertile soil for democratic education. Schooling is the first sustained public experience for children, and it affords a rich opportunity to nurture public virtue – for example, kindness and tolerance and the disposition and skills to dialogue across difference.

Fourth, this dialogue plays an essential and vital role in democratic education, moral development, and public policy. In a diverse society, dialogue is the avenue of choice to enlightened action. Fifth, the access/inclusion problem that we (still) face today is one of extending democratic education to students who typically are not afforded it....Democratic education is for everyone, and this certainly includes those who (for now) have the most power, for they are in a position to do the most harm when they lack virtue. Just as multicultural education is not only for ‘others,’ neither is citizenship education.”



Students participate in designing their own learning at Lehman Alternative Community School.

Parker¹⁰ alerts us to this caution: “Without democratic enlightenment, participation cannot be trusted: the freedom marchers of the Civil Rights movement ‘participated,’ but so did Hitler’s thugs and so did (and does) the Ku Klux Klan. Participation without democratic enlightenment can be worse than apathy.” With that warning in mind, I return to our initial question as posed by Tony Wagner: What does it mean to be an active and informed citizen and how does a democratic society best educate for citizenship?

We answer this question at the Lehman Alternative Community School¹¹—a public middle school and high school in Ithaca, New York in its 36th year – beginning with our Mission Statement: *To educate students to be respectful and responsible global citizens in the 21st Century.* We then ask, what should our high school graduates be able to do, know and value upon completing high school? Each potential graduate answers this LACS Essential Question by preparing and presenting the following final graduation exhibitions:

- ❶ A Team Interdisciplinary Graduation Project, involving three or more seniors, who make a public presentation, “take a stand,” on an issue that matters to them.
- ❷ An Individual Senior Project, which is also presented publicly at the LACS high school graduation ceremony
- ❸ A Graduation Portfolio which contains demonstrations of proficiency in our “Seven Essentials of a Global Citizen.” The first of these seven Essentials gets at the heart of what it means at LACS to be global citizens, by becoming:

I. Community Participants and Leaders who:

- A. work and live cooperatively with others

To demonstrate that they are becoming democratic citizens, students participate, and frequently come to co-lead with a staff member, meetings of “Family Groups” (groups of 10-15 students with a staff Family Group Leader/Advisor, where students work on social, group skills, participating in decision-making, and problem-solving in a kind of “laboratory in civics”) and Committees (affinity groups, decision-making groups, maintenance groups, issue groups, including a student court, and peer mediation group), each of which meets twice a week. Then, there are the weekly All School Town Meetings led by students, where students and staff gather to discuss school issues and make decisions based on a Decision Making Document, created jointly by students and staff, which spells out the areas of decision making purview for the school community. In addition, students document and reflect on doing at least sixty hours of community service.

The other six “Essentials of a Global Citizen,” we believe, lead our graduates to embody Parker’s “*democratic enlightenment*.” These Essentials are demonstrated through portfolios of work and various presentations to classes, to others within the school, and to outside evaluators. Global citizens need to be:

II. Communicators who:

- A. read, write, listen, and speak in English
- B. listen, speak, read and write in a language other than English
- C. use the language of math
- D. use the personal computer

III. Critical thinkers and problem solvers who:

- A. act on and reflect an anti-bias attitude
- B. use different methods of critical thinking and problem-solving
- C. use the processes of conflict resolution

IV. Designers, producers, and performers who:

- pursue concentrated study in one art area: theatre, music, movement, visual arts, media, or technology

V. Researchers with a historical and multicultural perspective who understand:

- A. U. S. history and the process of democratic government
- B. global studies and multiculturalism
- C. local, national, and global economics

VI. Contributors to sustaining the natural environment who know the key concepts of physical, biological, and chemical components of the natural environment, and understand their interrelatedness

VII. Healthy persons who demonstrate:

- A. physical fitness, group participation, and the meeting of personal physical challenges; and
- B. an understanding of concepts of human sexuality and current major health issues (presently, AIDS and substance use and abuse)

This is how one school – the Lehman Alternative Community School – strives to graduate students who will become active, not neutral, democratic, global citizens. It’s a school with a living tradition of a culture of caring, inclusion, equity and social justice, where students continually demonstrate, not only to the staff and the school community, but to the public, what it means to be educated for full citizenship in a democratic society. ●

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9. Parker, pgs. xvii-xviii.
10. Parker, pg. xx
11. For more information about the Lehman Alternative Community School go to www.icsd.k12.ny.us/schools/secondary/LehmanSchool.

Dave Lehman has long been active in the educational alternatives movement, as the principal of Alternative Community School in Ithaca, NY from 1974 to 2004 (the school is now named in his honor), school change and curriculum consultant, conference speaker, author of numerous articles, and editor, in the early 1970s, of the *New Schools Exchange Newsletter*. In addition to working with AERO, he has been involved with the Coalition of Essential Schools, the National School Reform Faculty, and other activist networks.



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Bringing Democracy to Education

BY ISAAC GRAVES

INTRODUCTION

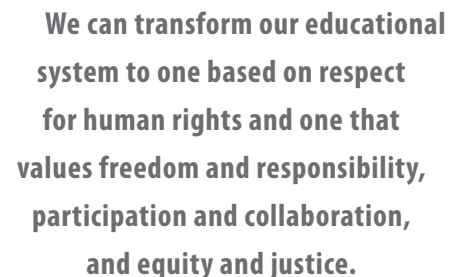
As a leader within the alternative and democratic education community, I am frequently asked the question, “What is democratic education?” When I was a teenager, and at that time a recent graduate of a democratic school, I used to give a fairly dogmatic and uninviting response which included a bullet point list of requirements to be “democratic.” Surprisingly, this was not an effective method to talk about what I was most passionate about. This style of communication disappeared as I grew up and my experience as an organizer and educator evolved. I learned to approach individuals humbly, listen genuinely, internalize and digest, respond gently and with care, share what is true for me, and not feel as though I needed to provide answers and solutions. I learned what I try to teach the young people in my life today—how to meaningfully and authentically communicate and be in community with others while honoring one’s own unique self and needs. When asked, “What is democratic education?” today, I am excited to share my current answer as well as shed light on what other voices in the wider education community have to say which are gleaned from hours of interviews I recently conducted.

WHAT IS DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION?

The Institute for Democratic Education in America (IDEA) defines democratic education as “learning that equips every human being to participate fully in a healthy democracy.” This definition excites me. It is brilliant in its simplicity, yet still profound. Before unfolding what the word “learning” means in that definition, I want to address democracy and public education since it affects most of the young people in the United States. In all public schools, democracy is taught, so wouldn’t that make them all democratic by IDEA’s definition? It’s important to note that while democracy is taught, students are not given an opportunity to authentically practice democracy. This means having the opportunity to make *real* decisions in a community with concrete outcomes—not voting in student council on recommendations that are then given to an adult authority figure to say yes or no to. As Shilpa Jain pointed out to me, “If we don’t experience democracy in our schools, how could we ever expect to end up with democracy in the ‘real’ world?”

We must balance our intellectual and historical understanding of democracy with opportunities for practice and spaces to learn about the nuances that take place when

you must collectively come to a decision that affects your entire community. Ira Shor was very clear in explaining to me that “Democracy is not a speech given by an official to reassure us that we live in a democracy. Democracy is an everyday practice.” Bill Ayers reiterated this point when he went on to express the importance of “learning *from* democracy, not *about* democracy” which reminds me of a great scene in a documentary called *Democratic Schools*. In the documentary students are learning about butterflies through a chalk diagram on the board when a butterfly flies by the window. One student stops paying attention and is consumed with watching the butterfly’s every motion. The teacher pulls



We can transform our educational system to one based on respect for human rights and one that values freedom and responsibility, participation and collaboration, and equity and justice.

the shade down, scolds the student and reminds her that they’re trying to learn about butterflies (not from them).

Shilpa Jain says that it is hard to use the phrase “democratic education” because of how each of those words have become so corrupted and diluted from their true meanings. Sonia Nieto added that democratic education “means practicing what we preach. It means putting into effect all of those noble ideals of equality and fair play.” She continued with a challenge to “look seriously at the policies and practices we have in place and ask how those further or not a democratic vision. Do high stakes tests for example further the ideals of democracy? What about the curriculum?” Her answer to each question was “not currently.”

After attending a democratic school and teaching high school and preschool in a democratic environment, I’ve come to settle on a personal definition of what democratic education is which unfolds the word “learner” in IDEA’s definition. I see democratic education as learning that is

meaningful, relevant, joyous, engaging, and empowering. I see it as learning rooted in respect for children and young people who actively participate in their education journey. It is learning grounded in love and community. I've come to realize democratic education is more than any one learning environment, such as a school, and more than one feature, such as voting, but an approach to life and learning and an approach to interacting with all members of your community in a way that respects, honors, and listens authentically to each voice within it. For me, this is the practice of real democracy, which can manifest in many different ways based on you, your community, and your learning environment.

WHAT MUST EDUCATION BE TO BECOME DEMOCRATIC?

Voices from around the country

Melia Dicker, Communications Director, Institute for Democratic Education in America

"...it must be accessible for everyone. It means every human being has access to quality education and has their basic needs met. This means addressing social issues such as poverty and others that affect people's ability to learn. For education to be democratic, every person must be valued, listened to, and participate actively in their learning and in decision-making processes."

Sonia Nieto, Professor Emerita of Language, Literacy, and Culture, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

"...in terms of students, it means having more of a voice in what happens in classrooms and schools and being able to practice democracy and not just read about it. And not only through student councils, but through taking action and being able to learn the tools of democracy like writing a letter, starting a petition, and learning how to start a boycott."

Bill Ayers, Co-author of *Teaching the Taboo: Courage and Imagination in the Classroom*

"A democratic education to me is something based in the culture of democracy and based on some radical propositions. A democratic education begins with the foundational belief that every human being is of incalculable value. It moves from there to a second core belief: the fullest development of each of us is the condition for the full development of all of us. And the reverse of that is true as well: the fullest development of all is the condition for the full development of each. Democratic education is... learning from the world not about the world, learning from nature not about nature, learning from the questions we can generate, and learning from democracy not about democracy."

Ira Shor, Teaches writing to undergraduates at City University of NY while also directing dissertations there in the Graduate Center. He experiments with critical literacy in his classes

"For there to be democracy in education, we have to experience and practice it every day. In schools, that would mean that all the stakeholders would need to be involved-

-teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Teachers would have a collaborative relationship with the school administration, parents would be partners in the democratic management of the school, and students would participate in the making of their education and give critical feedback on the quality of their experience."

Justo Méndez Arámburu, Executive Director of Nuestra Escuela

"...it has to be meaningful; it has to give value to the context in which each member of the community has come to be a person; it has to create an environment where every person and every opinion will be respected while providing the tools to build consensus... Life is community and community is life. They each manifest in themselves and it all happens in through education. Democratic education is the way of the community expressing its life and life developing in community."

Maria Luz Torre, Organizer of Parent Voices SF

"For education to be democratic it must be an holistic education, not proscriptive, and not limited to the four walls of the classroom. It must be developmentally and culturally appropriate and it must be participatory. It helps a child develop a love for learning and critical thinking. It must also be equitable so that all have access to it."

