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Revolution

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With special **CHANGING SCHOOLS** section  
The Magazine of the Alternative Education Resource Organization  
(Formerly *AERO-gramme*)

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Oleg Belin, pioneering teacher and grandparent at Stork Family School, Vinnitsa, Ukraine

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## ***The Education Revolution***

The Magazine of the **Alternative Education Resource Organization** (Formerly *AERO-gramme*)

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# **The Next IDEC: In Israel or where?**

Eighteen months ago at a meeting of IDEC at Summerhill School in England we planned the next two IDECs. The first was to be in Japan, hosted by Tokyo Shure. That was a big success. This year's IDEC was to be Israel and Palestine, co-hosted by Israeli and Palestinian schools. Little did we know about the current turn of ever

which has shaken up the region and turned our plan on its head. We now have hundreds of pages of internet correspondence as we try to decide what to do about the situation.

As of this writing the situation is not resolved. Just this week the representatives of the Israeli and Palestinian groups agreed that it would not be possible for them to co-host the IDEC at this time, since they are not even able to meet together now. This does not close the door to one or the other hosting.

Some of the options have included; moving the IDEC to Cyprus so all participants could attend, postponing until things settle down, having it somewhere else (with the Israel/Palestine IDEC to be held in a year), or have it in Israel as scheduled, and try to find a way to arrange for Palestinian participation. We'll let you know as soon as we know something.

## **The 10th Anniversary Celebration of the founding of the Stork Family School**

The word 'unique' is thrown around a lot in the world today. But it does seem to me that the Stork Family School is unique among the many schools I have visited. The school, perhaps the first parents' cooperative in the Former Soviet Union, does not have a formal democratic process, yet the relationships - between students, parents and teachers - all reflect respect, understanding and love. I first met Stork students, parents and teachers in the Crimea at the First New School Festival of the Soviet Union, in August of 1991. A week later there was no more Soviet Union! I've been a member of their "family" ever since. Since my grandmother was born in Ukraine they consider me American only by accident of birth! In 1998 we had the International Democratic Education Conference at Stork, partly as a way of supporting them.

I flew in from New York with no sleep for 24 hours, traveling via Switzerland to Kiev, where I was met by Alla Chukhas, a Stork staff member. We waited for about an hour for Ana Kobiljski to arrive from Yugoslavia. I had met her in Japan where this young, very skilled, linguist was translating from Japanese to English. Now she wants to start a school in the newly revolutionized Yugoslavia, so AERO helped her come here for the celebration, to see the Stork school and meet people from several other alternative schools in Eastern Europe. These include the Kluch School and Tubelsky's School of Self-Determination from Moscow, and the Rogers School from Hungary.

We took a taxi for an hour to get in from the airport to Kiev, then a four-hour train ride south to Vinnitsa. After getting a few hours sleep at Oleg Belin's house, we went to the school where the celebration was beginning. Oleg, the grandfather of current Stork students, was one of the first staff members at the school, giving up a career in mathematics and technology to teach math and English at the school.

The central room was jammed to overflowing with children from Stork and the other schools - including the teachers, parents, and the principals from about 30 local schools. They were invited but it is something of a mystery why they came. They stayed for the morning, but we were told they had a conference or meeting to go to and they left *en masse* just before lunch. We were still left with a standing-room only crowd.

Starting that morning we were given a detailed history of the school; its philosophical roots in the Eureka movement, and its contacts with the progressive educator Amonoshvili; also its contact with the wonderful teacher, Nadezhda Vitkovskaya, who is still the core of the school; and we heard of the help of the many pioneering parents, teachers, and local officials who have made the existence of the school possible. Other supporters were honored, including myself. I spoke about AERO's support through the years with the help of the Paul and Edwards Foundations.

The honors and history were interspersed with much music and singing, and short plays performed by the students and staff. The unstoppable energy and spirit of the school shone through during the whole process. Particularly notable was the animation of expression on the faces of the students. Visiting schools, particularly the Kluch School from Moscow, also did skits, which were received with great enthusiasm.

During the official two-day celebration various activities, including evaluation and discussion sessions, were non-stop, interspersed with tea and meal times. There were workshops on various aspects of the school. I did one on IDEC, showing videos from past conferences, including the one they hosted here in 1998. We discussed democratic process and the ideas of compulsory and non-compulsory classes, and how they could be legally and successfully applied in societies still suffering from old totalitarian habits.

The Rogers School had traveled by train from Budapest with five students and two staff members. The trip took 22 hours. Kluch School came by train from Moscow with 15 people, including one graduate, Andrew, who is now studying at university level. I had met him at the 1998 IDEC and was interested in how he would make the transition from the school to university level. He said he struggled to pass Greek but otherwise has done quite well

## PICTURE #2 41

Students and teachers from Rogers School and Stork School in music demonstration

## PICTURE #2 39

Stork celebration festivities

## PICTURE #2 37

Jerry and Oleg at official celebration presentations

# PICTURE #1 28 Brighten or use 26

Stork School's graduates are doing outstandingly well at university, in a wide variety of areas, and about a dozen of them came back for the celebration. Nevertheless the school continues to suffer one financial crisis after another. At one point the local government contributed to the cost of educating the Stork children. Then they stopped their support and started charging them outrageous taxes on their tuition. Those have been reduced somewhat, but the latest assault is an attempt to get two years back rent for the municipal building the school is using, at about \$1200 a month. Teacher's salaries at Stork come to about \$25 a month.

During the week a presenter who is a follower of Davidoff's developmental approach to education had a series of workshops on innovative approaches to teaching music. The school pays for him to come from Moscow but he donates his services and the workshops are free to local teachers. We videotaped some of his work.

I had several meetings with staff members and students, discussing how other schools tackled a variety of academic and financial challenges. I also taught a lot of table tennis to several dozen people. When I first met people from Stork, in the Crimea in 1991, I taught table tennis to many of the students and they subsequently set up a program at the school. One of the students I taught, Sergei, helped organize the program. Now he has graduated from university is married with a child and has come back to work for the school.

## PICTURE #2 48

Stork students and visitors play "around the world" on the ping pong table

## PICTURE #1 41 or use #A photo

Stork ceramics teacher helps Ana use the wheel

We had a special workshop with Ana Kobiljski, from Yugoslavia, to discuss her various initiatives. She is about to start teaching in Yugoslavia at the school from which she graduated. They have given her a lot of latitude in how she will teach. She will also be organizing a center for educational reform. Since going to the Japan IDEC she has visited the Rogers School in Hungary.

On the second day of the celebration, in addition to the workshops, there was some really great music, including a group of university students singing Ukrainian traditional music – all *a cappella*. This was absolute perfection. Equally stunning was a performance by a 12-year-old Stork student, Marina, of technically challenging pieces for the piano, by Chopin and a Ukrainian composer, Pillipenko.

The next day the seven from the Rogers School had arranged a bus excursion to Kiev, and it snowballed to 35 people. AERO contributed to the cost, so that Kluch and Stork students could come. Two Stork administrators, Lubov Stepanenko and Tatiana Yazykova, also came because they had arranged a meeting for me with the UNICEF director in Kiev, to support an application which they had made to them for funds. The director is promoting an initiative for 'children-friendly schools'.

After we arrived and met the director I asked him how much time he had, since we were a little late. Jokingly he said, "How much time do you need?" I said we needed a half-hour.

Then I asked him how much space he had. Quizzically he said, "How much space do you need?" I told him we had 35 children outside, and he said to bring them all in. We had a very nice meeting in which the students participated. A Stork student presented him with one of their symbolic bells.

## PICTURE #1 06

At old monastery in Kiev

## PICTURE #1 07

Overlooking the Knepr River

## PICTURE #1 04

Kostia, Nina, Andrew and Sasha in Kiev

On the last day in Vinnitsa they organized a farewell party at the school with lots of toasts and compliments all around. Sasha, Gena, and Nina, three of the students who spent a lot of time with me this week and who helped me a lot, came to the dinner. As we talked we realized that they all had access to the Internet at home and we hatched the idea of a regular IDEC class which we could have on the AERO chatsite every week. We agreed the first class would be on the Friday after I flew home.

After last exchanges of presents we got into cars and taxis and about ten people came to the train to see me off. Alla, and her son Vanya, a Stork student, went with me to Kiev.

Oleg's son Misha and his friend Sasha met us at the station and drove us to his friend's apartment where we had a nice meal and then walked around central Kiev. We then stopped by a military museum near the Dnepr River, which we could walk around even though it was late and closed. Vanya was excited about the tanks and the helicopters. It was hard to get him to leave.

After breakfast we went to the airport. Vanya got to see jets close up for the first time. He said he was, "a lot more than happy." I too was a lot more than happy about being here this week, and sad I had to go. JM

## PHOTO #C

Vanya and balloons at Stork Celebration

## PICTURE #2 40

Stork student waving goodbye

### **Trying to Solve Youth Problems in Jacksonville, Florida**

The city of Jacksonville, Florida, in Duval County has been experiencing a high rate of minority youth entering their juvenile justice system. They discovered that many of them have been in the county's at-risk type

alternative schools. They felt that if these schools could somehow be reorganized to attack this problem, it might successfully help reduce the rate of juvenile crime by minority youth.

While searching the Internet, Ed Jones, a researcher in Jacksonville, discovered the AERO website. He invited me to do a workshop there to help people become aware of programs around the country which have developed successful approaches with such children, in order to help them better tackle these problems. It was a daunting task and I asked for as much help and information as I could get from the extended AERO network. Many people sent me information about programs that are working well.

I flew into Jacksonville to do a full-day workshop. An impressive group of 45 people came there on December 4th. They included teachers and school principals from Duval County's alternative schools, juvenile justice professionals, community activists, judges, attorneys, sheriffs and law enforcement personnel, truancy officers, violence prevention coordinators, and, luckily for me, students from the county's alternative schools. We were honored by the full-day participation of Judge Brian Davis, of the 4th Judicial Court.

When we started there were clearly two different orientations: one somewhat authoritarian and punitive or 'disciplinary,' the other more therapeutic and learner-centered. At first some of the former group were frustrated because they expected me to simply present some discrete models of 'best practice' from which they could choose. As I saw it, I needed to help the group create their own model, perhaps drawing from the examples that I brought, but ultimately finding an approach to working with these children that will be successful in this community.