Pedro Noguera, Professor of Education, NYU

Education is democratic when it is inclusive because it is acceptable to a wide variety of people. It's democratic because it recognizes that students are not passive beings but have to be engaged as critical thinkers. It's democratic because parents need to be treated as active participants in the educational process and not merely as consumers of it. And it's democratic because it has a sense of public accountability and a commitment to addressing broader public and social goals.

Lella Gandini, U.S. Liaison for the Dissemination of the Reggio Emilia Approach

"Democratic education is where people listen to one another and where children are the source of learning for teachers. What I have experienced in my decades of teaching is that there is a way to help children learn and at the same time listen to them. Teachers do not feel diminished, and they construct with the children and respect them, which is something important to learn."

Shilpa Jain, Learning Activist, Shikshantar

"...it means people having a say in their own learning process. From a very young age, we need to play a role in deciding what and how we will be learning. This, of course, must happen in a community, through dialogue with others. It's not an overly individualized, my-way-or-the-highway kind of learning. Rather, it's that I am able to dictate some of the path of my own learning, based on my interests, my questions, curiosities, and natural instincts, and that this happens in a community of people and is related to the context I live in. Learning in community means that there will be give



Isaac Graves reads to children during an afternoon at The Patchwork School in Louisville, CO.

and take, compromise, and sometimes sacrifice. But, it's not always bad for me, because there's a benefit in relationship, there's a reciprocity, a mutuality, an interdependence, which ultimately serves my well-being and the well-being of all."

CONCLUSION

Our schools and learning environments are not immune to the most pressing social issues of today. For a few examples, we can simply look to the inequities faced in how schools are funded, how test scores and graduation rates are intrinsically tied to race, class, and gender, and how grading, ranking, and competition in our schools have left students feeling worthless, stressed, depressed, and isolated. It is imperative that we respond to these social issues by creating a generation of "solutionaries" as Zoe Weil, from the Institute for Humane Education, said in a recent TEDx talk, and this begins with our young people.

As such, we need to address these issues within our learning environments by creating authentic opportunities for young people to experience the power and possibilities democracy provides in loving and supportive community. We must and can provide an education that is meaningful, relevant, joyous, engaging, and empowering. We can transform our educational system to one based on respect for

human rights and one that values freedom and responsibility, participation and collaboration, and equity and justice. To create a more just, sustainable and democracy world, we *need* democratic education.

For more information on democratic education, please visit: <http://www.educationrevolution.org> and <http://www.democraticeducation.org> ●

Isaac Graves began his journey in democratic education at a very young age at The Free School (Albany, NY), the longest running inner-city democratic school in the United States. Since graduating, he has worked extensively in the field as an educator, speaker, and organizer.

He co-founded and taught at Harriet Tubman Democratic High School, serves on the board of and teaches part-time at The Patchwork School in Louisville, Colorado, blogs for the Institute for Democratic Education in America, and serves as the outreach coordinator for the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO). Isaac founded and for the past eight years has served as the lead organizer for AERO's annual conference, the United States' largest alternative education conference. Currently, Isaac is writing a book, *Community-Based Education: The Necessary Interdependence Between Life and Learning* set to be published in 2012.

John Holt's Eureka Moment

The Birth of the Home Education Movement—1972—Mexico

BY TUNYA AUDAIN

I remember people ardently ranting and raging against oppressive compulsory schooling. About poverty and the thwarted aspirations of the poor. About the escalation of schooling as destructive as the escalation of weapons. About school and medical systems showing declining results as more money was being poured in.

These were the heady discussions students and academics enjoyed at CIDOC (Center for Intercultural Documentation) in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in the Spring and Summer of 1972. Deinstitutionalization was the main theme.

I had just completed teacher training at Ottawa Teachers College and was there (two young daughters in tow) to listen to the lectures of Ivan Illich who had just published the book *Deschooling Society*. His ideas had already spread via

"Unquestionably, the educational process will gain from the deschooling of society even though this demand sounds to many schoolmen like treason to the enlightenment. But it is enlightenment itself that is now being snuffed out in the schools." Ivan Illich

many articles in magazines and book reviews. (His complete book is available, all short 116 pages, for reading online or downloading at <http://www.davidtinapple.com/illich/>)

If you dare comprehend the book, you will be a different person.

"School is obligatory and becomes schooling for schooling's sake: an enforced stay in the company of teachers."

"Unquestionably, the educational process will gain from the deschooling of society even though this demand sounds to many schoolmen like treason to the enlightenment. But it is enlightenment itself that is now being snuffed out in the schools."

"Two centuries ago the United States led the world in a movement to disestablish the monopoly of a single church. Now we need the constitutional disestablishment of the monopoly of the school."

These words were spoken way before we had online education. If people pride themselves now on the advances of this technological magic, just read the chapter of 40 years ago, "Learning Webs."

"Everywhere the hidden curriculum of schooling initiates the citizen to the myth that bureaucracies guided by scientific knowledge are efficient and benevolent. ... a huge professional apparatus of educators and buildings which in fact restricts the public's chances for learning ... It should use modern technology to make free speech, free assembly, and a free press truly universal and, therefore, fully educational."

Illich was a priest, a philosopher, an inspired prophet. He laced his talks with Greek myths and poetry. When we heard his version of how Prometheus tricked the gods out of their monopoly of fire, we tried to project that concept to health, education, welfare and other fields monopolized by the state.

Neither Illich nor any of our discussions ever conceived of the notion of home education as a movement, though we frequently talked about home care of the sick. It was not till I had a discussion with John Holt, the author of such books as *How Children Learn* and *How Children Fail* that the movement toward home education started to percolate.

So, one morning, beneath a heavily-laden mango tree from which John partook, this was our conversation:

John: Now that you have completed teacher training, where are you going to teach?

Tunya: I didn't get training to teach in a school. I took it to teach my own children.

John: Is it legal?

Tunya: Yes, I've studied the legislations. It's possible across North America and England. Parents are to cause their children to obtain an education at a school or elsewhere. It's this "elsewhere" clause that allows home education.

John: Well, at least you're now qualified to teach them.

Tunya: I also found out that you don't need a qualification to teach your own children.

John: What about socialization? They'll be different.

Tunya: Kids should be individuals. They'll have plenty of friends from the groups we belong to. Besides, there is a lot of negative socialization in school ...

John: What if they want to go to college?

Tunya: They will probably be strong, independent learners and will have an advantage to transfer in ...

John: SMART CITY!

5 years later John Holt, who already had a large mailing list of people interested in education reform, started the home education movement with his newsletter, *Growing without Schooling*, and the rest is history ...

Meanwhile, Dr. Raymond Moore was spreading the word amongst his mainly Christian audience (The Learning Home) and paid frequent visits to Vancouver, Canada, especially when we held Home Learning Fairs in the 80's.

Besides jump-starting the home education movement John Holt had the wisdom and foresight to caution against the threats and antagonisms that arise from people splitting off from conventional schooling. This quote is worth posting front and center on our bulletin boards, and deserves a lot of pondering in our present day:

"Today freedom has different enemies. It must be fought for in different ways. It will take very different qualities of mind and heart to save it."

The link to my article which helped validate the movement in Canada is here: Home Education – The Third Option (1987) <http://education-advisory.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/home-education-third-option.pdf>
See also: Parent Rights and Their Children's Education (1977) <http://genuine-education-reform-today.org/2010/04/06/parent-rights-and-their-childrens-education/> ●

Tunya Audain is a grandmother with 4 active school-aged grandchildren. She attended at CIDOC, Mexico in '71-72 when Ivan Illich and other educators such as John Holt discussed the principles of deinstitutionalization and deschooling. In the 80s she helped organize Home Learning Fairs in Vancouver, Canada. She has been a libertarian candidate in school board, provincial and federal elections because, she says: "It provides a brief platform from which to talk about self-government." She is active on education reform blogs and is writing a handbook on education.



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Alternative Education in Turkey

BY EYLEM KORKMAZ AND SIDIKA ÇALIŞKAN KAYAÖZ

Before talking about alternative education in Turkey, it is helpful to look at Turkey's educational reality and the factors that affect this reality.

According to 2009 census data, Turkey's population is approximately 72.5 million and more than 16 million of them are children in preschool and students in primary and secondary education. Adding the number of university students to these statistics, it becomes obvious that education is a matter of concern for Turkey and has a direct effect on every citizen.

The people who believe that "education is an act of freedom" have a fundamental question about why educational alternatives are not discussed. One of the main reasons for this goes back to the years of the foundation of the Republic of Turkey.

Through the "Code on Reunification of Education" dated 1924, all educational institutions were gathered under the umbrella of the Ministry of National Education. The reasoning of this law says that the individuals of a nation can only be educated in one single form; otherwise there wouldn't be any united feelings, ideas and solidarity. Thus, an understanding of "state" centered education was legally and conceptually formulated in the foundation of the Republic of Turkey.¹

At the Basic Code on National Education, 1973, the attributes of the "person" to be achieved through education have been clarified and described in the law. Accordingly, three goals were set as "good person," "producer person," and "good citizen." In accordance with these targets, a statist and nationalist education system has been maintained. Today, the "positivist" education system of Turkey is trying to integrate to the neo-liberal education policies and European Union education models by basing its philosophical foundations on "pragmatism."²

On the other hand, the deficiencies of Turkey's communities on the way to becoming civilian; the individual and social mindset of submission over power; the conservative social set up; the lack of awareness among the families and authoritarian state structure which doesn't allow establishment of independent schools free from state control seems to delay the debates on alternative education and consequently, the practice of alternative education.³ Under these circumstances, alternative education, unfortunately could not take place in the education agenda until recently, and

only a few application were encountered in this scope.

It is worth mentioning that two significant models have been implemented in Turkey for years in terms of the prior-mentioned reactions. Although they do not completely qualify as alternative education models, "BILAR" and "Free University" may be considered as examples of alternatives to government run educational institutions. The first one, BILAR, was founded by socialist author Aziz Nesin, where academics expelled from government universities could give lectures. Describing BILAR, Aziz Nesin stated: "We conceive BILAR as a 'people's university'... It is a university which a low-educated laborer, a housewife or a university student could attend..."⁴

Unfortunately, BILAR did not survive much. Free University was founded in 1992. Fikret Başkaya, Director of Free University describes it in these words: "... We don't aim to replace present universities - because we don't issue diplomas, we don't give exams. We don't have a profession-oriented education. Our studies aim to criticize and abolish these things. We criticize the official history and ideology that infects the educational system..."⁵ Free University, which has two centers, doesn't have any financial support from any institution and collects only a symbolic fee from



the students. Free University is an important example and has reached thousands of students since 1992.

When we reach the years after 2000, alternative education started to move onto the education agenda. The first step taken for this change was the 1st Symposium on Alternative Education in 2005, which managed to gather together people interested in alternative education from around Turkey.

In this symposium, various education models such as Montessori, Waldorf, deschooling, home education, democratic schools, free schools and critical pedagogy were presented with the consideration that alternative education covers an integrated point of view. 300 people from different cities met together; international experts shared their thoughts and experiences and seeds were placed for institutional works needed for alternative education in Turkey.

One of the most important outcomes was to set up the *alternative education work group*. This work group turned into the Alternative Education Association in 2007. The Alternative Education Association has organized workshops and panels on Montessori, Waldorf, critical pedagogy and democratic education. The Association tried to convey alternative education at every possible platform like newspapers, journals, TV channels, and conferences. Its activities and relations achieved between different people gradually started to deliver results.

People who were interested in Waldorf pedagogy and some members of the Alternative Education Association decided to start and work under another initiative. This initiative turned into an association in 2009 called Friends of Arts of Education Association. In this time period, its most important works were organizing a two day symposium and starting a two year long Waldorf Pedagogy Kindergarten Teacher Training Seminar together with German and Turkish partners. They have organized parent information meetings in different cities. Parent and educator groups formed after these meetings, and are now working on planning a Waldorf kindergarten in 2011 together with the Association. At the same time this initiative has organized conferences and published various booklets about Waldorf pedagogy.⁶

When evaluating the alternative education picture in Turkey in terms of democratic schools, we did not see any effort and attempt to constitute a democratic school until 2009. Although democratic education is the most voiced concept by Turkish dissidents, it could not go further than a few democratic principles forced into mainstream education. However, recent developments are hopeful. At the end of 2009, a few people started to meet together to discuss democratic schools. After about two months of meetings, an invitation letter spread to people who share values and principles to come to meetings around the idea of opening a democratic school. In this way, Another School is Possible Initiative⁷ (*Başka Bir Okul Mümkün*) came into being, consisting of parents, children, and educators. This initiative's concrete objective is to open a

primary school. The BBOM initiative seeks to implement a project involving alternative management, financial, and educational models and sustainability.

Montessori education is by far the most commonly known and studied method of alternative education. It was first tried in the 1970s. Under Güler Yücel's leadership, a Montessori education rehabilitation center was founded. Montessori preschools were founded in the 1990's but most closed down later on. After the 1st Alternative Education Symposium, a series of seminars took place in accordance with the propositions by pro-Montessori educators in Turkey and Cheryl Ferreira. All participants, both the academics and teachers, wanted to specialize in this

The reasoning of this law says that the individuals of a nation can only be educated in one single form; otherwise there wouldn't be any united feelings, ideas and solidarity. Thus, an understanding of "state" centered education was legally and conceptually formulated in the foundation of the Republic of Turkey.

subject. So, preliminarily a course for training Montessori assistant teachers organized in collaboration with the Association Montessori International.⁸ After the symposium, workshops related with Montessori were formed outside the Association, and some of the earlier works started to result in a concrete product. A Montessori kindergarten opened through parent initiative and again an association was established, affiliated with this kindergarten, named Montessori and Development of Inclusive Education Association⁹ (*Montessori ve Kaynaştırma Eğitimi Geliştirme Derneği*). In the last three years, the number of Montessori kindergartens has started to increase. Montessori implementation classes are opened in two universities and we are observing that the number of academic articles has increased in this subject. Again it is planned to start a Teacher Diploma Training Program.

Providing readers with publications that will give an integrated point of view on the alternative education movement is our future task to tackle.¹⁰ In accordance with our purpose, we have published the *E-Journal of Alternative Education*¹¹ both in Turkish and English since the beginning of 2010. However, it was not possible to provide periodic publication until now.

Work that has been done in alternative education over the last five years is not adequate for Turkey but it is promising for the future. In order to speed up this process, it is important to be thinking of getting to the implementation dimension from theoretical discussions.

Getting through this phase is only possible, once at the local scale, then on a global scale, with the solidarity between people who set their heart on alternative education. ●

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Eylem Korkmaz is one of the founding members and a member of the management board of Alternative Education Association. She has an MA from the Educational Administration and Supervision Program. She is currently studying for her PhD in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at Yıldız Technical University in İstanbul. She has published a book on the Montessori Method and writings on alternative education in various journals. e-mail: eylemkorkmaz@hotmail.com.

Sidika Çalışkan Kayaöz is one of the directors of the management board of Alternative Education Association. She studied Educational Sciences and graduated as Pedagogue. Near to the graduation she became interested in human behaviors in corporations and studied Business Administration in London and worked many years in the international companies in the field of Market Research and Marketing Communication. She quit working in 2006 and since then has worked on educational projects. She is one of the founding Member of Friends of Art of Education Association which aims at introducing Waldorf Pedagogy in Turkey. e-mail: sidika_caliskan@yahoo.co.uk.

A Stirring Manifesto for the Education Revolution

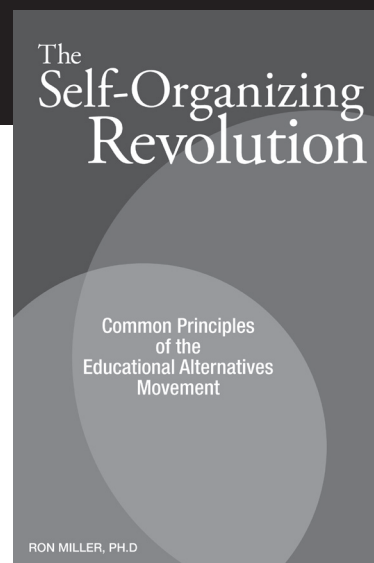
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Parents are People, Too

BY MICHELE BEACH

Have you ever had one of those moments where you were attempting to be the most reasonable, democratic parent possible, but your mind was just screaming "... because I said so, that's why!" I had one of those recently when my five-year-old son and I were disagreeing about where he should build his fort. He wanted to put blankets on the kitchen table, but I thought the basement would be a better location. I told him that I thought it would be in the way for dinner; he replied that we could just eat in the living room on the coffee table. I said that no, we didn't use the living room for that; he countered by reminding me that we did, in fact, eat in the living room for a party just a few weeks prior.

And that's when I started to feel impatient. Why are his arguments so well thought out? Why doesn't he just follow the rules? Why does he think he should have a right to stand here and argue with me about this? Why is he so good at questioning the status quo? Oh... right. This is what I *wanted* him to do. I have actually encouraged him to think for himself, and to be his own person, and to question authority. So, I concede that he does have a good point, and after much more discussion we finally decide that building a fort in the kitchen and then moving it before dinner is acceptable to both of us.

Interactions such as these constantly remind me that trying to parent in a democratic way, just like trying to teach at a democratic school, can be very hard. It is very time-consuming, it can be emotionally draining, and society is probably not going to pat you on the back for raising an activist. In fact, you'll probably get many questions along the way such as: "How will he ever get a job if he can't obey the rules?" or "How will he ever learn math if no one makes him?" You may at times even ask yourself some of these same questions. And as far as I can tell, there is no one handbook that will give you all of the answers. Many parents, especially those who have sought out democratic education for their children, are determined to parent in a very intentional way. This is extremely noble, but at times can cause parents to forget about themselves. You are an important part of your child's world, and for the *whole* family to be happy, *you* must be happy, too.

We sometimes need to be reminded that parents also have ideas, and even rights! When playing with your children, you shouldn't feel obligated to play exclusively by your child's rules, or to always let them win, or to play only their games. When parents allow play to be too child-directed, the child doesn't get a realistic picture of how the world works. I have heard so many parents say, "I just don't think I can stand to play princess one more time!" Well, you don't have to. If you give your child the impression that someone will always be interested in their game and will always follow their lead, they

will be quite disappointed when they encounter peers who are also accustomed to getting their own way.

It is much healthier for you *and* your child if you voice your honest opinion at least part of the time. Besides ensuring that you are not powerless in the relationship, you are modeling ways to negotiate and compromise that children will pick up on and be able to use in their own social world. It is amazing to hear your four-year-old say to her friend, "okay you can be the queen this time and I'll be the queen next time" rather than running off screaming, "no one wants to play with me!" Learning to adapt their play to include others' ideas is well worth the momentary irritation your child may show when you don't play by their rules. Plus, the playtime experience may prove to be more fun for both of you.

Parents also make mistakes. We are human, too. It is okay, and can even be beneficial, for your child to see you mess up. I was so proud of my son the other day when his

Many parents, especially those who have sought out democratic education for their children, are determined to parent in a very intentional way. This is extremely noble, but at times can cause parents to forget about themselves.

teacher told me that he said to her, after she sang the wrong words to the song in morning meeting, that "mistakes are okay because it takes a lot of practice to get something right, and adults make mistakes, too." Being able to see that an adult has made a mistake and then even comfort them is such a wonderful confidence builder for a child. Knowing that he isn't the only one who forgets words to a song or spills a drink all over the table at dinner helps him to realize that becoming a "big kid" doesn't mean that he has to know everything or do everything perfectly.

Just as expressing your own emotions can help your child express his or hers, admitting your mistakes will allow your child to come to you with theirs. This can also help decrease lying, as a child will not be afraid of admitting a mistake. Additionally, it allows you to model behavior for rectifying the situation, whether that is saying "oops" and cleaning up,

or even apologizing to someone else. In the long run, seeing mishaps occur and knowing that everything will still be okay is much more comforting than believing that parents are infallible, only to feel betrayed at some later date when they discover that this is not actually the case.

Besides just little mistakes, you can also let them in on your weaknesses. If you are a terrible juggler, but have always wanted to learn how (like my husband), then go for it. Let them see you drop the balls over and over and over again. Or if you have a particularly hard time with recipes, let them help you muddle through preparing a challenging meal. If you are interested, you could even take a cooking class to let them know that it isn't just children who have things to learn. Seeing adults, and especially their own parents, struggle with something will help them feel less helpless as they work to tie their own shoes or ride a bike. It will also allow them to see that things do get easier with practice. They will be much more motivated to practice piano or try out for a sports team if they are experiencing failure and success right alongside you.

Another realm of worry for parents tends to be tone of voice. I have read many books and heard speakers talk about how you must remember to speak to your child as though he were an adult friend. This is supposed to keep you from raising your voice or saying something disrespectful. Well, I personally have never had an adult friend who pulled my hair. I really have no idea how I would react if that did happen. I am fairly certain, though, that I wouldn't respond

in my nicest "inside voice." In trying to be constantly calm and compassionate, it is possible to go so far as to appear superhuman. You should not hold yourself to such a high standard that your children never get to know the real you. There should be times when your child hears you cry, and when you respond in an honestly "frustrated" tone of voice. How can our children feel safe enough to express their own emotions if you never show them any? How will they know that it is okay to have a strong reaction to something that bothers them?

This is not to say that we should justify any outburst we have by claiming that it helps us to appear human, but we should not feel overwhelming guilt, either. If your child breaks your favorite plate, even though they were being careful, it would not be unreasonable to show some tears. If your adult friend did the same thing, you might hold your emotions in a bit more, but that friend would also probably have a very good idea of exactly how you felt anyway. Furthermore, why is it that we *don't* show our emotions to our good friends? How many times have you had a friend hurt you in some way, but then you never told them about it? I'm not so sure that striving to make my relationship with my child look like my relationships with my friends is the best goal. I hope to have a relationship with my children that is as open and honest as is reasonable. I want them to know the real me, I want them to feel safe to express themselves with me, and I want them to understand that I, too, have feelings, needs, and weaknesses.

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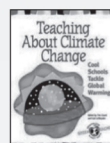
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Ultimately, respecting our child's rights, needs, and emotions does not mean that we need to sacrifice our own. If a child is given too much power in the relationship they will not only come to expect their every desire to be catered to, but they will also not feel very safe. A teacher I work with, who is also a midwife, told us a story that reminds me of the importance of the balance of power in relationships with children. She had learned that newborns may have a less traumatic birth if they are transferred directly to a water environment to simulate the womb. However, when a group of midwives decided to implement this technique in their own practice, they found that rather than comforting the babies, it instead appeared to upset them. At last they realized that they were missing an essential element of the water environment—the container was much too large. As important as the water itself, was the fact that the newborn wanted to feel the sides, just as they had when they were inside their mother. This remains true as a child grows: their “container” is no longer physical, but the child needs to have limits in order to feel safe and secure. They need the family “container” to push back when they have gone too far.