As the day went on I felt that the participation of the alternative school students in this process was very important and powerful. Although they differed in their backgrounds and in their opinions, they all agreed that they perceived placement in the alternative schools as a punishment. They are embarrassed to be in these schools and feel negative things are expected of them. They appreciate the smallness of the schools but they can't really have an experience of success there, because any apparent accomplishment they experience is in 'one of those' schools.

We had one dramatic turn of events when a woman had to leave at lunchtime to get her granddaughter who had been suspended that day for saying a prohibited word. This was not this girl's first suspension. The grandmother brought her back to the afternoon workshop. During the evaluation session the girl said, "I need help and I'm not getting it. At this point in my life I could go one way or the other." When asked about specific resources she said she had tried unsuccessfully to access them. "They are very slow," she said. People in the room made strong, specific commitments to help her.

It was felt, while talking about current intake and evaluation procedures, that a significant percentage of emotionally disturbed and other special education students may have been inappropriately placed in the alternative schools. It also became clear that the different agencies are duplicating services and not coordinating with each other. Children are falling between the cracks.

There was general agreement that this was a good beginning and that future follow up will be crucial. A teacher-of-the-year at her school said she hoped for a real paradigm shift toward a learner-centered approach. The principals of the alternative schools invited all present to come visit them. In the final evaluation, people used phrases such as "lots of good options," "hope the group stays committed," and "no one has taken the approach you've suggested here." By the end, people were more in accord about approaches that might work. The judge even said that if it hadn't been for strong and supportive people in his life at crucial times, he might have been in the juvenile justice system himself.

## Mail and Communications

### Edited by Carol Morley

To me and, I imagine, to everyone else of my generation, school was dark, sad and unreal; unreal in the sense of life-denying, in the sense that it showed all the truest and solidest things in life in a completely dead, abstract sort of way. It was therefore, profoundly, a non-education. Then there was the sense of guilt . . . that time spent in class was all wasted. **Federico Fellini.**

The **PEN NewsBlast** is a free weekly e-mail newsletter featuring school reform and school fundraising resources. The PEN NewsBlast is the property of the Public Education Network, a national association of 53 local education funds working to improve public school quality in low-income communities nationwide. To subscribe or unsubscribe, visit: <http://www.PublicEducation.org/news/signup.htm>. Howie Schaffer, Managing Editor, Public Education Network, 601 13th Street, NW #900N, Washington, DC 20005.

**Tees Valley Communities Online** is a group of small very poor mining communities on the East Coast of England. I am artist in residence at Skinningrove and have open house for young people every evening, because otherwise they meet in the dirt on the street. They are quite frightened of the computer but have suddenly realized the possibilities; they are desperately looking for pen pals. No one in the village has a computer at home. The village is very isolated socially, no employment, and it is cut off from the transport systems. The young people go ferreting for rabbits and catch trout as they swim upstream, miss school whenever possible, and feel like foreigners when they do get there. The village was badly flooded three months ago and is still a national disaster area. Even if your young people do not want pen pals, they may be interested in the web pages. Best wishes, Jean Grant  
Web: <http://www.tvco.org.uk/skinningrove>.

From **Oleg Belin, Stork School, Ukraine**: We are so grateful to you for your invaluable help. The support you give us is vitally important to our school and it makes us feel that we're not left all alone with our problems and troubles. Thank you for being our true friend for 10 years.

Writer **John Adcock** advocates a radical change in the way we help children learn, with parents playing an active role. Recently, Roland Meighan interviewed him for **Natural Parent**. Here are some of Adcock's comments from that interview: "Today, the possibilities for educating children at home – each according to his need – are infinite, with more space, time, money, knowledge and other resources, together with the controlled support of multimedia making an enjoyable, encouraging and personalized study program possible for every boy and girl. We no longer need classes of 30 pupils in schools of hundreds, following a politically contrived, centrally administered, imposed and externally inspected national curriculum based on targets, tests, performance league tables, and the naming-and-shaming antics so beloved of civil servants and politicians.... How much more could a gifted teacher do if she were given a free rein to spend her time, energy, imagination and other resources – including compassion – to devise schemes for her pupils, aided by their parents, to work in small study groups at different times and places. School as we know it would be superfluous.... For thousands of years, the family – several generations of it – educated its own children. Universal and compulsory schools changed that during a particular period of economic development in Western society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. That period has passed. Now the family can benefit from the huge opportunities that period gave rise to and resume its original work. The school will be seen as a blip in recent social history – no more." For more information, contact **Education Now**, 113 Arundel Dr., Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ.

**Paths of Learning: Options for Families & Communities** is a journal with the purpose of encouraging an understanding of education as a means of nourishing holistic personal development and a sustainable, democratic and peaceful community life. The latest issue includes the interview with Zoë Readhead that Jerry Mintz conducted on his radio show regarding Summerhill School's recent court victory. Zoë is Director of Summerhill and the daughter of A.S. Neill, the founder of the school. The issue also features articles by Joseph T. Hinds, a public-school teacher of special-needs students in Texas; Mary Goral, about Waldorf education; Jeffrey S. Cramer about his homeschooling family; poems and stories by young writers; an alternative education resource directory and more. PO Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733. Web: [www.great-ideas.org/paths.htm](http://www.great-ideas.org/paths.htm).

**The Montessori Leadership Institute** in affiliation with **The Montessori Foundation** hosts workshops and interactive seminars for Montessori school community leaders. These include Building a World-Class School, Fundamentals of Fundraising, Master Teachers Model Programs, and The Art of Managed Growth. For more information, contact The Montessori Foundation, 17808 October Court, Rockville, MD 20855. Tel: (800) 632-4121. Web: [www.Montessori.org](http://www.Montessori.org).

**Committee for Children** has introduced "Steps to Respect," a new school-wide bullying prevention program, intended for use in elementary schools. This is a school-based social & emotional learning program designed to decrease bullying and help children build more respectful, caring relationships. Committee for Children's mission is to promote the safety, well-being, and social development of children by creating quality education programs for educators, families, and communities. They can be contacted at 2203 Airport Way South, Ste. 500, Seattle, WA 98134. Tel: (800) 634-4449. Web: [www.cfchildren.org](http://www.cfchildren.org).

For the past five years we have been field-testing and implementing a graduate program that leads to an M.Ed. in Integrative Learning. Its uniqueness stems from the context under which we operate. That context includes: the implications of modern science on our world views; a natural systems approach to teaching and learning; the development of a collaborative learning community; and a web-based environment enabling a global exploration

ideas. Students can complete all requirements via the e-campus; or they may choose the option that includes two short-term summer residencies. The course of study is 18 months or three semesters. For more information contact **Philip Snow Gang**. Email: [t\\_ties@endicott.edu](mailto:t_ties@endicott.edu).

**Living Routes - Ecovillage Education Consortium's** programs are based in ecovillages, communities that are striving to create cooperative lifestyles in harmony with their local environments. Bring your college education to life and learn skills needed to help heal our planet and build sustainable communities. Earn college credit while designing ecological communities in western MA and upstate NY; monitoring a "Living Machine" waste treatment facility in Scotland; gardening organically in Australia; meditating at Thich Nhat Hanh's Buddhist monastery in southern France; identifying rare medicinal plants in a rainforest in southern India; or building a straw bale house on a green kibbutz in Israel. For more information, email: [info@LivingRoutes.org](mailto:info@LivingRoutes.org). Web: <http://www.LivingRoutes.org>.

The **European Forum for Freedom in Education (EFFE)** celebrated its tenth anniversary this year. It was founded 1990 in Budapest for the purpose of disseminating materials outlining the basic principles behind an independent, pluralistic and democratic education system. Since its inception, EFFE has acted as a monitor on the human right to education and the freedom of education in Europe. It is producing an atlas illustrating the right to education and the freedom of education, which will list countries that respect the right to education and freedom of educational choice and those which obstruct or suppress such rights. For more information, contact EFFE, Annener Berg 15, D-58454 Witten, Germany.

The **Education Freedom Index Report**, a study released in September by **The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research** shows that there is a link between a state's educational freedoms and its student's performance. An Education Freedom Index (EFI) was developed using equally weighted portions of five criteria. Fifty percent of the criteria used in evaluating home school freedom came from **Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA)** and the rest came from the U.S. Department of Education. The tests used to measure student achievement include the SAT and the National Assessment Education Progress (NAEP). Overall, the study found that a statistical one-point increase in the EFI equaled a five-percent growth in students' achievement scores. The study can be downloaded for free at [www.manhattan-institute.org](http://www.manhattan-institute.org).

**The Clearwater School** celebrated the grand opening at their new location this past November. The beautiful, spacious building includes a computer room, multipurpose room, and kitchen/art room. Clearwater is a democratic, Sudbury school located in Washington State with 30 students in attendance. They are located at 11006 34<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE, Seattle, WA 98125-6806.

**The Foundations of Holistic Education Series** is now available from **The Foundation for Educational Renewal, Inc.** The series includes **Caring for New Life: Essays on Holistic Education** by Ron Miller; **Education for Awakening: An Eastern Approach to Holistic Education** by Yoshiharu Nakagawa; **Unfolding Bodymind: Exploring Possibility Through Education** by Hocking, Haskell & Linds; **Under the Tough Old Stars: Ecopedagogical Essays** by David Jardine; **The Primal, the Modern, and the Vital Center: A Philosophy of Holistic Experience & Place, the Cultural Preconditions of Educations** by Oliver, Canniff & Korhonen; and **Holistic Education: A Pedagogy of Universal Love** by Ramon Gallegos Nava. For more information, contact the Foundation at PO Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733-0328. Tel: (800) 639-4122. Web: [www.PathsOfLearning.net](http://www.PathsOfLearning.net).

"Kids listening skills deteriorate if they are not encouraged. In one study, 90% of first-graders could repeat what was said in a lecture, but only 28% of high school students could. To help children become good listeners: Listen carefully when they speak to you – stop what you are doing, look at them and listen when they talk...ask questions – to show you are paying attention and are interested ... play games that require children to listen carefully, such as Simon Says, Mother May I, and Trivial Pursuit." **Ralph G. Nichols**, PhD, University of MN, St. Paul. As reported in *Bottom Line Personal*, 9/1/2000.

From **East Dallas Takes Its Private Success Public**, by Mark Anderson, *Public School Montessorian*: The **East Dallas Community School**, a private Montessori school, has won acclaim throughout the nation because of the successes its mostly low-income, minority students achieve in the classroom. The school's director, Terry Ford, and her partners have believed for years that, given the right learning environment, all of Dallas' inner city children can achieve those same academic success. Last year they embarked on a groundbreaking – and risky – partnership with the Texas public education system to try to prove that. They have opened its first publicly funded Montessori



program, Lindsley Park Community School last fall, aiming to repeat East Dallas' success using public school find and public school rules. Fall, 2000.

A new book has been published called **Failing Our Kids: Why the Testing Craze Won't Fix Our School**, edited by Kathy Swope and Barbara Miner. It contains over 50 articles that provide a compelling critique of standardized tests and also outlines alternative ways to assess how well our children are learning. The articles cover origins of the latest testing craze, parents and teachers talk back, views from the classroom, alternatives to standardized testing, policy and background, and resources. It is available from Rethinking Schools, 1001 E. Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212. Tel: (414) 964-7220. Web: [www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org).

**School building for sale**; includes all instructional contents including 8,000-volume library. State approved for 50 students grades K-8. Built in 1991 as a private academy. 3,000 square feet on an acre. In Hanover, PA, one hour from Baltimore, MD. Director retiring. Call: (717) 632-1709 or e-mail: [davidandbobbie@yahoo.com](mailto:davidandbobbie@yahoo.com).

**Democracy is Born in Conversations: Recreating N.F.S. Grundtvig for Lifelong Learners Around the World**, edited by Clay Warren, afterword by Chris Spicer has just been released. The publication is of 12 interviews with Danish teachers, students, folk school directors, and Grundtvig scholars. The conversations provide a snapshot of late twentieth century Grundtvig-inspired folk education, with an afterword reflecting on its relevance to non-Scandinavians - particularly North Americans - at the turn of another century. Order from **Institute for People's Ed and Action**, 107 Vernon St., Northampton, MA 01060. Email: [cspicer@admin.umass.edu](mailto:cspicer@admin.umass.edu)

*The Danish Free School Tradition – A Lesson For Us All?*, a 24-page booklet by **Robert Powell** is now available from AERO for \$5 plus \$2 postage.

## Feedback from Education Revolution #30:

Just to let you know we got the new issue of *The Education Revolution*. Looks very interesting. I like all the article in this time, and am always especially happy to see anything Japan-related in ER. I'd hate to see advertising in the *Education Revolution*. We are bombarded with advertising everywhere else in the world, and it's like a breath of fresh air when we get to read a magazine like yours that is devoid of advertisers. We were also pleasantly surprised, of course, to see the photo you included of our son **Kenya** with **Marie Kobayashi** during our Kyoto get-together. Thanks very much for including us in the memoirs of your Japan trip. Seeing the photo in your magazine reminded me how much fun Kenya had that day. For weeks afterward, he kept wanting to go back to Kyoto, thinking you all were still there: "Let's go see Jerry!" he kept saying. We had to explain that Jerry wasn't in Kyoto anymore, but I don't think he believed us. So, you'll just have to come over to Japan more often! We'd all love to see and talk with you again. I like it, especially the fact that it's a nice, thick 48 pages!. Best wishes, **Brian Covert**, Japan

I take this opportunity to thank you so very much for the important news you send me each time. It assists a lot in keeping up to date and opens new correspondence and communication with educators all over the world that will hopefully forward peace among all human beings. Thanks, love and blessings, **Malyah, Israel**

I've read about half and so far I love the article about Denmark best! No wonder my friend **from Kirkdale School** (a free school in London) who has lived in Denmark for ten years feels no qualms at sending her kids to the local public schools. She couldn't understand my complaints about the schools around me and I couldn't understand her complaisance with the schools around her. Both of us were totally ignorant of the differences between Danish and American education systems. I am not surprised as I spent several years in Dutch schools and they were pretty great compared to German and American high schools. **Liz Reid**.

Yesterday I received the magazine and immediately delivered it to the school. There was much joy among the students when they found **Kostia's** photo holding the "KLUCH" sign! Teachers were reading the magazine all the time. The article about IDEC is the most interesting article for us, of course, but others are interesting, too. Thank you! We will use this and previous issues of Ed Rev in our looking for grants because there are some words and photos about us. It is very important for a Russian school! **Andrew P**, Moscow.

I love **Jerry Mintz's** work and the huge contribution he has made to the movement through his exhaustive research, networking, etc., as well as his monthly publication, *The Education Revolution* (a powerful title). I also think its

really cool that he provides a web forum for alternative education advocates to share information, insights, ideas, feelings, etc. It strengthens our "community", which is vital to the health and growth of our movement. We need to continue to strengthen our voice in order to effect transformation in the mass-consciousness around "education". Like Jerry says...."revolution". From homeschooler in CA.

The idea of a homeschooling resource center really appeals to me. I call it a learning resource center because I really want it to be something for all ages--although homeschoolers will be the main "market" because they are the ones who need this the most. Perhaps I will help build a bridge between the intentional communities and alternative education--I think it is a bridge that is really, really needed, and could enrich everyone. Again, thank you for making such a big difference in my life. Really...it was a huge revelation to find my right livelihood and to figure out how that connects to community! And you have the resources to help me. What a gift. In peace, **Patricia**. Email [patriciamik@hotmail.com](mailto:patriciamik@hotmail.com).

I wanted to write a note to acknowledge the role that AERolist plays in supporting change in education. The knowledge that we gain from one another on this list helps us as individuals in our struggles, as recent postings show. Beyond that, the knowledge that members share in their individual communities multiplies and benefits everyone. With a heartfelt plea for help in dealing with reluctant administrators, students, and teachers who were affected by the change he was introducing into his classroom, a poster asked very important questions. The beauty of it all was being able to read everyone's responses and opinions about his situation. The support he received was significant, and he thanked everyone. And, I know that this is just the beginning of the change that AERolist engenders. For example, I plan to share those letters and the responses with teachers at our high school where my daughter attends. Those letters will serve as touchstones for important discussions and dialogue, and help another group of teachers to think about change and their own way of thinking about education. Thank you for your hard work and dedication to the group, which you have 'set free' to learn together. Sincerely, **Debbie Smith**, Director, Lancaster Athenaeum.

I enjoy my hard copy of Ed Rev. I read a great deal of information and articles on the computer, but hard copies are much more valuable to me. I tend to print off so many papers already in order to show teachers and parents. I prefer to just take my Ed Rev as a complete magazine. Of course the PDF file is great for reference. As to advertisements in the magazine, I appreciate ads - they remind me of books I want to read, or suggest places to buy things. Advertising over the Internet is wonderful for you, but I do hope you will continue to publish a hard copy especially for those of us who love to read on the run, over coffee, or to share with a friend or colleague. Thanks. **Barbara Shpack**.

### **Discussion on ADHD:**

I have been conducting an anthropological cross-cultural study of ADHD for several years now. I compared the behavior of "normal" children in England, where diagnosis is rare, with "normal" children in the United States, where non-diagnosis is rare. Interestingly, my results seem to show that the children's behavior is identical in both settings; it is the social interpretation of that behavior which varies. *That is, we can with enough observation diagnose any child with as being ADHD or not being ADHD. All children exhibit the behaviors. If a child is not "achieving" up to the politically defined standards of their society, then, since all children exhibit the behaviors, the label can easily be applied.* As I share these findings, I find the people least able to accept them are psychologists committed to the idea that better diagnosis will sort out the "faux" cases of ADHD from the "real" cases. It isn't even a case of degree, with the "real" ADHD kids being much more hyperactive/impulsive/distractible. The behavior of all children varies from extremely off task to extremely on task. *My research seems to indicate that this is a clear case of correlation without causality.* Accordingly, my interest in the free school movement came from a desire to find non-political ways in which to let children grow and learn. We absolutely need to stop labeling/blaming the children and look to their environments (personal and political) for reasons their behavior appears "abnormal". Cheers...Ken.

## **International News and Communications**

### **BRAZIL**

From **Helena Singer** who is working with Ricardo Semler in Brazil: We keep on struggling to raise money for the school. We've finished the project and built the school council with people from university, foundations and NGC. The biggest problem is that we can't find a building. As all large cities, land is really expensive here in Sao Paulo, so we are trying to receive a donation, but it's not easy. We'll send the project to American and European foundations.

and companies trying to convince them to support the poor children in the school. It'd be really important for us have AERO as a partner. The idea of **Semco Institute** is to be a catalyst of all the important groups committed making the education revolution. The basic principle of the school will be that students will be free to choose the subjects they pursue and to set their own timetables and goals. Semco Foundation School will begin with 0-6 year old children and will gradually expand until reaching 18 year-olds. As equal members of a democratic community the students will be actively involved in the events of daily life. Semco Institute is being created as a think tank education that will connect schools, institutions, experts in new technologies and children's products creators in order to redesign the school model for the present day. A. V. Angelica, 546 AP. 95, Sao Paulo SP, Brazil-01228-00 Email: [hsinger-99@yahoo.com](mailto:hsinger-99@yahoo.com).

## CANADA

Season's greetings from -34 degrees centigrade and blowing snow, by definition, a blizzard. It has been a good year for the **Manitoba Alternative Schools Special Area Group**. Our Fall conference was well attended and there is some new blood on the executive. Transfusions are a critical part of the ongoing renewal of all forms of alternatives. I'm currently working at designing an access program for aboriginal students to gain entry to and graduate from the Science and Technology departments of the local College. Their record with the aboriginal community is dismal to say the least and needs a shot in the arm. I glad to be designing the hypodermic in collaboration with the community. Am enjoying the magazine so keep it coming. **Gerry Moore**, [demoore@MINET.gov.MB.CA](mailto:demoore@MINET.gov.MB.CA)

## ENGLAND

**Lewes New School**, which opened its doors on September 11, was totally flooded on October 12th when the River Ouse burst its banks. The children had just been sent home early from school when the water swiftly swirled in, reaching waist high within an hour. The water remained high for well over a day before receding, by which time the plaster was sodden, the electrics bust and the floorboards buckled. Our surveyor and architects say it may be six months before we can reoccupy our beautiful listed buildings. After a couple of days of reeling with shock, things seem brighter: the insurance will pay for all our losses, including loss of business. We were just beginning to get into the flow of things when the flood happened. Twenty families are involved with around 30 children, including the nursery. We've been keeping in close contact with the families, and they are still strongly supporting us, every one has offered to help re-create the school. The school has so many assets: visionary, dedicated people, vibrant children, strong support, a wonderful location (even though a little too close to the river) and a real feeling of team spirit. These precious qualities and other less tangible ones will carry us forward. Please pray for us in this challenging time. Adrienne Campbell, Lewes New School, Talbot Terrace, Lewes BN7 2DS. Tel: 01273 477074. Email: [office@lewesnewschool.co.uk](mailto:office@lewesnewschool.co.uk).