Thus, respecting a child is not the same as respecting an adult. The developmental age of the child must be taken into account in everything you do. Just as it would not be respectful of a newborn to leave them floundering without a physically confining embrace or swaddle, it would not be respectful of a two-year-old to expect them to determine

when and where they should take a nap. Similarly, it would not be respectful of a six-year-old to ask them to choose which parent they would like to live with in a divorce case without taking a number of additional factors into consideration. However, it might be reasonable to ask the same question of a mature adolescent. Respect does not mean treating everyone equally. It means that we see each person, young or old, for who they are. And fortunately, this should be easier than trying to remember some set of parenting rules that you need to live by, or some formula that you should be following. Instead, you just need to be you. You will make mistakes, you will have emotional outbursts, and your child won't always agree with you. But, as long as you remember to respect and forgive your child *and* yourself, your child will be able to do the same. ●

Michele Beach is the co-founder and director of The Patchwork School in Louisville, Colorado. She is also a parent, residing in Colorado with her husband Dave and two children, Cameron and Alexander. She has a Master's degree in Educational Psychology as well as an Early Childhood Teaching License. The Patchwork School's philosophy is based on freedom, responsibility and compassion within a supportive learning community. Michele and her co-founder Elizabeth Baker founded the school on principles taken from Democratic Education, Humane Education and Reggio Emilia.



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What Should Education Be

If Adolescence is the Next Step in Human Evolution?

BY DAVID MARSHAK

According to most recent accounts our species, homo sapiens, originated in Africa about 200,000 years ago, reaching full “behavioral modernity” around 50,000 years ago.

Use either number. We have lived for tens of thousands of years as a species, and for all but the last century, adolescence as we know it was not part of human life. Humans in their teen years were adults.

G. Stanley Hall was the first to name adolescence—from the Latin *adolescere*, meaning “to grow up”—in his 1904 book, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology*,

What did adults do with these tens of millions of adolescents when they first appeared? They sentenced them to 30+ hours each week in secondary schools plus more hours for homework, even though the paradigm of the academic high school had been created for a very different purpose and a much smaller fraction of the population.

Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education. Yet the first significant adolescent population did not appear in the United States until the post-World War II baby boomers began to enter their teens in the late 1950s.

What did adults do with these tens of millions of adolescents when they first appeared? They sentenced them to 30+ hours each week in secondary schools plus more hours for homework, even though the paradigm of the academic high school had been created for a very different purpose and a much smaller fraction of the population. Adults excluded teens from most of adult life and, instead, dumped them into the age ghetto that quickly became youth culture.

It's not at all surprising that our initial social and cultural responses to the sudden appearance of tens of millions of adolescents were so misguided. The manifestation of adolescence on a mass scale was a radically new evolutionary step for homo sapiens. For the first time in our existence as a species, we had an opportunity for tens of millions of individual humans to explore and develop their human

potential, to find their gifts and their callings, and to evolve into a much more complex and articulated consciousness. Right on schedule, the human potential movement—part psychology, part spirituality—emerged in the 1960's culture and began developing tools for this evolutionary step upward.

But the people with power in our industrial society had no insight into either evolution or human development; they feared the human potential movement and fought to delegitimize its insights and destroy its initial flowering. They worked hard in this campaign—and they are still working very hard—to keep adolescents in conventional, industrial paradigm schools, youth culture ghettos, which block both the development and maturation of individuals and the evolution of the species.

So here we are three generations into adolescence, and as a culture we are ignoring or repressing this profound evolutionary possibility.

Margaret Mead explained one aspect of where we need to go with adolescence in terms of cultural evolution in her book, *Culture and Commitment*. Mead describes three cultural paradigms in terms of their teaching/learning relationships between the young and the old:

postfigurative, in which children learn primarily from their parents and other adults

configurative, in which both children and adults learn primarily from their peers, and

prefigurative, in which children learn from their parents and other adults, and adults learn from their children and other members of their children's generation

All human societies prior to the 20th century were *postfigurative*. Pre-agricultural societies, in which humans lived for 80%-95% of our species life, changed little if any. Agricultural societies, beginning about 10,000 years ago, did change but slowly enough not to alter the dynamics of cultural transmission. In contrast industrial societies have experienced continually accelerating change for about 250 years, a moment in the history of the species.

What our societal leaders unknowingly did in the 1950s in the United States was to create a *configurative* culture. Adolescents were sentenced to years of schooling, even though formal schooling is unengaging and unproductive for most of them. They were excluded from meaningful roles in the

adult world, and teens' capacity for perceiving the present in a quickly changing society more acutely than their parents was ignored or ridiculed. Adolescents responded to this exclusion by creating their own youth culture, which both in its 60s counter-culture form and its later rap/hip-hop form included considerable hostility to and contempt for adults. Adults responded by viewing teens as dangerous: the putative gangs in the 1950s, the counter-culture in the 1960s, the supposed "super predators" of the 1980s, and so on.

In our *cognitive* culture, many adolescents feel sentenced to years of high school, which offers them a repressive, alienating, and largely meaningless experience. So they look to each other for engagement and meaning. Yet adolescents are not mature human beings, so the culture they create is also adolescent, immature, and often unnecessarily egocentric.

What we need to create, Mead argues, is a *prefigurative* culture, in which the capacity of adolescents to see the world anew, with idealism and creative vision as well as sometimes unbalanced judgment and critique, and make novel sense

We have lived for tens of thousands of years as a species, and for all but the last century, adolescence as we know it was not part of human life. Humans in their teen years were adults.

of it is valued by adults. In such a culture, teens would be welcomed into adult society as contributors with different strengths and limitations, and teens who were engaged in this way would value the experience and wisdom of adults. Forty years ago Mead saw the destructive divisions and the denial of wisdom that a cognitive society engenders and argued that we need to move beyond this dead end.

What kinds of experiences and social structures would we offer teens if we understood adolescence rightfully to be a new stage of human development that can allow a more complete unfolding of each human's potential? Some school programs that enact holistic or whole person or post-modern education respond more intelligently to this evolutionary opportunity, because they focus on the capacity of the adolescent to take a significant role in leading her/his own learning. "Free schools" or Sudbury Valley model schools provide even more freedom—and responsibility—to the teen. Yet both of these forms tend to keep adolescents in the school all or most of the time and, thus, still in their own society.

The MET Program—Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center—in Providence RI and its clone Big Picture "schools" across the nation eschew traditional high school

classes and place their students in internships in which they spend two days every week working in an actual business or nonprofit, supervised and supported by employees. These adolescents receive a partial release from the teen ghetto, and they gain access to a prefigurative cultural experience. They learn from the adults in their workplace, but they also have an opportunity to contribute in meaningful ways to the work being conducted there.

Another kind of response to the evolutionary possibility of adolescence is offered by Explorations Academy Online (EAO), a new web-based learning environment. EAO is a program of Explorations Academy, a 16-year old bricks-and-mortar, buses-and-backpacks independent school in Bellingham, Washington that features interdisciplinary curriculum, service learning, wilderness experience, self-directed learning, and international expeditions.

The Explorations Academy Online's program includes the following elements:

► **Learning Coach** EAO begins by pairing each adolescent learner with an adult Learning Coach. The Coach and the learner talk face-to-face via Skype at least twice each week. *Adolescents don't want to distance themselves from all adults, just from their parents as they begin to establish their own individual identities. Adolescents want to interact with adults who want to interact with them in respectful and mutual ways.*

► **Clusters** Learners engage in one Cluster each term. A cluster is an interdisciplinary study, designed by EAO and led by the Coach, that is focused on one theme or question and that weaves together learning in the subjects of English, Social Studies, Science, and the Arts in a coherent and meaningful way. Some of the clusters available are Crime and Punishment, Life Cycles, You're on Your Own, Water, Renaissance, and Shelter. *Here teens engage in exploring conventional—and unconventional—academic content, but the content is structured in relation to contemporary issues, problems, and concerns that adolescents view as timely, relevant, and personally meaningful.*

► **Learner's Investigations** Each term the learner, in dialogue with her/his Learning Coach, poses a question that she/he wants to investigate. The learner and the Learning Coach frame this inquiry and the learner conducts it. The Learner's Investigation may relate to the Cluster that he/she is investigating, or it may be on a completely different topic. *In this context teens design their own learning, with support from the Coach, and then they enact their design. Teens want freedom, and here they get it, although its bundled with responsibility and support.*

► **Mathematics and World Language** Learners study at least the equivalent of three years of high school mathematics, because math is required by most colleges for admission. The same is true for the study of a world language. *These studies are required because many teens will want to go to college. Completing these prerequisites leaves that option open for learners.*



Explorations Academy students find adventure in the world outside the classroom

► **Experiential Learning** A significant part of the learning at Explorations Academy Online is experiential. The learner negotiates his/her specific learning experiences each term with his/her Learning Coach. Over a four-year career as a learner at EAO, the learner engages in at least two Experiential Studies in each category listed below:

THE ARTS: drawing, painting, singing, playing a musical instrument, pottery, or any other form of art or craft

ADVENTURE: hiking, backpacking, tracking, hunting, orienteering, or any other activity that is challenging and that takes place outside

SERVICE: any form of service to other people, animals, or the natural world

BODY/MIND DISCIPLINE: an activity that is physical and encourages awareness and mindfulness about that activity; for example, yoga, dance, tai chi, chi kung, aikido, long distance running, gymnastics

APPRENTICESHIP: a commitment by the learner to learn a skill(s) from an appropriate adult who is proficient in this skill(s); can be work-related, in the arts or crafts, or in any field of human endeavor

ECOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE: active engagement with an ecosystem in some meaningful way; for example, ecological restoration, gardening, permaculture, birdwatching, animal husbandry



In these experiences adolescents have a wide range of choice, within enough parameters to insure that they also have a wide range of experiences. So there's a lot of freedom with clear boundaries. And all of these experiences take the learner out into the mainstream society in all of its complexities, so they interact with people of all ages every week.

Howard Thurman wrote, “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” The evolutionary potential of adolescence as a stage in human development is that for the first time in our species history, we have created societies in which individual human beings can discover what it is that makes them come alive—their gifts, their passions, their callings—and can begin to “go do it.” Not later on. Not when they’re older. Now, today.

This is exactly what our species needs, to unleash our most profound creativity and capacity, if we intend to evolve through the crises and challenges we have created for ourselves in this century. Should we not get started with this effort at once?

See **Explorationsacademyonline.org** for more information. ●

David Marshak is the author of *The Common Vision: Parenting and Educating for Wholeness* and the coordinator of Explorations Academy Online (EAO). His email address is: **david.marshak@gmail.com**.

Empowering Youth to Pursue Emancipation

BY JOEL LEHI ORGANISTA

To bridge the disconnect between our country's democratic values and the way we treat young people
~ from the website of the Institute for Democratic Education in America

For my high school senior thesis last year I wrote a paper titled “Closing the Academic Achievement Gap Between the Latino and White Students at West High School.” I have since joined the discourse presented in that paper. First of all, the term “academic achievement gap” causes deficit thinking, blame that is fueled with pain and discomfort, a reaction of certainness followed by a mentality of perfection and success. I have now shifted my thoughts from an academic achievement gap to an *opportunity gap*. Like the statement above, the real gap is “the disconnect between our country’s democratic values and the way we treat young people.” It is the very gap addressed by democratic education or education that empowers our youth to pursue emancipation.