Over 700 people attended the Alternatives in Education Fair which was organized by Human Scale Education in London on September 30<sup>th</sup>. This was the second fair. There were 40 exhibitors representing small alternative schools, organizations, publishers and home educators. Human Scale Education, 96 Carlingcott, Nar Bath, BA2 8AW. [Hse@clara.net](mailto:Hse@clara.net), [www.hse.org.uk](http://www.hse.org.uk), 011441 275 332516.

## GERMANY

My nearly 6-year-old son is at the **Freie Schule Frankfurt**, the free school there, and my 3-year-old son will follow next year. The FSF is a day school with 47 kids age 3 to 13 in three age groups. Every group has more or less three grown-ups watching over them and making offers or working out ideas the kids have. There are no formalized school hours. The FSF is probably the oldest free school in Germany. It started out as a kindergarten in the sixties and as a school in 1972, I believe. My son is there now for three years. By profession I'm a judge. I'm 40 years old. Never went to Summerhill but sympathize with it for obvious reasons. Michael. Email: [gerlinger-kato@web.de](mailto:gerlinger-kato@web.de). (Former student at Lewis-Wadham's School, which was based on Summerhill.)

## GUATAMALA

**Social Transformation through Democratic Education** by **Pauline Bartolone**:

(Ed: Paula visited as an intern as part of her college studies)

Perhaps the most important tool for transforming oppressive systems is the democratic process. In Guatemala, more than 36 years of military dictatorship has deprived the population the opportunity to create the structures th

regulate their lives. Without the education for using dialog to resolve conflict, many Guatemalans have never experienced democracy. In Guatemala City, there exists a regional rarity, the participatory and relatively decentralized private school called **Colegio Naleb**. In this school of kindergarten through 12th graders, I found the students to be well spoken, informed, respectful, responsible, enthusiastic and friendly. I attribute these traits to the opportunities they have had to represent themselves in the primary institution that they belong to, granting them ownership and responsibility for the way their institutional structure functions. In this holistic process of educating, emphasis is put on how to participate in the system, institution, or community that one belongs to. In a traditional school setting, students are only oriented to the content of a prescribed curriculum or method of teaching, not to interacting with the structure that regulates how the institution functions. A participatory approach to education is most important in order to implement an egalitarian, just, and empowering society. When a population understands the system that they belong to, they become more active, careful, informed and conscientious citizens. I observed the inequality, oppression and consequences of a society without alternatives in my stay in Guatemala. Just social and political change begins with democratic orientation through the institutions that dictate the lives of citizens. In a society trying to redesign itself, Colegio Naleb is a model for the development of democratic processes, and gives a brighter outlook on the future of democracy in Guatemala.

From **Lucrecia at Naleb**: The Guatemalan Education Ministry is about to pass a law ordering the creation of school governments in all the schools of the country, and they asked us to supervise it and orient these institutions in dialogue and other democratic tools that we practice at **Naleb School**. For our country this is going to be a big step that begins to break the culture of silence and non-participation in order to be safe. We are also working with companies, government institutions and municipalities, giving them tools for dialogue, as a model of peace, strength and efficiency.

## HAITI

Dear Jerry: I am very happy to be in contact with you. Most Haitian schools use the French system of memorization, and it is a horrible system. Exactly what Paolo Friere talked about "the banking system" of depositing information and getting graded on how well you spit it back out! There are some Montessori schools here. My daughter just started in a Haitian school run by a man who professes to worship **Summerhill**. This is a rare find in Haiti! School just started and we have discovered that the teachers hit and pinch and scratch and twist ears! However, hitting by teachers is expected in Haiti, and the school is learning-centered and the children love the school, love learning and love the director. I want to really work on getting information for the directory and having Haiti represented in it. It will be positive reinforcement for those trying to respect children, their rights and their desire to learn. If you'd ever like to come here, you're more than welcome and I could give you a tour of different types of schools. What an experience! The most exciting is what former resident Aristide did with the home for street children. The center isn't functioning now but the kids still run a TV and radio station. Most children who go to school here (and that's the minority of children) don't learn. It's all rout and only a tiny percent of the country can actually pass the final exams to graduate high school. Please let me know how I can be of help to you. **Michelle M Karshan**.

## HUNGARY/YUGOSLAVIA

**It Can Be Different**, Observations on **Rogers School**, By **Aleksandra Majstorac Kobiljski** (from Yugoslavia; she was translating Japanese into English as an intern at the IDEC): I arrived in Budapest and was happy to see the familiar smiling face of **Kristina**, English teacher at Rogers School, an **IDECer** I met in Tokyo a few months ago. The whole evening and the following day were filled with my questions to Kristina about the modus operandi of the school and how it came to life. The next evening, the two of us met **Istvan**, art teacher at Rogers who was also at this year's IDEC. We had a long and fruitful discussion about where to start. Since the atmosphere has changed in Yugoslavia it seems a bit easier, although long years of conflicts in the region and severe economic deprivation have left marks. At the school, there were two boys who spent some time in the States so Kristina thought it would be nice for them to get somebody fluent to talk with. It turned out they were more fluent than I was and we had half an hour of fun. One of them told me something striking: "I was going to a regular school for the first two grades. But I couldn't take it any more. It was like a prison." We also talked about freedom of alternative schools and I was amazed how articulate they were about their opinions. It was like listening to the spokesmen of alternative education at a press conference. After lunch I had to catch the train back to Belgrade. As I sat on the train the notes were pouring in --it was so inspiring. (Rogers School's principles of) Kindness and devotion to children, the patience and love I felt left me speechless but deeply motivated to tell all the people I know how different it can be. The clash of the still-fresh memories from Budapest came the next morning when I took my brother's child to school. Huge classroom. Desks faced teacher's desk that was 3 times the size of the child's desk and a teacher who

looked like the winner of Miss Serious Face that makes you freeze in the morning. The bag full of homework that was heavy even for me to carry. I was sorry that Teodora, first grader, has no other school to go to. And that was it. Something has clicked in me and I knew that things would be different from now on. It is impossible that I am the only one feeling like that. I realized that I came from Budapest with less answers but much more support and encouragement than I could ever expected. I knew that before long Yugoslavia will have Alternative Solutions in Education Club. Belgrade, October 2000.

## INDIA

(Note: **Amin** is a 15-year-old "working child" who lives in the Delhi train station. He and a representative of "**Butterflies**," a democratic education center for street children, came to the Japan IDEC where Amin was a presenter, speaking about working children in India.)

Dear Jerry Bhaiya (Elder brother): How are you? I am fine here. I am glad to know from your mail to Rita Didi that you remember me and have spoken about me. Bhaiya, I still very fondly remember the way you taught me how to play table tennis. It was a new game for me and you taught me the technique of playing the game. You were very affectionate. I sometimes wonder how I met you -- you from USA, myself from India met in another country, Japan. We became friends and departed for our ways. I do not know if ever I will meet you again but I will certainly remember you forever. But I must mention that I was very fortunate to meet friends like you and others who came from different countries. You will be happy to know that I have enrolled for class VIII exam through National Open School and I have established link with my family. Now I write to them regularly. I am also getting trained for street theatre. I would like you to come to India and visit us. My friends and I will be very glad to meet you. Please do come to India. Hope to meet you someday, somewhere. Amin.

Dear Jerry, Greetings from **Butterflies**! It has been lovely to meet you and other friends who believe in democratic education. It was worth knowing how much you yourself have done for this. Despite our country being democratic, there are very few educational institutes who run along that line. I would like to pass on your magazine to a few of my other friends who work or run democratic education institutes. Hope to be in touch. **Ishani**.

## ISRAEL

From *Ha'aretz*, Schools Need a Revolution, by Shiri Lev-Ari: The traditional role of the modern school, as it functioned for the past 200 years, has come to an end, say educators, particularly those who deal with futurism. Even now it is possible to find educational methods that challenge the ordinary school. For example, e-learning, distance learning via the Internet or the method of homeschooling, which are providing much food for thought. Engaged in this also are 80 experimental educational institutions, as well as parents' associations that are taking responsibility for the education of their children and setting up schools with their own curricula. All these phenomena are signaling to the education system the need for change -- in curricula, in teaching methods and in the organizational structure of the school. "We are now in a transition from the modern age to the post-modern age, which is characterized by a series of revolutions," says Dr. Aaron Aviram, head of the Institute for Futurism in Education at Ben-Gurion University. "In the past decades a relativist culture has developed in the world, in which there is no absolute truth but everything is a matter of perspective, and it we ourselves who produce the truth. We are putting the young people of today into a 12-year ritual of doing things that they see as meaningless. This is not only a huge waste of money, it also teaches the young people that the world is absurd and that there is only one thing of significance in it: the matriculation certificate." In recent years, several companies have been set up that deal with e-learning. Studying by Internet is an accompaniment to the regular classroom. One recent study showed that 85% of weaker students passed their tests as a result of taking part in live lessons that were transmitted over the Internet. There is talk of a more advanced version of learning via the Internet. However, in Israel "the use of e-learning is practically zero," says Dr. Asher Idan from the Open University, "Less than one third of the schools are linked up." 10/17/2000.

Anything that is related to **homeschooling in Israel** is a confused issue. The first step is to be lucky enough to reach the right people at the Ministry of Education to submit reasons and intention to homeschool. Next, the Ministry is supposed to send a delegation to the home, and permission is granted to homeschool for one year. In reality, today in Israel there are 40 families who choose to homeschool their children. Most of the families (90%) didn't send any letter to the Minister. From the very few who sent such a letter, one didn't get any answer and one received a confirmation that the letter had been received. Only one family had anyone from the Ministry visit the house and confirm that the family doesn't abuse the children. Israel is very pluralistic about the education issue; it lets everybody teach without real supervision of content, even though it sometimes budgets for unique systems of teaching. I think it is a good idea to send a letter to the Minister of Education. The letter should explain that this is

your way and your belief; it is strongly recommended not to attack the system. I don't believe you gain much care from the system, but it is important that you understand that the Ministry is incapable of telling you what to teach when and how. **Mara List, The Institute for Democratic Education, [maralist@ort.org.il](mailto:maralist@ort.org.il).**

## JAPAN

From **Homeschool Movement Goes Global**, by Andrea Billups, *The Washington Times*: Homeschooling is rapidly expanding worldwide as families abroad search for options to guide their children's education amid growing concerns over lax educational standards and increasing violence in government-run schools. Christopher J. Klicka, senior lawyer at the Home School Legal Defense Association, says, "There seems to be a thirst for this by parents everywhere." In Japan, he says, homeschooling is becoming all the rage, and is being supported by several leaders in the corporate business community. The country has experienced a 300,000-student per year dropout rate in junior and senior high schools over the past several years, and is seeking solutions that might give children who have left school a reason to return to their studies. "The business community is driving the home-school community in Japan," he said. "They want kids to be educated." Homeschooling, while not yet officially approved by the Japanese government, continues to garner the support of many education officials, Mr. Klicka says. They include a professor of education at Hyogo University who is the president of a newly formed home educators group called HOSA (Home School Support Association of Japan). Japanese educators say the freedom and creativity home schooling gives students may be an effective alternative for those who are disenchanted with the country's rigid system of public education.