WHY YOUTH

Prevention helps decrease future problems and understanding how prevention connects with our young people is vital. Youth are marginalized, and this problem is huge! Especially in our schools for example, they do not fully have autonomy and ability to express creativity. The result of this strain in schools is expressed by both autonomy and creativity outside the school in sometimes self-destructive and risky behaviors. Just see the popularity of virtual living, drugs, videogames, and dropping out. Youth want to be able to control something. On Facebook you can create a virtual self, write what you want, communicate freely and be creative. Our country’s young people are also marginalized with the mentality of success and achievement, a norm that being perfect is not only possible but also that it is the only thing acceptable. Media powerfully influences how success should appear to both adults and young people. Both peers and adults then push while pulling our young people to become something that is not always possible or needed. The “Race to Nowhere” film by Vicki Abeles is a visually appealing way to see the diverse views of parents, students, doctors, and community members of the effects of the dark side of America’s achievement culture. It depicts how children are

being pushed to look at the next thing. In elementary school you look to middle school, then the ACT/SAT and AP/IB, and then to college. This success mentality causes the youth to not have full autonomy for their future and creativity enhanced by joy.

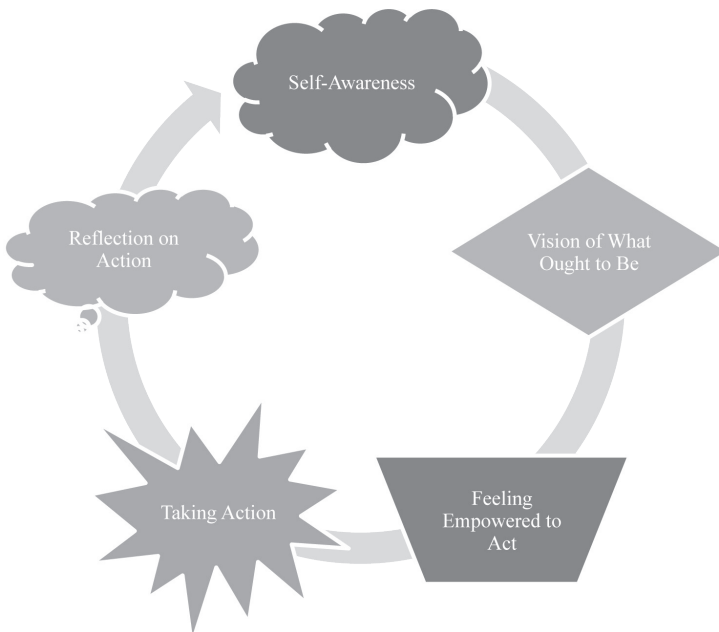
“I’m afraid that our children are going to sue us for stealing their childhoods.”

—quote from “Race to Nowhere”

I fully acknowledge this is mostly happening in middle and upper class communities and not in lower ones because parents usually do not know about such “college prep” opportunities. Yet youth in low-income communities are marginalized to a greater extent. Tracking in schools causes a nasty gap in our democratic values as a nation. Such youth in harsh conditions have no autonomy to take AP/Honor/IB classes because they are deemed not college bound. I speak from experience because English is my second language, I am not white, and from a low-income family, adults would tell me not to take AP/Honors/IB course. Yet I took such courses and received the International Baccalaureate Diploma.

Our country’s young people are also marginalized with the mentality of success and achievement, a norm that being perfect is not only possible but also that it is the only thing acceptable. Media powerfully influences how success should appear to both adults and young people.

Young people are still being marginalized and oppressed coming into college. The ironic way we “assist” and thank young people who want to continue their education is by getting them in massive debt from student loans. We can only grow, progress and change the world by peer-to-peer empowerment to pursue emancipation.



The diagram presented is a circular model created by Sid O’Connell of effecting change within a supportive learning environment. This cycle can be used to understand how youth can become empowered to pursue emancipation.

SELF-AWARENESS

“As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world... as in being able to remake ourselves.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

Self-awareness is only the beginning to effecting deliverance. Creating autonomy and true freedom, with both its negative isolation in its individualism or positive realization of relationships that give pure joy, to our whole beings, is the first step. Freedom is love; it is to take your self-willed agency and use it towards truth, goodness and human relationships, not just the mere absence of bondage. Imagine if all of our children were to understand their freedom and dignity.

“The job of an educator is to teach students to see the vitality in themselves.”

—Joseph Campbell

Self-worth is rooted to help us accept others. If you cannot see my worth, it is because you cannot see your own. By reclaiming ourselves we start the necessary momentum for shifting from defense mode to demand mode. For example, the work I do with the National Student Bill of Rights for All Youth Movement is fully focused on causing that shift. We start with becoming aware of what rights and opportunities we are entitled to, and what oppressions and injustices we as youth have to endure. If being a true defender of democracy means being engaged, then there is a price we pay for achieving any type of awareness and nothing worthwhile can ever be easy. That is why with our movement we stress the importance of the equal balance between rights and responsibility.

“...empower students to become contributing citizens and life-long learners.”

—West High School in Utah Mission Statement.

Many school mission statements look similar to this, but there is a difference between words and action. Yet, this is truly what we want. Students become “*contributing citizens and life-long learners*” by becoming aware of their “*vitality in themselves*” and autonomy to contribute and learn.

HOW DO WE THEN CAUSE AWARENESS?

As adults, make sure there are authentic relationships between you and young people that promote autonomy, and reinforce their dignity. Because one cannot force self-awareness, youth must have that support from parents, teachers, mentors, and coaches. Going back to the mentality of success and perfection will mostly likely push young people to depression. Providing critical hope rather than deficit thinking can truly empower young people. Adults can also provide opportunities like leadership conferences, internships, critical service learning and action-based research projects to close the opportunity gap.

Nonetheless, the best type of empowerment is the one that comes within the community itself. There is good done when adults tell us that we are vital and can make a difference, but this cannot compare to the sense of

Young people are still being marginalized and oppressed coming into college. The ironic way we “assist” and thank young people who want to continue their education is by getting them in massive debt from student loans.

belonging that comes when a peer says, “you’re vital to the emancipation of this world of ours!” Well, youth wouldn’t say it like that, probably something like “you’re cool and we can change this world of ours!”

Democratic education and its elements of shared learning, teaching and participation can be found in youth helping each other become aware, empowered and then taking action. In sports there are coaches to help mentor the youth, but there are also youth team captains or leaders. Letting these peer leaders embrace their responsibility to empower their peers is always an inspiring thing to witness. It goes with the arts. Listening, viewing and experiencing a spoken word, film, dance, art piece or song from a young person is truly an example of the tremendous human

potential sometimes overlooked. Real autonomy is expressed when youth create their own original art, perform their best in and out of their sport, and spend many hours reclaiming media through film, music and the internet.

VISION OF WHAT OUGHT TO BE AND EMPOWERMENT

"Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare"

—Japanese proverb.

Continuing with the cycle of effecting change, vision serves its function of catalyzing action. It is vital to envision the greater role youth have to change while understanding their individual role in it. The tricky part is feeling that dignity, sense of belonging both from society, adults and peers. That is why educators have the responsibility to let young people see the vitality in themselves so they use their autonomy and creativity to emancipate our world.

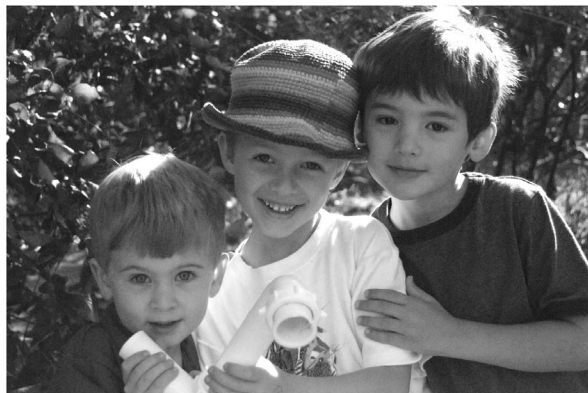
ACTION

"To be well educated is to have the desire and the means to make sure learning never ends."

—Alfie Kohn

Again, my high school's mission statement, "...empower students to become contributing citizens and life-long learners" is a result of emancipating our youth. Sometimes the real emancipation is being the first generation college student in your family. As humans we fully need understanding of ourselves, what we ought to be, and what we aspire to be. By continuing in this cycle of effective change within a supporting and sustainable environment we then all will be unshackled. ●

Joel Lehi Organista was born in Mexico City, is a recent high school graduate who earned the International Baccalaureate diploma and received the ACLU of Utah Youth Activist Award. Joel is creating his own Social Justice Major with an emphasis in Education at the University of Utah. Joel is on the advisory board of the Education for Liberation Network and is the national organizer of the National Student Bill of Rights for All Youth Movement with the support of the Institute for Democratic Education in America. He has a black belt in karate and is a filmmaker who produced a documentary titled "Red Flags: Racism and Ethnic Stereotyping in Schools." He recently presented at the IV World Congress on Child and Adolescent Rights in Puerto Rico to around 200 youth from all over the world on youth empowerment.



www.thepatchworkschool.com
info@thepatchworkschool.com
or call 720-271-6729.



The Patchwork School

Located in Louisville, Colorado, The Patchwork School is a nonprofit, democratic school for children ages 2 ½ to 7 years old. Our philosophy is comprised of principals from Democratic Education, Reggio Emilia and Humane Education. We are committed to preserving every person's right to a life of self-direction, meaning and joy.



We're not just a school!

Because we are advocates for children's voices on a local, national and international level, we are interested in **creating collaborations** between our education project and yours, **offering support** through parenting and education consultation, and **speaking out** in workshops and conferences.

Awareness Through the Body

BY MARGO MACLEOD AND HEIDI WATTS

INTRODUCTION

Concentration, self-awareness, confidence, the ability to work independently and the ability to work cooperatively: these are among the many qualities an integral education seeks to draw forth from children. In a program called Awareness Through the Body, (ATB) developed by Joan Sala and Aloka Marti, these and many other qualities are taught through a sequence of varied, age appropriate activities, responsive to the needs of both the individuals and the group. Let us give you some snapshots from *Awareness Through the Body* in action:

❶ A group of kindergarten children of all sizes, shapes and colors gather at the entrance to the hall, which is covered by a blue cloth. Aloka explains that they are going to go on a journey to the moon and they will need to be very quiet. They are going to go up a tunnel and come out the other side. She also explains that they must not touch the “ground” on the moon, but they can cross to the other side of the moon in other ways. All eyes are on her as she dramatically pulls the blue curtain and there is a sharp collective intake of breath, “Ahh!” as the children see they are facing a large blue tunnel.

One-by-one they squirm up the tunnel and come out on top of a ladder that leads to a series of platforms constructed of planks and set between stools, chairs, and another ladder. There are two adults in the room, for coaching and spotting, but other than the low brook-like murmur of the coaches the room is quiet, the concentration so intense you could touch it with your hands. As the children emerge from the tunnel they begin their journey across the moon, going carefully down the ladder, feeling their way onto the planks, some of which slope up, others down: the moon is not, apparently, a flat place.

❷ It is the end of a class to illustrate the difference between tensing, stretching and relaxing. What does it really mean to “relax”? What does that feel like inside yourself? The children have been “contracting” newspaper, “relaxing it,” “tensing it” and then “smoothing” the paper. They have tried doing the same thing with their bodies: contracting, tensing, stretching, relaxing until the concepts flow from the abstraction into the actual and back again. And then they are asked to scan their inner sense of what it feels like to be “tense” and to be “relaxed.” They have new internal reference points for what it means to relax.

Now they have all the newspaper in bits and pieces about them. With more in reserve, the teachers start throwing the

paper at each other and at the children. Soon the room is a blizzard of shredded paper, the children laughing, jumping and tossing the paper about wildly. At any moment a class may move from being deeply focused and intensely serious to purely playful. Often it is impossible to tell where work ends and play begins, or play ends and work begins. Each new movement brings new levels of self awareness.

BACKGROUND AND EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Awareness Through the Body was developed in Auroville, an intentional, international community in southeast India, during the 1990s. It is now an established part of the curriculum in all Auroville schools from kindergarten

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through high school, and is spreading internationally through workshops in Holland, Spain, and the U.S.

In their book, *Awareness Through the Body*, Aloka and Joan describe the goals of ATB in this way:

“Awareness Through the Body aims to provide tools for individuals to expand their consciousness, explore the different planes of their being, discover their inner selves and, eventually, *their deepest self*. Along with this we want to offer individuals the opportunity to refine and internalize the senses and become aware of their own perceptions with as little outside interference as possible. Using their senses in a more complete way, free from judgment and preconceived ideas, individuals will be able to better manage their mind and emotions, to determine how to steer their own lives and to create their own ‘owner’s manual.’”

Out of their previous experiences with dance, yoga, martial arts, Tai Chi, Shiatsu, physical therapy, cooperative games, somatics, and relaxation techniques and from seventeen years of experience in the schools of Auroville, Joan and Aloka have created an approach which intentionally engages and develops all parts of the individual—mind, emotions and body, and offers the space to come in contact with the deeper part of oneself—through games, concentration, attention to the breath, and sensory awareness, which includes an exploration of the elements: earth, air, fire and water. Because the book also has hundreds of “recipes,” activities carefully described step-by-step with their rationale and many pictures, creative teachers and parents can appreciate and use these activities in and out of the classroom.

Awareness Through the Body is grounded in the principles of integral education articulated by Sri Aurobindo, a leading Indian philosopher and spiritual leader in the 20th century, and translated into practice by Mira Alfassa, commonly known as Mother. Although Sri Aurobindo wrote extensively, and on many subjects, he summarized the main principles of integral education in three succinct statements that will resonate with progressive, holistic and alternative educators:

“Nothing can be taught to the mind which is not already concealed as potential knowledge in the unfolding soul of the creature.”

“Mind must be consulted in its own growth.”

“Work from the near to the far.”

“Nothing can be taught...” Nothing can be inculcated but much may be introduced and encouraged, or recognized and drawn forth. In a variety of breathing exercises children in ATB classes are frequently asked to notice what they are feeling in their emotions, thinking in their minds, experiencing in their bodies and sensing in their inner selves— in the very act of noticing they learn new ways of understanding their own feelings, thoughts and reactions. This is true of every activity. There is no telling—only asking, and asking again.

“Mind must be consulted in its own growth” is exemplified by activities like the “scan” or by the “witness attitude” in which children are encouraged to observe themselves, their thoughts, reactions, desires, and to draw their own conclusions from what they are able to observe about themselves in different situations. As children participate in ATB exercises, they gradually learn to take more responsibility for their own actions and for group work until, for example, they are able to create spontaneously a symmetrical shape with their bodies without teacher direction and in a certain time frame. This also *requires attention in the eye, attention in the ear, and the capacity to let go of one’s own preference for the sake of the group.* Children have many opportunities to experiment, to solve problems and to discover their own interests and capacities from within and without, in ways both visible and invisible. “Working from the near to the far,” the concrete to the abstract, requires starting with what is known, comfortable and relevant, and widening the challenges, but maintaining the supports so that what is known grows wider and wider to encompass a universe of possibilities. A simple ATB



concentration exercise becomes a challenge – how slowly can you raise your arms with your eyes closed and without speaking or touching anything? How focused can you be? And the unspoken question – can you concentrate with this same intensity in other circumstances?

When asked what was best about their elementary school in Auroville a group of teenagers replied, almost with one breath, “Awareness Through the Body” and when asked why they said:

“It makes the physical body much more real and you discover things about yourself.”

“It made me more aware of everything around, and it made me much more open. When I get nervous, now, or angry, I always return to my breath to cool down.”

“The group work was very important. You learn how to find your own way in a group and one thing we learned is that if it didn’t work in one way we could try another.”

“It gives you a spiritual opening without anybody ever mentioning the word spiritual. It helps you to find your own spiritual center more than any other activity. It brings up things in you which remain.”

There are a number of ways in which interested people can learn more about Awareness Through the Body. There will be ATB workshops in August 2011 in New England and Seattle as well as introductory sessions at the AERO conference in Portland, OR. There will also be workshops in Holland and Spain.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT AWARENESS THROUGH THE BODY

<http://awarenessthroughthebody.com>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3rGEVw5zWA>

<http://matagiri.org/atb/>

Article in *Ode Magazine* about ATB: www.odemagazine.com

Marti, Aloka & Sala, Joan. *Awareness Through the Body*. 2006. SAIIR. Auroville, India. New revised edition \$32 plus postage. This book may be purchased at the workshops or ordered on Amazon.com or through email or phone to info@pondi.biz. (845) 679-2926.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Education. 1956. Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Pondicherry, India

The Mother. 1990. *Fivefold Education*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust. Pondicherry

Heidi Watts has been working with the schools and teachers of Auroville, India for 19 years as advisor and teacher trainer developing and implementing best practices from the progressive and integral traditions. She is Professor Emeritus in the Education Department at Antioch University New England, USA, and is responsible for the long-running,

successful teacher/student exchange between Antioch and Auroville. She follows a migratory pattern, living in Nova Scotia in the summer, New Hampshire in the fall and spring, and Auroville in the winter. For more than 50 years Heidi has had a passionate interest in the art and craft of teaching, with all ages, in all subjects and circumstances. She has as much respect for the way in which ATB is taught as for what it teaches — though perhaps those two become one and the same. Contact: hwatts@antiochne.edu ●

Margo W. MacLeod has been involved with integral and progressive education for over 30 years. As Program Director of both the Individualized MA and BA Programs at Goddard College she helped create a variety of innovative programs in, for instance, sustainable business and communities, transformative language arts, and consciousness studies. Recently, she has consulted on projects such as creating a learner centered, culturally relevant, liberal arts curriculum for high school students in Palau, developing an effective board for a small elementary eco school in Austin, TX, and producing video documentary of K-12 integral education projects in Auroville, India and San Diego, CA. She is actively engaged in learning to be an Awareness Through the Body practitioner and helping to organize ATB workshops in the US. Contact: margowmacleod@gmail.com



News Reports

COMPILED BY CAROL MORLEY AND RON MILLER

National

Los Angeles Schools to Seek Sponsors By Jennifer Medina, *New York Times*, December 15, 2010. The football field at a public school in the second largest school district in the country, soon may be brought to students by Nike. Facing another potential round of huge budget cuts, the Los Angeles school board unanimously approved a plan to allow the district to seek corporate sponsorships as a way to get money to the schools. The district is not the first to look for private dollars as a way to close public budget gaps — districts in Sheboygan, Wis., and Midland, Tex., for example, have offered up naming rights for their stadiums for years. But the Los Angeles school district is by far the largest to do so, and officials say the plan could generate as much as \$18 million for the schools. “This is really our way to be responsive to that reality; we need to look for other sources of revenue,” said Melissa Infusino, the director of partnerships for the district. “As uncomfortable as it may be for folks, it’s less comfortable to get rid of programs or go through more layoffs.” In a one-page summary pitch to potential sponsors, the district mentions the possibility of arranging school visits to pass out samples of approved food products or placing the donors’ logos in school cafeterias. Or perhaps they might rather have the naming rights for the Academic Decathlon or Drill Team championships.

California’s Parent Revolution ‘Triggering’ School Reform in Compton, *Wall St Journal* Opinion: “Under a California law passed in January, parents can trigger a change in governance at some 1,300 schools that have failed to make ‘adequate yearly progress’ for four consecutive years. If at least 51% of the parents sign a petition, they can shut the school down, shake up its administration, or invite a charter operator to take over. Charters that open as a result of parent triggers must accept all students from the original school.” Parents of students in Compton’s McKinley Elementary School recently became the first to pull the “parent trigger.” The school is in the bottom 10% in California. Over 60% of parents have signed to petition “to free the school from the Compton Unified bureaucracy and install charter school operator Clarity Educational Group to run it instead.” California Federation of Teachers is in opposition to the move, and parents expect they will have to sue to get their way. (Editor’s note: The Compton School Board has since rejected the petition on procedural grounds. The parents say they will move ahead with a lawsuit.)

‘Brain-based’ Education: Run from It, by Larry Cuban, reported by Valerie Strauss, *Washington Post*: An “analogy of cancer researchers and medical specialists initially framing the problem of cancer for a half-century as one disease, one cause, and one cure—surgery, radiation, and toxins—before medical researchers began to understand the genetic and molecular mechanisms that turned normal cells into abnormal ones is similar to brain research findings that have spilled into classrooms helter-skelter.” Brain research is too new to be used by teachers in the classroom in any practical way. “Cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham at the University of Virginia, a frequent blogger and associate editor of the journal *Mind, Brain, and Education*, offers three bullet-point facts for those educators caught up in brain-based research: The brain is always changing. The connection between the brain and behavior is not obvious. Deriving useful information for teachers from neuroscience is slow, painstaking work.”

Two Million Home Schooled, New Study Estimates, by Dave Bohon, *New American*: A recent study from the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) estimates that there as many as 2.346 million homeschoolers in the United States, or nearly 4% of school-aged kids. Dr. Brian D. Ray, president of NHERI and author of the study, “predicts another ‘notable surge’ in home schooling numbers in the next five to ten years, as those who were home schooled in the 1990s choose that education option for their own children as well.” According to a 2006 study by the Department of Education, 31% of parents homeschool due to concerns about the public school environment; 30% for religious reasons; 16.5% because dissatisfaction with public school quality of instruction; and 14% for special needs. Homeschoolers score 34 to 39 percentile points higher than average on standardized tests; boys and girls perform equally well; family income level is not a factor in student achievement; and parent education level has only a small impact on their children’s results. Homeschoolers also continue to do better than average when they move on to the college level and beyond. “As a relevant side-note, home school proponents point out that when U.S. Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler (R–Wash.) was sworn in for her freshman term on January 3, she became the first homeschooler elected to the United States Congress in recent history.”

The Politics of Education Upended, by Jennifer Epstein, *Politico.com*: Recent events in Wisconsin, New Jersey, Nevada, Indiana, and Florida “point to a convergence that is remaking the politics of education ... On both sides of the aisle, politicians are unhappy with how teachers are compensated, hired and fired, and are eager to introduce reforms.” President Obama and his Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, have stated they agree that the status quo “isn’t working for children” and that unions can be an “impediment to better schools.” Obama’s Race to the Top program includes provisions for teacher merit pay and allowing school districts to fire poorly-performing teachers. Michelle Rhee, former chancellor of District of Columbia public schools, launched Students First last year and has made alliances with governors whom the nonprofit advises. As to Rhee’s alliances with Republicans, despite being a Democrat herself, she explains, “We’re not focused on partisan politics. We’re focused on what’s right for our kids.”