From **Brian Covert** of Osaka, Japan, regarding the above article: In this article, Dr. Christopher Klicka of the controversial, US-based Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) speaks on home learning in Japan as being "all the rage" and that "the business community is driving the homeschool community in Japan." Which is strange, because I was under the impression that only a vast minority of Japanese society is even AWARE of home learning as an educational option -- and that it is ordinary, everyday home learning families in Japan who are the real "driving" power behind the home learning movement in this country. In one sense, Klicka may not be too far off the mark when he notes that the engine of the home learning community is currently Big Business and by extension, academia). So already, the PR spin is being cast: It is Japanese companies and schools -- not Japanese families -- who are supposedly "driving" the home learning movement in Japan. What a load of crap.

**Child's Interests Come First**, by Kazuko Fujimoto, Special to *Asahi Evening News*: Is there room in Japan's rigid school system for a school that aims to help each student cultivate his or her particular talents? Not likely, would be the reply of pessimists, who tend to associate this country's schools with such terms as "standardized" and "control." But an attempt to prove them wrong is being undertaken by students and their instructors at the Dream Planet International School, which opened a year and a half ago in Okinawa Prefecture. Breaking with tradition, the school has no end-of-term exams or report cards, and the students are not required to attend lessons that do not interest them. Tomoko Shirai, Dream Planet's 27-year-old principal, does not believe that children need to learn the same thing at the same time or be told off for failing to do so. What she does believe is that "recognizing where children's talent lies, and helping bring out their personalities and refine their communication skills, count more than simply teaching them how to read and write or to obey the rules." 10/2000.

## SCOTLAND

**Schoolhouse Times** is a newspaper project for home-educated young people supported by the Schoolhouse Home Education Association, a recognized Scottish charity that offers information and support to families who educate their children without school. The publication includes home education news, young contributors' articles, review and a contact list. Schoolhouse, 311 Perth Road, Dundee DD2 1LG. Email: [editor@schoolhouse.org.uk](mailto:editor@schoolhouse.org.uk).

PHOTO (Use Picture at top left at <http://www.netdesktop.co.uk/he/march.shtml>)  
Participants at Scottish Home Educator's march

## SWEDEN

A homeschooling family in Sweden with three children 6, 10, and 12 is having big problems with the local school authorities. They are facing a fine if they don't send their children to school right away. They have been forced to flee their home to another school district. Homeschooling is legal in Sweden and the same laws apply for the whole country but they are not interpreted in the same way in every district. The Swedish Minister of Education has expressed that she wants to make it even more difficult to homeschool in Sweden in the future by changing the laws. This will mean that there will be more refugees from Sweden because of their beliefs as the interest for



homeschooling increases. If there are any questions or if they can be of any assistance for other homeschoolers, email Magnus Drysen & Maria Berkestam at [magnus.drysen@telia.com](mailto:magnus.drysen@telia.com).

## THAILAND

Last November, the Thai government introduced a home school system that allows parents to educate their children at home. Since then, a total of 50 families, either dissatisfied with the cramming style of school education, fearing the spread of drugs among students or trying to keep closer contact between family members, have started teaching their children at home. Yutthachai Chalermchai, a 45-year-old magazine editor who works from his home in Bangkunun, 20 kilometers south of Bangkok, is one of the pioneering parents. His two sons, 14-year-old Saipan and 12-year-old Sarntor, decided in May to study at home instead of going to school. The Daily Yomiuri. 10/30/2000.

# Home Education News

In 1992 I started an email conferencing site that moved onto the Internet. I designed it for home learners and rented it to several home learning organizations for several years. The public system is no longer allowing their home learners onto the site (in other words they are no longer funding memberships). I designed the graphic metaphor to parallel a sustainable community. When you first log onto the Internet site you see an overview of a village. When you click on any area of the village you zoom in on that section. Each of the 13 sections shows people in groups in conversation. Under each group appears a name of a conference and when you click on the people you open up a conference full of emails on that topic. You can send email inside the village and also do live conferences. The entire environment is on the Internet. I want to get it running again this year and I would like to offer it to AERO; I think that this environment would offer a very unique opportunity. Brent Cameron M.A., **Wondertree Foundation for Natural Learning**, Box 38083 Vancouver, BC V0B 2C0 Canada. Tel: (604) 224-3663. Email: [brentcameron@telus.net](mailto:brentcameron@telus.net). Web: [www.wondertree.org](http://www.wondertree.org).

The **National Home Education Network** journal, *Voices*, will be honoring excellence in homeschooler publications by selecting a small number of articles written by and about homeschooling to be published in a new feature: "Spotlight on Outstanding Voices of the Homeschooling Community." Part of NHEN's mission is to support and encourage state and local homeschooling groups. One way we feel we can do that is to provide a national audience for writers who publish in local and state level newsletters. Starting with the Winter 2001 issue each of our quarterly publications will honor up to four articles as outstanding contributions to the homeschooler community. For more information, contact Voices Spotlight Award, National Home Education Network, PO Box 41067, Long Beach, CA 90853. Email: [Voices@nhen.org](mailto:Voices@nhen.org).

From **US Parents Switch to Homeschooling**, by Tom Rhodes, *Sunday Times*: As many as 1.7 million American children, 3% of the school-age population, are being educated at home. Spurred on by poor standards in state schools, a lack of moral direction in the classroom and the fear of murderous playground shootings, more parents are teaching their children. Once considered the preserve of evangelical Christians, home schooling is undergoing what experts describe as an extraordinary growth of up to 15% a year. The biggest increase is among the children of lawyers, doctors and other professionals. Ivy League universities including Harvard, Princeton, Stanford and Yale are reporting that applications with teachers' recommendations written by "mom and dad" have more than doubled in recent years. Fears that children taught in the comparative isolation of the home might find it hard to interact with others have evaporated with the emergence of such high-profile products of home schooling as the Hanson brothers - Isaac, Taylor and Zach - the teenage pop stars. Even Karen Hughes, chief spokeswoman for George W. Bush, is teaching her 13-year-old son Robert on the road for the duration of the presidential election campaign. The Internet economy, and the ability of many parents to move away from cities they considered dangerous, has fuelled further interest.

While most homeschooled children do their learning at kitchen tables and bedroom desks, swelling numbers in areas of the Midwest and the South have led parents to set up communal classes. Conferences for parents wanting to discover the best teaching methods have become a routine part of the cultural landscape in many states. 9/10/2000.

We are unschoolers/homeschoolers looking for connections with other like-minded people "out west". We have 1 and 11 year old sons. Do you know of any supportive unschooling type communities or good alternative high

schools in the state of Washington, or even in the NW region? We are looking to move and wish to find the "best" place for these boys. We have always homeschooled and I have a Waldorf background, but we are now mostly unschoolers. Any direction or connection you can help me with would be appreciated. Thank you, **Joni Stemple**, 2482 Hawks Rd., Colville, WA 99114. Email: joni@pplx.com

**Update on North Star School:** We were going to pass it along to a 7-12th grade independent, alternative school that is in the town next to us. As it turned out, the whole thing fell through. The sad thing is that we had achieved some recognition in the community and a lot of people were very interested in enrolling their kids - some even with "preschool age" kids that were asking about getting on a waiting list. It was such a great opportunity and this is a fairly progressive area so we were really surprised that there wasn't more interest in it. I wish we had the stamina to continue it on our own, but as 2 homeschool moms, it was just too much for us to run full time. I guess having it operate for one really great year was something! We had a really great core group of parents at North Star that agreed to form an informal homeschool group. We voted on the name "Compass Homeschoolers" and started an e-list, like AERO, so that we could make our group plans and throw out questions, ideas, thoughts to each other. There is a teen group that is meeting monthly just to hang out and listen to their CD's. It's a pretty active, diverse group and growing all the time. A lot of our families are doing some really great things individually, too. North Star is what pulled the Compass group together so I guess that is another good thing. In a lot of ways it's as if North Star just "morphed" into Compass. Kara.

Katherine Houk has written a new book entitled *Creating a Cooperative Learning Center: An Idea Book for Homeschooling Families*. It is a practical, realistic, yet inspirational guide for those desiring a nurturing and challenging context for children involved in home education. Through telling the story of a center founded by a few dedicated parents, Katherine provides ideas you can apply to your own situation. It is available from Longview Publishing, 29 Kinderhook St., Chatham, NY 12037.

*Choice in Education* is a monthly independent publication for home educators in the United Kingdom put together by a collective of home educating volunteers. A recent edition included articles on "A Home Educator's Diary," "News from the Press - Jail for Truant's Parents," and "Socialization and Home Education," among others. It is available from *Choice in Education*, PO Box 20284, London LW1 3WY. Web: [www.choiceineducation.co.uk](http://www.choiceineducation.co.uk).

## Public Alternatives

From **Alternative Schools in City Lose Appeal on Regents Test**, by Kate Zernike, *The New York Times*: A New York State's appeals court has affirmed decisions that said students at charter and alternative schools in New York City must take the state Regents exam.... Since last year, the schools have argued that their alternative curriculum is the essence of being alternative, and that requiring their students to take the state tests would force the schools to change what they teach.... They went before state lawmakers and the Board of Regents to ask that they be allowed to assess students using different measures, like portfolios of work. Requiring all high school students to pass the Regents exams, however, has been at the heart of (state education commissioner) Richard Mills's plans to raise standards across the state. In January, the commissioner ruled that students at the charter and alternative schools were not exempt. The 28 schools in New York City that sought exemption, he said, had failed to provide as rigorous a measure of student work. 11/18/2000.

From **High Stakes vs. Democracy** by Ken Jones, *FairTest Examiner*: When tests dictate whether teacher will lose their jobs or students will graduate, it is essential that the tests be able to stand up in a court of law, for surely these decisions will be contested by the inevitable "casualties." It is this pressure that forces state departments to take a safe approach to testing, despite all best intentions about classroom visions. Content validity requires that the assessment align with the curriculum. And yet, how can this happen when the state is in charge of the assessment and the schools are in charge of the curriculum? In Kentucky, it has meant that the schools, held highly accountable by the mandated test, have demanded that the state define the curriculum to be tested. Over the years, we have seen greater and greater articulation from the state. Now there is a very precise, and extensive, core content for assessment published by the state. Almost universally, schools spend a great deal of time "aligning" their curriculum to this state document to ensure that they are providing their students with the proper instruction. Thus, opportunity to learn has come to mean teaching to the test. So much for local empowerment. The moral to this story is that the high-stakes use of tests dictates standardization. A democratic vision for the classroom will be undermined by the control taken by the state when it uses testing as a weapon. Let us not be deceived. It is the state that is empowered through high stakes, not local schools, parents, and teachers. Fall 2000. National Center for Fair



& Open Testing, 342 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139. Web: [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org). Congratulations, FairTest Examiner, on your 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

**Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs (MAAP)** hosted the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual International Affiliation of Alternative Schools & Programs (IAASP) Conference last June. An important result of the conference was the ratification of an official professional organization, the International Association of Learning Alternatives (IALA), which MAAP will lead in developing. Initial recommendations model MAAP, including an annual conference, website & communications system, a youth organization, and more. The goal is to finish organizational development including bylaws for ratification at the June Conference in Oregon. 4182 N. Lexington Ave., Shoreview, MN 55126.

**The Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research** reports that a recent poll found that in Massachusetts, while charter school parents' ratings of the schools have declined slightly, 84% gave their children's school a high grade. Charter school parents are more satisfied than district school parents in virtually every important area. The results of the poll can be found at the Institute's website: [www.pioneernet.org](http://www.pioneernet.org). 85 Devonshire St., 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Boston, MA 02109. Tel: (617) 723-2277.

The **Alternative Network Journal** is a resource for teachers, counselors, and administrators in the field of educating troubled youth. It is published bi-monthly during the academic year. It contains articles about various alternative programs for at-risk students, interviews with others in the field, news about programs around the country, lists of resources, first-hand accounts, and book reviews. It is available from Alternative Network Journal, PO Box 461, Ithaca, NY 14851.

## Teachers Jobs and Internships

**Liberty School** in Blue Hill, Maine is starting a 13th year program in Homesteading and Community. This post-high school year is open to graduates who are looking for an alternative to college and to people of all ages who want to move from mainstream America into a more self-sufficient life style. We have a small farm less than a mile from the school and are looking for the right person or couple to be the director of this school--Liberty School Homesteading and Community. The curriculum would include organic agriculture, food processing, animal husbandry, solar construction, wood lot management and cooperative living skills. Students could also have apprenticeships with local crafts people. We are also starting a Classical Music Program and are looking for someone to direct that program. We want to provide a program for talented music students from all over Maine who want to spend more of their day practicing, studying and playing with other serious musicians. With music and art programs being cut in most schools, we believe it is essential to offer this opportunity. Please contact Arno Greenberg at [grnbrg@downeast.net](mailto:grnbrg@downeast.net). Web: <http://liberty-school.org>.

**The Graham & Parks Alternative Public School**, a K-8, citywide school of choice, is seeking a principal. The school has 350 students, including a Haitian bilingual program, and serves a wide range of learning styles. The school has a developmental approach that includes multi-graded classes, active, hands-on learning, cooperative learning groups and integrated, multicultural curriculum developed by teachers. The school strives to be a community of learners. The school believes all students can achieve at high levels and encourages them to become independent learners who are drawn beyond the mastery of basic skills toward the rewards of inquiry, initiative and reflection. For more information, please contact Barbara Allen, Executive Director, Human Resources Office, Cambridge Public Schools, 159 Thorndike Street, Cambridge, MA 02141.

**EnCompass School** is looking for a principal, certified teachers, administrative officer, and conference center manager. This is a new holistic school set to open this fall. For information about these positions, contact the school at 11011 Tyler Foote Rd., Nevada City, CA 95959. Tel: (530) 292-1000. Email: [connection@encompass-nlr.org](mailto:connection@encompass-nlr.org). Web: [www.encompass-nlr.org](http://www.encompass-nlr.org).

**Coeur d'Alene, Idaho Waldorf Initiative** is seeking a **Waldorf-trained Kindergarten Teacher** for September 2001 position. A fully trained Waldorf Kindergarten Assistant is available to assist you. We are looking to open a 2, 3, and 5-day Kindergarten program in the fall and have a Parent-Child group currently running. We are also seeking a **Waldorf-trained Grade 1 Teacher** for September 2001 position. You will have excellent support from not only Parents but also a solid group of community members. Our closest Waldorf School is the Sandpoint Waldorf School.

about 40 minutes north of us. We have a great rapport with them and they have been a wonderful resource in setting up the school. Nelson, British Columbia and Seattle are the next closest schools about four to five hours away from us. Please e-mail cover letter and resume to **Penny Winton** at [pwin4115@msn.com](mailto:pwin4115@msn.com).

**Highland Hall Waldorf School** is searching for a Grade 1 Class Teacher. 394 students. Full member of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, and the high school is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. 30 full-time and 25 part-time teachers, supported by an administrative staff of ten. We are interested in candidates with a bachelor's degree or the equivalent in addition to Waldorf teacher training who are enthusiastic about making a commitment to a full class of up to 30 children. \$33,000 - \$38,000 based on experience, with the possibility of earning \$50,000 in time. Medical coverage, full tuition remission, and dental coverage for full time employees and their dependents. We also offer support for relocation expenses and financial support for further teacher development. Please submit three references from people who know your work and a short autobiography with your resume. We are particularly interested in your experience, relationship to children, interests, and specific areas of strength. Contact **Lynn Kern** at 818-349-1394, fax 818-349-2390; email [cegoodno@cs.com](mailto:cegoodno@cs.com)

**A Child's Place School** in Lincroft, N.J. near Red Bank is seeking Interns or Beginning Teachers for K-1 or Nursery (3-5 year olds) classroom in an innovative small private pre-school with individualized learning and integrating progressive traditions with new methods and the philosophies of Reggio Emilia and the Project Approach. Must have BA degree and training in Early Childhood and enjoy the Arts. A Child's Place School, 1409 West Front St., Lincroft, N.J. 07738. Tel: (732) 747-0141.

The **Arthur Morgan School** in Western North Carolina, is seeking teachers/houseparents for the 2001-2002 school year. We also have one opening for a teacher starting April 2001. The Arthur Morgan School is a small, alternative boarding and day school for 27 boys and girls in grades 7-9. Our 100-acre campus consists mainly of woods and meadows with creeks and a pond; it is surrounded largely by National Forest. The school fosters a loving, energetic living/learning community dedicated to supporting individuality while teaching group cooperation. A balance is sought between academics, outdoor activities, and meaningful work; experiential learning and responsible participation in community are emphasized throughout. Please send resume to **Ana Pacheco** or **Sarita Hennessey**, Hiring Committee, Arthur Morgan School, 1901 Hannah Branch Rd. Burnsville, NC 28714 For more information call 828-675-4262.

**Horizons School** is seeking live-in dormitory parent(s) for August 2001. Requires a mature person to take charge of evenings, weekends, and holidays; ideal for writer or home office. They also anticipate the need for elementary and high school teachers. Further, the school's Spanish staff plans to supervise students in Guatemala next summer; earn one year of high school credit in six weeks of intensive training. Contact Lorraine Wilson at (404) 378-2219. Web: [www.horizonsschool.homestead.com](http://www.horizonsschool.homestead.com).

Ed Note: I just received the a note from Les Garber of Horizons School ([landigarber@earthlink.net](mailto:landigarber@earthlink.net)) in Atlanta, GA. He said they have an immediate need for one or two staff members. Horizon is a k-12 with about 150 students, democratic meeting, a boarding program primarily with international students (about 15) and a strong emphasis on drama. It would be an interesting place to work.

The **Green Willow Charter School**, with a scheduled opening for Sept, 2001 in northern Bergen County, NJ is seeking gifted educators to create it's art infused, thematic and interdisciplinary and character education program. The school runs k-8, one class for each grade with 16 students per class. Our website will be live soon: [www.greenwillowcharterschool.org](http://www.greenwillowcharterschool.org). We are accepting applications from general education and art, music, spanish and physical education teachers. For a brochure and employment application, please email [jackiedevries@yahoo.com](mailto:jackiedevries@yahoo.com).

Brookline High School English teacher( may be part time) for democratic program called **School Within A School** at BHS 10-12 grades. Pretty traditional curriculum. Call or e mail me: 617-713-5401 [ellen\\_kaplovitz@brookline.mec.edu](mailto:ellen_kaplovitz@brookline.mec.edu)

Elementary/Junior High Director; position available July 1, 2001. **Oak Grove School**, founded by J. Krishnamurti, seeks experienced educator/administrator. Needs strong interpersonal skills and deep commitment to consensual decision-making. Will work in development, admissions, public relations. Salary negotiable; benefits included. Contact Eileen McGuire, Oak Grove School, 220 W. Lomita Ave., Ojai, CA 93023; Fax:(805)646-5306; ph:(805)646-7 e-mail: [emcguire2001@yahoo.com](mailto:emcguire2001@yahoo.com).

**Ken Fladie** desires to teach or aid in developing the whole person – physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. He wishes to connect with others of similar interests in order to attain a more integrated approach. Waldorf concepts are of particular interest to him. Contact him at PO Box 3306, Fayetteville, AR 72702. Tel: (501) 973-9220.

**Alicia Gauger** is looking for a community atmosphere and individualized attention for students. She wants to teach in a school where art is seen as a vital part of a person's growth. She will graduate in December with a BA in Art Education, and a Maryland State teaching certificate. She has extensive and varied experience and is willing to relocate. Alicia can be reached at 16907 Yeoho Rd., Parkton, MD 21120. Email: [aquarial43@hotmail.com](mailto:aquarial43@hotmail.com).