An Instructional Approach Expands Its Reach, by Christina A. Samuels, *EdWeek.org*: Response to intervention (RTI) began as a way to help special needs children. In 2002, the Reading First program started to be used by schools for their literacy programs. Then in 2004, RTI was allowed to be used as a tool to discover learning disabilities in children. RTI has grown rapidly ever since. In 2010, 61% of school administrators used RTI in their districts. RTI “involves early identification of students’ learning problems and the use of focused lessons, or interventions, to address those problems before they became entrenched. Though primarily linked with special education and early reading, the method is now used at all levels of schooling and in a variety of subject areas. Educators use ‘tiered-intervention’ models – of which RTI is one type – to improve school discipline. Response-to-intervention models have also been used to improve instruction for English-language learners, with preschoolers, and as a lever for district-wide reform.” RTI

has been helpful in reducing the rate of students diagnosed with some learning disabilities. Using RTI, students are screened early and problems can be caught and corrected before they become intractable. Proponents claim it has improved education for all students. Many students in the past were told they had a disability when actually “they were really victims of poor instruction.”

From **A Moment of National Insanity**, by Diane Ravitch, *EdWeek.org*: “I’m beginning to think we are living in a moment of national insanity. On the one hand, we hear pious exhortations about education reform, endlessly uttered by our leaders in high political office, corporate suites, foundations, and the media. President Obama says we have to ‘out-educate’ the rest of the world to ‘win the future.’ Yet the reality on the ground suggests that the corporate reform movement – embraced by so many of those same leaders, including the president – will set American education back, by how many years or decades is anyone’s guess. Sometimes I think we are hurtling back a century or more, to the age of the Robber Barons and the great corporate trusts ... The corporate reformers have done a good job of persuading the media that our public schools are failing because they are overrun by bad teachers, and these bad teachers have lifetime tenure because of their powerful unions ... What do we hear from the corporate reformers? Merit pay. Really? Bonuses for some, layoffs for others? Fire teachers with low value-added scores? Ah, more teaching to the test, more narrowing the curriculum. Nothing to improve education. Just “innovation” (i.e., no evidence) and “disruption” (i.e., firing the whole staff, closing the school). Our schools remain subject to a failed federal accountability system. We are packing children into crowded classrooms, ignoring the growing levels of child poverty (the U.S. now leads all advanced nations in infant mortality), and putting fear into the hearts of our nation’s teachers. Who will want to teach? How does any of this improve schools or benefit children? Do you understand it? I don’t.”

International

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INDIA

Skippping Rote Memorization in Indian Schools, by Vikas Bajaj, *NY Times*: In Nagla and 1500 other schools in the state of Uttarakhand, students write their own stories and pursue self-directed projects instead of memorizing and duplicating textbook passages on tests. This is a revolutionary change in India, where rote memorization and stressful exams have long been the norm. The five-year program is funded by Azim H. Premji, chairman of the information technology company Wipro. The Azim Premji Foundation is

training teachers in “overhauling the way students are taught and tested at government schools.” In spite of government more than doubling spending on public education in recent years, most schools still perform poorly. India’s literacy rate is 64%, while China’s is 94%. Progress has been slow, and the Foundation only helps schools that the government has invited to participate, which has some worried that progress will be undermined by government administration and severe understaffing.

International

UNITED KINGDOM

Geography Declining in Many English Schools – Ofsted,

by Hannah Richardson, *BBC.co.uk*: Ofsted inspectors have found that many secondary pupils are unable to locate countries, mountain ranges or key features on maps despite studying them, and that in one in ten primary schools visited, “geography was said to be disappearing.” The number of secondary schools not entering pupils for geography has risen steadily, and many students “rarely had the opportunity to use maps ... Uninspiring teaching and lack of challenge” kept many students from taking geography. Christine Blower, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said that excessive testing in English and Maths is partly to blame for geography and other subjects suffering.

Ofqual head: End Paper Exams for Digital Generation,

bbc.co.uk: Isobel Nisbet, CEO of Ofqual, says that handwritten exams are becoming unacceptable and “cannot go on.” Pupils are “techno-savvy” and “use IT as their natural medium for identifying and exploring new issues and deepening their knowledge.” At the present time, only a small number of exams can be taken online. She argues that “exams are running the risk of becoming invalid, as their medium of pen and ink increasingly differs from the way in which youngsters learn.” The country’s three exam boards welcomed the comments but said there were many challenges to overcome in moving toward online exams. Andrew Hall, CEO of AQA said, “The real prize here is to have assessment, online, on-demand, when the student is ready,” suggesting a future where students did not all take their exams at the same time.”

Government Gives Go-ahead to First Eight Free Schools,

by Jamie Doward, *guardian.co.uk*: Eight free schools have been approved by the government to date and are set to open in September. Free schools are comparable to charter schools in the US; they are state-funded, but independent in that they have control over curriculum and hiring and firing. “Free schools, which will be funded directly by Westminster and operate outside local authority control ... will have more freedom over their curriculum and teachers’ pay and conditions. Teachers employed by them will also not need to have formal teaching qualifications.” They are opposed by teacher’s unions, who fear they will dismantle public schooling and create chaos. Proponents hope they will facilitate higher teaching quality and improve standards for all students, especially those in deprived areas. According to the DfE, “Free schools are all-ability, state-funded schools, set up in response to parental demand.” There have been 250 applications; 35 have gained initial approval. Department for Education Secretary, Michael Gove, said he was even interested in the idea of opening a free school in the Department’s headquarters in London.

Gove Sweeps Aside 102 ‘Woolly Standards’ Teachers are Expected to Meet in Bid to Weed out the Incompetent,

by Kate Loveys, *DailyMail.UK*: Education Secretary, Michael Gove says that “the current skills required of teachers are ‘woolly, meaningless and fluffy’ concepts. Of the 102 so-called standards, just two state the need for good ‘subject and curriculum knowledge’.” Gove is reviewing current standards and will replace the “woolly” ones with a “small rigorous core.” Teachers who do not meet the new standards will be fired. The move will make it easier to fire bad teachers, while at the same time making it more difficult to qualify. Mr. Gove said that “a ‘simple and clear set of skills’ – of which there will be fewer than ten – will ensure teachers have a thorough knowledge of their subject, good literacy and numeracy and can crack down on bad behaviour. The new standards will be imposed in September 2012.”

Councils Wary of Radical Shake-Up,

by Andrew Denholm, *Herald Scotland*: Officials from Cosla, which represents local authorities, said sudden reform of local government had the potential to derail major initiatives, such as the roll out of the Curriculum for Excellence. “Focusing on structures will distract us from pushing ahead with change already underway. We are not against all forms of structural reform, but are extremely wary of proposals that suggest immediate redrawing of boundaries or shake-up of public sector structures without a firm evidence base. Our viewpoint is shaped by the experience from past reorganisations where a great deal of time and money was spent re-structuring the public sector. In addition, there is evidence which suggest savings from this type of change are over-estimated, hard to realise and even questionable if reform has been ill thought through.” The submission follows calls in recent months for schools to be freed from council control with more power given to head-teachers and parents.

BRUNEI

Out With The Old, In With The New,

by Lyna Mohamad, *brudirect.com*: The Ministry of Education’s Active Permanent Secretary, Dr. HJ Rahman, says that “Investing in early childhood education is one of the strategies of the ministry in national planning, and it is also the ministry’s main agenda that needs to be upgraded in order to produce a role model with holistic, excellent and dynamic characteristics.” Early childhood encouragement of creativity and imagination are crucial for long-term positive impact of children on the community, family, and their futures. The Pre-School Teachers Nationwide Program has launched with the aim of training teachers in implementing standards to ensure learning and teaching quality. “It is hoped pre-school teachers are ready to move away from conventional and traditional learning and teaching practice to one that is fun, informal, play-based and provides balanced learning centered on teachers and children.” ●



Book Reviews

Children Don't Start Wars

By David Gribble

Peace News, 2010

<http://peacenews.info/webshop/index.php>

REVIEWED BY CHRIS MERCOGLIANO

Two of history's greatest proponents of educational freedom were moved to become schoolteachers by the horrors of war. Count Leo Tolstoy came home from fighting in the Crimean War and converted a wing of his ancestral estate into a free school for the offspring of his serfs. And after spending three years on a World War II attack submarine, John Holt turned away from his Yale engineering background and decided to teach young children instead. Their combat experience had transformed both men into profound pacifists, each of them convinced that the best way to prevent future wars is to raise an entire generation of happy, peaceful children.

Tolstoy and Holt wrote eloquently about how conventional schooling robs children of their humanity. Before he opened the school doors at Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy toured a series of newly founded German and Prussian public schools. "Terrible. A prayer for the king, beatings, everything by heart, frightened, morally crippled children," reads a diary entry after one such visit. Then in *Tolstoy on Education* he elaborated, "[Schools are] an institution in which children are deprived of their chief pleasure and youthful need of free motion, where obedience and quiet are the chief condition, where every misdeed is punished with a ruler. . . . Not only does such a school breed loathing for education, but in these six years it inculcates upon its pupils hypocrisy and deceit, arising from the unnatural position in which the pupils are placed, and that condition of incoherence and confusion of ideas, which is called the rudiments of education."

Even Holt's initial work in a progressive private school in Colorado a century later led him to a similar conclusion. "We adults destroy most of the intellectual and creative capacity of children by the things we do to them or make them do. We destroy this capacity above all by making them afraid, afraid of not doing what other people want, of not pleasing, of making mistakes, of failing, of being wrong. Thus, we make them afraid to gamble, afraid to experiment, afraid to try the difficult and the unknown," he lamented in *How Children Fail*.

Unfortunately, the link between war and the ways in which societies socialize their children is all too easily

forgotten, and thus was I overjoyed to discover that British educator and author David Gribble has joined the ranks of Tolstoy and Holt with his latest book. One only need glance at the simple declarative title to know where Gribble stands on the subject: *Children Don't Start Wars*.

How does he know this?

Retired from teaching since 1992, Gribble began his 37-year career in conventional schools. Like Holt, his early experience radicalized him and sent him looking for a way to educate children that isn't steeped in fear, conformity, and blind obedience. He moved on to the democratically run Dartington Hall school; and when it suffered a conservative takeover and closed in 1987, he and two other Dartington Hall teachers founded Sands School, an even more Summerhillian alternative that now thrives on without him.

When a man spends the majority of his adult life associating with children in settings in which they are not only allowed, but encouraged, to think independently and express themselves freely, he develops a deep understanding of who children really are. He discovers that they are neither miniature adults, nor are they blank slates awaiting society's imprint. He acquires a profound respect for their ability both to perceive the world as it is and imagine it as they would like it to be. And above all, he witnesses on a daily basis how slanderous is the Calvinist image of children as innately bad that continues to dominate mainstream thinking.

Which brings us to one of the author's biggest reasons for writing *Children Don't Start Wars*, the deconstruction of this deeply embedded notion that kids are an ignorant cauldron of dark impulses covered by a thin skin of adult enforced decorum. Idle hands aren't the devil's workshop in the schools in which David Gribble worked. Quite to the contrary—at Sands School where class attendance is noncompulsory and students are often left to their own devices, they responsibly and productively choose how to structure their own time. Their source of motivation: the very same instincts and urges that the Calvinists who institutionalized British and American education so wrongly viewed as wild and amoral.