Experienced, compassionate, adaptable educator seeking position in an alternative school. Twenty-plus years public & private school experience-middle school through high school with unique learners, gifted, LD, ADHD and traditional populations. Strengths: program development, curriculum adaptation, supportive/accepting attitude towards all learners. Contact: Christine Parsons, (508) 478-5903, or e-mail: [EAICC@juno.com](mailto:EAICC@juno.com).

## Conferences

February 25-27, **2001 Magnet Schools of America February Legislative Advocacy** in Washington, D. C., Metro Marriott. contact Julie Wright Halbert, Esq. At [j.w.halbert@worldnet.att.net](mailto:j.w.halbert@worldnet.att.net). For information on Magnet Schools, D Judith Stein, Exec. Dir., at [stein@nova.edu](mailto:stein@nova.edu).

March 9-11, **Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex -- NE Regional Strategy and Organizing Conference**, NYC, NY. Objective is to raise consciousness of the prison industry and, in turn, to galvanize action to resist the prison industrial complex. NE Regional Organizing Committee, PMB 4053, 341 Layayette St., NY, NY 10012. Tel: (212) 561-0912.

March 15-17, The **Washington Association for Learning Alternatives 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference** (WALA), Shilo In Ocean shores, WA. Call WALA Office at 1-800-455-WALA or e-mail for info to [walakids@gte.net](mailto:walakids@gte.net).

March 22-24, the **Montessori Leadership Institute/ the Montessori Foundation, Master Teachers-Model Programs**, Sarasota, FL, Tim Seldin & Jonathan Wolff, 301 840 9231, 800 655 5843, 17808 October Court, rockville, MD 20855

April 20-21, **Charter Schools: The Next Generation**, Providence, RI. A principal conference goal will be to find and develop strategic alliance resources and potential points of leverage for future charter school development. Chad Osborne, Charter School Network, 49 Hillside Ave. 2F, Providence, RI 02906. Tel: (401) 831-6404. Email: [ozpk@earthlink.net](mailto:ozpk@earthlink.net).

April 20-22, **Democratic Schools Conference**, Sydney, Australia, Currumbena School. For information on conference papers or a registration form, contact: Chris Price, Email: [enquiries@currumbena.nsw.edu.au](mailto:enquiries@currumbena.nsw.edu.au). Tel: 61 2 9427 0644.

April 25-29, **National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools**, Upattinas School. Glenmoore, PA, 610 458-5138, [upattinas@chesco.com](mailto:upattinas@chesco.com)

May 12-18, HES FES 2001, **Home Educators' Seaside Festival**, Dorset, England. . HES FES is now in it's fourth year and is the world's biggest HE event. Expected number at HES FES 2001 of over 320 families, around 1600 people. Get regular updates on the HES by subscribing to the online newsletter, [www.hesfes.co.uk/hesfeslist.html](http://www.hesfes.co.uk/hesfeslist.html) 020-781 5907, [info@hesfes.co.uk](mailto:info@hesfes.co.uk), [www.hesfes.co.uk](http://www.hesfes.co.uk), PO Box 20284 London NW1 3WY

May 4-5, **Home Education Thrives in the Heartland: OCHEC Home Educators' Convention**, Oklahoma City, OK Myriad Convention Center. Contact OK Christian Home Educators Consociation, 3801 NW 63<sup>rd</sup> St., Bldg. 3, Ste. 23 Oklahoma City, OK 73102. Tel: (405) 810-0386.

May 17-20, **The Link Kid Comfortable Homeschool Conference**, Woodland Hills, CA, Warner Center Marriott. Contact The Link, PMB 911, 587 Ventu Park Rd., Ste. F, Newbury Park, CA 91320.

June 22-24, **Nurturing the Teacher: The Heart of Education - Spirituality in Education Conference**, Rocky Mountain Shambala Center, Naropa University. Contact Michael Girodo at [mgirodo@aol.com](mailto:mgirodo@aol.com). Web: [www.naropa.edu](http://www.naropa.edu).

June 27-30, **30<sup>th</sup> Annual International Alternative Education Conference**, Inn of the 7<sup>th</sup> Mountain, Bend, Or. at [eduserve@igc.org](mailto:eduserve@igc.org), fax to 360-574-4017. Bob Fizzell. Conference Coordinator, Educational Development Services, 1201 NW 109th St, Vancouver, WA 98685 or call the AERO office.

July 20-21, **New England Homeschool and Family Learning Conference**, Boxboro Woods Holiday Inn, Boxborough, MA. 978 263-8701. Features David Albert. Further info: 207 657 2800

October 4-12, **Spirit of Learning, The 2nd International Soul In Education Conference**, Kauai, HI. With the support of the organizers at Findhorn, preparations are now under way to create a week-long conference for educators, parents, child care-givers and counselors who wish to explore and implement more soul-consciousness in education - fully respectful of the diversity of cultures, races and beliefs which make up our society. For information contact Children Believe, PO Box 253, Kilauea, HI 96754. Tel: (888) 615-8889. Email: [Conference@childrenbelieve.com](mailto:Conference@childrenbelieve.com).

## Special Section:

# CHANGING SCHOOLS

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*Since 1973: The Journal of Alternative Education*

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Edited by Albert Lamb

## THE DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOM

The following 1st message from Stuart Stiobhard on the AERolist listserve started an amazing chain of posts to the group. We are calling this collection of messages - A CIRCLE OF DESKS. These posts describe how public school teachers are being able to use the manner in which they set up their classrooms to help create democracy in the classroom. This exchange beautifully demonstrates the good that can come from teachers exchanging ideas on the AERolist.

Partly inspired by these posts two teachers began posting regular journal or diary entries about their classroom experiences, which are currently being shared by the readers of the AERolist. We have edited extracts of their earlier postings into two articles: GOING DEMOCRATIC, the first week of this school year as recorded by Rob van Nood, and CLUB HOUSE DEMOCRACY, a description of a well-established democratic classroom, taken from the ongoing journal of Leonard Turton.

## A CIRCLE OF DESKS

**1<sup>st</sup> MESSAGE**  
**From Stuart Stiobhard**

Hello friends.... Here is another question from my public school classroom...

I have placed the seats in a semicircle around the room. Every teacher who has stopped by has really like the way I arranged my room and some have modified their own rooms as well. This really made me feel good and that I was doing the right thing. Initially, I let students sit where they wished. And since our classes are seriously overcrowded it was just first come first serve.

However, recently I have had to deal with administrators who have been pressuring me to change this. They are adamant about my putting students into rows and in a seating chart. The reason is that my classes are too loud and disruptive (this admittedly is true). The administrators blame the seating (what about the overcrowding?). I have bowed a little and created a seating chart, with students placed alphabetically - the most random and arbitrary arrangement that would not show any favoritism. I have had to fight this out with my student: day in and day out.

And my administrators are not appeased.

I tried at first to move the desks farther apart while keeping the basic format. That seemed a reasonable compromise, and I *hated* it. I could not move around at all and it just felt wrong. The students spontaneously moved them back to where they were to start with and I let them because I was happier to have my room back the way it was.

And the administrators are on my case about it again.

There are a few reasons why this important to me. There is the simple fact that I am prejudiced against traditional seating because I am prejudiced against traditional classrooms. My inspiration came from grassroots organizations where people spontaneously sit in a circle, and this was reinforced by what I saw in art and foreign language classrooms. (I wonder if I would be getting this kind of pressure if this was an art classroom instead of a required academic subject?) It best captures what I want the class to become - a classroom community, participating together.

In practical terms it is just the easiest way for me to walk around the room (again, there are just too many students in my class). I have a lot of open space to walk around and it makes it easy for me to one-on-one with a particular student. In a traditional setting I couldn't do this and would be penned into the front of the classroom. Underneath all this is the nagging feeling that I have usurped something that the students should be allowed to decide.

Now there would be no problem, I suspect, if my class was quieter and more focussed. But how to achieve this is still beyond me.

So I have three questions:

1. What do y'all do? What other arrangements are out there and what other possibilities might I consider?
2. What would y'all suggest that I do to appease said administrators?
3. What can I do to solve the noise problem without completely degenerating into a totalitarian state?

Please let me know what you think.

Frazzled and cornered, Stiohard

## **2<sup>nd</sup> MESSAGE**

**From Rob van Nood**

The way I start the year is by letting the kids help design and build the classroom. There are numerous advantages to this, which I assume most people on this list would understand. However, I am a 4th grade teacher and have the kids all the time, all year long. In your case, it sounds like a secondary school. In any case I would suggest that you bring the kids into the discussion. Talk about the concerns you have, the administrative concerns and the needs and concerns of the students. Whenever I run into these kinds of struggles I always turn to the kids in my class. Perhaps you can set up a time when the administration can come into your class and have an 'open' discussion with the class. The administrator would have to be willing to join in the compromise and not just say, "This is the way it has to be." If the administrator isn't interested, perhaps the students can write a letter or set up a meeting outside the class.

## **3<sup>rd</sup> MESSAGE**

**By Del Jones**

Gordon has proposed a great slogan which fits in with what we are trying to do with Partnership Education Consultants ([www.partnershipway.org](http://www.partnershipway.org)) in the schools: Include students (and parents and teachers and the community!). Sitting in a circle seems so trivial and yet it comes up everywhere: business meetings, conferences and yes, even schools. *At last! Calling The Circle* (Baldwin) is a great book, which gives practical principles about this phenomenon.

## **4<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**From Gordon F. Vars**

Dear Frazzled, I've "been there and done that" for 30 years. I believe your "nagging feeling" contains the best answer: invite the kids to help you solve the problem. I do not know the age of your students, but I used that approach with middle school students, the most volatile of the lot!

Some years I challenged the class to design a room arrangement that would meet several criteria, which we identified cooperatively: 1. Everyone can see the chalkboard, teacher, and other students; 2. Easy to move around; 3. Easy to get out in case of a fire drill; 4. Encourages all of us to stay on task, etc. In the years I taught math, we divided into groups that made scale drawings of the room and its contents and presented their recommendations to the class. We voted on the one to implement, with the understanding that we would revise it if it did not meet our criteria.

Whatever the room arrangement, I used sociometry to determine seating. Each student submitted in writing three choices of whom they would like to sit near, and I promised to try to honor their preferences. The understanding was that if an individual was unable to stay on task in that location, I would move him or her. We repeated the process each quarter so that they had another chance to express a preference. Incidentally, the sociograms I derived from their choices helped me monitor group dynamics in the class.