Unsupervised students at Gribble's schools also don't band together and prey on the weaker members of their peer group, as William Golding so vividly portrayed in *Lord of the Flies*. Few readers realize how thinly veiled was Golding's Calvinist bias, that he was still the headmaster of a Church of England boarding school when he wrote his iconic novel. Actually, order at schools such as Dartington Hall and Sands, labeled "democratic" because students actively participate in school governance and their votes are equal to the teachers' and administrators', depends very little on adult control. It is often the students, in fact, who come up with the best

ideas for rules and policies, sense who will make the best teachers, or know best how to address each others' antisocial behavior—which is usually quite infrequent.

Here Gribble offers two examples from the early days of Sands School, the first of which reveals the author's own admitted lack of trust in children's ability to address complex issues. Peter, who had come to the school at the age of twelve with a long history of academic and social troubles, tended to react with physical aggression whenever he felt threatened. When he went after other boys with sharp objects three times in a single day, Gribble, then the head teacher, intervened without consulting anyone and made an appointment for Peter at the Child Guidance Clinic. He also told him he couldn't come back to school until the school meeting had met to discuss his situation and decide whether to allow him to continue attending.

The overriding student response at the meeting was that students and staff "had not been nice enough" to Peter. If he were treated more carefully and given more attention, they reasoned, then the school would be able to help him with his problem. The meeting voted to allow Peter to return to school; however, Gribble, concerned about placing too much unpleasant responsibility on the students' shoulders if Peter's aggression persisted, also convinced everyone to let him unilaterally deal with the problem if it reoccurred. When Peter still proved unable to control his temper upon his

return, Gribble told Peter's parents they would have to find another school for him, leaving Gribble to wonder to this day whether the story might have ended differently had he let the school meeting handle the entire affair.

The second example involved three students who stole all the money from the school's petty cash box so that they could run away from home. When Gribble collected the kids from the police station after they were caught trying to buy train tickets, they were sullen and unresponsive. Then, back at school, it was the thieves themselves who called a school meeting so that they could tell everyone what had happened and why. After the three finished their story, it was their peers who did most of the talking. Some of them recounted how the school community had supported them through their own troubles, and when the three thieves called for a vote on whether or not they should be expelled, the result was a nearly unanimous no. Their behavior then improved for a while; and ultimately, one of students changed dramatically for the better, one moved abroad, and one was placed by her parents in another school. But the outcome isn't the real point of the story, according to Gribble; rather it is that again and again the young people at Sands proved able to deal wisely and compassionately with difficult problems.

Perhaps to ward off claims that he is just another Romantic, like Wordsworth or Rousseau, proclaiming the sweet innocence of youth, Gribble injects the latest research



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in children's moral and intellectual development into his argument that children don't start wars because it is simply not their nature to do so. He refers to studies by social psychologist Carol Gilligan, professor of child psychiatry Judith Dunn, early childhood educator Vivian Gussin Paley, all of which confirm that from the age of 18 months children are well on their way to recognizing the pain of others and how to comfort it, and that by the time they are three they already understand the concept of responsibility and are able to comment on the morality of other people's behavior—without instruction. *Unless instructed otherwise*, these scientists are demonstrating, children are too inherently empathetic, fair-minded, and reasonable to believe that the way to resolve conflicts is through massive displays of power and aggression.

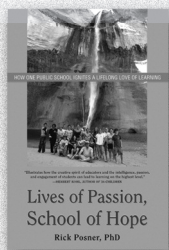
Of course as we all know, it is adults who start wars; and here Gribble takes the brilliant tack of contrasting the evidence currently pouring in about how much more children know and are capable of knowing than was previously assumed with seldom discussed information regarding the decline of the adult ability to make rational moral decisions that begins quite early in the game. Actually, as Gribble points out, our capacity for empathy and our affinity with the world around us starts to diminish as soon as the competitive nature of schooling begins suppressing children's innate altruism and replacing it with narcissistic conformity.

There's more: it isn't only our moral edge that has already begun to dull well before we reach the age at which our opinions are taken seriously and society allows us to participate in the formation of public policy. Here Gribble reports at length on the research of psychologist David Wechsler, who in the late-1930s developed a battery of diagnostic intelligence tests that are still widely used today. Few of us know about Wechsler's side project, in which he tested thousands of subjects in every age bracket in order to determine the point at which we humans reach peak performance in the various areas of mental functioning. One of the things his results revealed was that it isn't just memory that fades with age, but also a host of other intellectual skills and abilities. Moreover, the deterioration sets in *far earlier* than is popularly acknowledged. For instance, when Wechsler reviewed the results from all the subtests he found the highest scores occurring between the ages of 15 and 30, with 55- to 59-year-olds scoring at the same level as the average 9- to 12-year-old!

The average age of members of the U.S. Congress: 57.

Thankfully, Gribble doesn't leave us to despair over the seldom examined paradox that those who make the decisions that lead to war are doing so with declining intellectual powers, while those who are excluded from public discourse are approaching the height of theirs. The aging process isn't entirely a legacy of loss, he reminds us; there are potential

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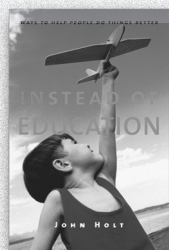
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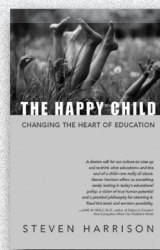
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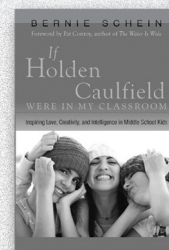
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gains as well. In particular, our increasing life experience engenders a very important type of intelligence that can't be measured on Wechsler's scales. It's called wisdom.

On this hopeful note, Gribble shares with us his parting vision. Like Tolstoy and Holt before him, he too views children as the answer to war. He imagines a generation of self-aware and self-confident children—which he sees emerging as we speak—who will be open to acknowledging the loss of moral and intellectual “liveliness” as they grow older; and rather than suppress the intelligence and insight of the young, they will work *with them* instead.

Or as Gribble so gracefully puts it: “What I would wish is that the idealism and energy and sensitivity and freshness and intelligence of the younger [person] should be able to work in combination with the experience and knowledge of the older, so that we could complement each other and produce a figure very much more effective than either of us could be on our own. The proper relationship between young and old is not one of teacher and pupil, or authority and obedience, but of cooperation, affection, and mutual appreciation. We need to learn to use the skills acquired with age to serve the needs sensed by youth.”

Would such a shift lead to a future without war? I, for one, would like to find out.

Like Holt, David Gribble's early experience radicalized him and sent him looking for a way to educate children that isn't steeped in fear, conformity, and blind obedience.

Mother Nature's Child: Growing Outdoors in the Media Age

A Film by Camilla Rockwell
Fuzzy Slippers Productions, 2011
www.mothernaturesmovie.com

REVIEWED BY RON MILLER

According to the startling research cited in *Mother Nature's Child*, the average American child now spends 44 hours each week parked in front of a television or computer screen, and 40 *minutes* playing outside. This is a drastic and historically sudden alteration in the formative experiences that have nourished young human beings for millennia. Camilla Rockwell's brilliant documentary film explores the implications of this change.

To find out how an indoor, electronically-mediated reality shapes young minds differently than does the natural world, Rockwell interviews educators, parents and researchers, including Richard Louv, author of the bestseller *Last Child in the Woods*, and David Sobel, who has written extensively about place-based learning. They all speak about the importance of meaningful connections with nature. “We evolved in a biocentric world,” an environment teeming with diverse forms of life inhabiting diverse landscapes and ecological niches. This vibrant world invites spontaneity, imagination, and empathy; it calls on humans to use all their

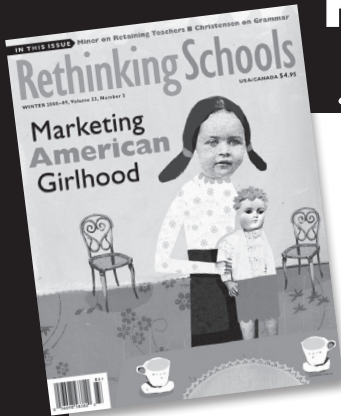
senses and test the limits of their physical capacities. We become aware of the awesomeness of creation, particularly toward adolescence; contact with nature inspires a sense of wonder and raises existential questions, such as the meaning of life and death.

The clear message here is that, as biological organisms, we are meant to connect with—experience deeply—the life processes and challenging habitats of the natural world. Confining childhood to artificial indoor spaces and virtual realities on flat screens constitutes an experiment on our children, says Louv. We don't know whether human nature is flexible or resilient enough to thrive in a world devoid of biological immediacy. So far, the results of our experiment are not promising, as we see rising rates of asthma, obesity, depression, allergies, aggression, and attention disorders among children.

Part of the problem is the seductive allure of video images and digital entertainment. But another part is the overprotective style of parenting that has evolved in recent decades. Children were once left free to roam, exploring the world on their own, told only to be back home by dinner. Now, out of irrational fear spurred by sensational media stories of kidnapping, as well as a competitive desire to turn out ambitious high achievers, kids are placed under “protective house arrest” and have play time, sports, and various lessons scheduled for them. The film observes that children who grow up in such a cocoon are turning out to be emotionally and psychologically fragile as they mature. Adolescents, especially, need to take on meaningful risks in order to test and confirm their sense of self.

Mother Nature's Child is a beautiful film, filled with delightful images of children exploring and playing in rich natural settings. The superb cinematography is enhanced by a judicious use of caressing music. One notable segment follows a group of teens in a challenging wilderness program, who quite obviously come out of it with astounding wisdom, self-confidence and compassion for each other. “They're powerful beings,” says one of the program leaders, “because they've been mentored to turn on all their switches.” It's ironic to use such a mechanistic metaphor for the biological and spiritual awakening we witness, but the point is clear: Our increasingly artificial environment does not, cannot, nourish the blossoming of our deepest and most meaningful human capacities. ●

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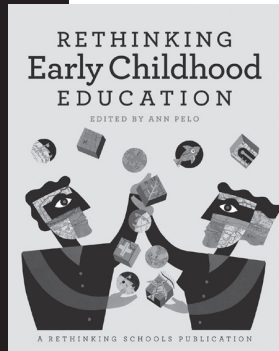
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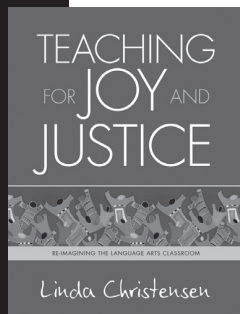


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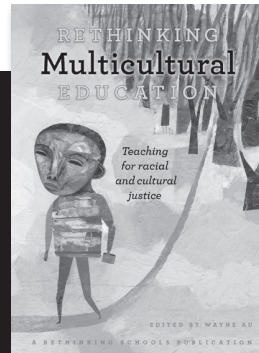
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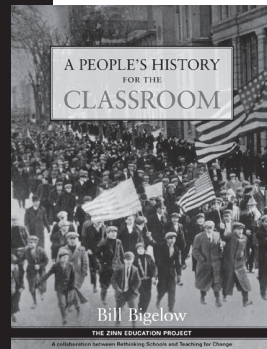
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