I was fortunate to have both administrators and custodians in all my schools who recognized that it was up to the teacher to choose the classroom arrangement that best promoted student learning. I also let the parents know what I was up to, so I had them on my side.

My lifetime slogan in teaching has been, "When in doubt about what to do, ask the students." Good luck!

## **5<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**By Leonard Turton**

Rob, We have 4 classes using democratic based meetings and clubhouse type kid development environments here at a Canadian inner city school (it is one of the few ways that the kids around here can participate in schools without causing riots and sending teachers to mad houses. It works, which is why the administration here, who don't really understand the details, have given us free reign. It's time we, and I'm sure others here and there, set up some kind of diary access so other teachers who are interested can see how things evolve... and give it a try...

## **6<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**From: chrisgo2@pacbell.net**

Hello, fellow educators. Ah, yes, the circle...

I, too, encountered much opposition when I used circles in public school classrooms. You don't say what grade level or subject area, but I'm reading into your description that it is middle or high school.

I taught grades 3-8, and several combinations thereof, and I can speak from experiences at those levels. First of all, I think you may actually have a couple of related, but different, problems. First, making your space work for what you are trying to achieve with your students. And second, as you put it, appeasing administrators.

I stumbled into my similar dilemma by inviting the students to help me make their classroom conducive to their best learning (4th graders). They were quick to tell me, and even quicker to show me, that we needed big work areas (achieved by shoving many desks together), small work areas (achieved by shoving fewer desks together), and talking space (achieved by moving the chairs into a circle). We also evolved an understanding that the inside of a person's desk 'belonged' to them, but the tops belonged to everybody (i.e. everybody had a place to put their stuff and flexible work space).

By the time things settled down in the office and my administrator actually got around to seeing classroom in action, we were moving very smoothly around in our spaces and there was tons of real learning going on. Nothing was said then but about three weeks later I got a terse message that I "must comply with the school standard of desks in rows." When I asked for clarification, I was told that "the classroom arrangement is a problem for other teachers." Again I asked, Why? This time I didn't get an answer. So I took the problem to the kids.

Astute little beings that all kids are, they said, "So, our job is to figure out who we're bugging, and see if we can fix it, because this is the best classroom we've ever had and nobody is going to take it away from us. If they try, we'll bring all our moms and dads to school." And they set up committees to visit and interview other teachers and kids and classrooms. (The depths to which they knew other teachers was a real eye-opener for me. Friends, we can't hide a thing from the kids, no matter how hard we try.)

After several days, a pair of students asked abruptly to visit another teacher. "Part of our Project," they said. I let them go. Four minutes later they were back, faces glowing, asking for a break from math and an immediate class meeting - because, "WE HAVE THE ANSWER!"

They had visited the room below us, heard our chairs scraping on our linoleum floor as we moved them to desks for math work - and they saw the teacher clench her teeth and frown. The kids who had been her students previously all nodded, "She's mad! She'll tell on us!"

Now I knew why the administrator was on my case. She had a teacher complaining, and we were bothering at least one person.

The kids started brainstorming, "Too bad we don't have carpet on the floor - too expensive - no way to clean it - Hey, what if we put carpet on the chairs? you know, on the feet, then they won't make noise. Let's see if anyone has something at home we can use. If not, we'll just have to each ask for a dollar or two to buy something."

One dad donated carpet scraps, and his time to cut and attach them to all of our chairs and tables, so we could move furniture noiselessly. Then the kids assigned themselves homework to write up stories to tell about how they arranged the classroom and solved all the problems and how much they were learning and how much they all like it. Then, after much discussion and editing, they submitted these stories to the school newspaper. They were printed and I never heard another word about room arrangement while I taught there.

But when I taught middle school, I put the armchairs around in a circle: "Oh you elementary teachers, these big kids are noisy. If you let them talk, they'll be off task, and everyone else in the pod will hear them. Big problem! Big problem for me if we weren't having real literature circles, and editing groups, and practicing presentations! I wouldn't be able to achieve my instructional objectives. I asked for a chance to try it. "Ok, but you'll see..." Again, kids being the wise beings that they are, they said, "We can do this! We can monitor our own noise. Group work will always have a noise monitor." I soon realized that if they were whispering, they were off task, otherwise, they were working hard. And I never had a complaint, even though I had all the - supposedly - bad kids right after lunch.

So, from experience, I suggest: get the kids involved, and try to find out what the real objection is. Two separate, but related, problems. Good luck, and let us know how it turns out.

### **7<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**From Merrill L. Tew**

The prison-like regimentation, which you address in your school, is antithetical to an environment conducive to learning, and is a reason I found a different environment. Innovation is not acceptable to traditional administrators. One educator, turned homeschooler, told me that the reason she could not attempt different seating arrangements was because the custodians complained. Schools are made to accommodate custodians and administrators, not teachers and pupils. The following was extracted from my note of her report:

"...she provided pupils with enrichment activities that caused other teachers to complain because they did not wish to take the time to prepare similar beneficial activities for their pupils, and the custodian was irritated and uncooperative because the desks were frequently arranged in an unconventional manner."

In the different environment that I found, I had students arrange seats in a semi-circle for large group discussion and in sets of four to six seats in circles for simultaneous small group discussions. Rationale: learners learn more effectively while participating in discussion than while listening to instructors.

### **8<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**From Rob van Nood**

Leonard, great idea. I find myself in a bit of an isolated arena at my school, although there are people who appreciate the work that is going on in my class. I am at a brand new school this year and am attempting to develop a plan to make it a democratic school. The principal has been interested but there have been few conversations as of yet. I like the idea of having a web page of some sort where we (who work in the public arena) as well as those working in other settings, can share ideas and experiences about the work we do and attempt to do. I have little understanding about how to build such a thing, but am willing to get my hands dirty and work with you on it. If there are others out there who are interested, this would be a great place to drum up support. I attended the alternative schools conference in Minneapolis for a day this summer while I was visiting family there, but never had a chance to chat with many other people besides Jerry.

I am still very committed to making things work in Public schools (I am not up to date on the difficulties you face presently in Canada), and would love to have conversations with more people that are standing up to the National Curriculum and testing wave, and working to make classrooms a place where kids feel like they have power to shape their own learning. While I still would love to start a school such as the Albany Free School in NY, feel there are things that can still be done to change the public system. A sounding board for those ideas would help to connect all of us.

### **9<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**From Stuart Siobhard**



Hi again. Well, the overwhelming response I received here was to try involving the students in a solution; I try self-management. This is honestly what I really wanted to do anyway, and today I tried it in all my classes. In my classes before lunch it worked OK, but it's a very strained agreement. I think it is going to be very difficult to get them to stick to it. We are still going to have to find a way to make it work.

I have to say I have participated in many groups that function democratically. Teaching it is something else entirely. This is really hard, especially in a culture that seems married to authoritarianism. They really do not believe it is possible to do this. I can make all the references I want to alternative schools, they don't believe it's possible to really do this concretely.

The class after lunch is the most crucial: 1. This is the class that has been visited by administrators and put me in the hot seat; 2. This is my most difficult and loudest class; 3. This class has the daughter of one of the other teachers in it. If I can resolve the problem in this class, I stand on much better ground, and, incidentally, this class supposed to be honors (which adds to the pressure).

With this class it went disastrously. There were a (very) few students who wanted to work with me. Many students wouldn't take it seriously and the whole class was sharply divided. There was a large and vocal group who actually wanted the authoritarian model, even though they would lose all their privileges if they chose it, and it ended in lots of vocal bickering. We never could come to a decision and after class I had a whole cluster of them passionately pleading with me, "See! This will never work!"

The last class was difficult, but I did reach a tentative agreement that was a bit more focussed than the earlier classes, mostly because the experience of the previous class gave me some ideas to work with. Until I can get this to work I have nothing with which to defend myself against the administration. And it's getting more critical because what started as regular interviews by the 'instructional specialist' now look like I'm to appear in a meeting with the principal. So I really need something tangible if I'm going to survive this one. I really need to persuade the 5<sup>th</sup> period class to work with me on this, and I need to work out the kinks with the other classes.

The after school bell just rang. The girl who was most passionate about this not being possible just stopped by and asked me what I was going to do. Well, I have to stop here. I would welcome more insights if people have them. Talk to you soon. By the way I teach high school, 9th grade geography and 10th grade history.

#### **10<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**From Judi**

Have you tried instituting a drop-everything-and-read with your honors class after lunch? You might like to ask them what topics they feel would be appropriate in this time frame. I recommend this 'quiet read' as a solution settling them down after lunch. You might ask them to help you design a survey to get their ideas for this quiet read. Let them select what quiet music will be played in the background. Once you have this first time period handled you may find that their minds have quieted and they will be more open to other more creative approaches to curriculum.

Also, if you are concerned about your evaluation, just ask the administrator for suggestions for making this class better. It may be that you have a difficult combination of kids, and a program change for one student or changed seating will make the difference. Be honest about your strengths and be open to getting insight in those areas where you may need staff development. This is a strategy that older teachers use all the time.

Let me know what you think.

#### **11<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**From Bill Ellis**

I can't do anything but praise your attempt to democratise learning. If you can do it, it will prove that schools do have a future. But the fact that schools, like our society, are authoritarian, patriarchal, hierarchical and teach self-interest, competition, survival-of-the-fittest and the other values of the Euro-American industrial culture makes your job almost impossible. But unless we can change our schools, and thereby our culture, my hope for the continuation of our species is low. That is why I joined 'A Coalition for Self Learning' and helped write the book *Creating Learning Communities*.

I hope you will continue to post your daily experiences. They are most enlightening.

#### **12<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**From Debbie Smith**

...I plan to share Stieghard's letters and the responses with teachers at our high school where my daughter attends. Those letters will serve as touchstones for important discussions and dialogue, and help another group of teachers to think about change and examine their own way of thinking about education.

#### **13<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**From Leonard Turton**



What is it that you mean exactly by self-management? What controls do the students have and not have over doing, not doing? – and over the other students who choose to interfere with the rights of others in the confine environment? (i.e. can they toss someone out who is interfering with those who want to be there?)

What connections do you have with them other than academic? Have they seen the Summerhill Website and others? Can they ask themselves what, given their particular educational environment, they think that they could pull from the democratic school philosophy?

Obviously they have a totally different situation, but what freedoms do they think would make *their* classroom experience better, more interesting, more free? - given an understanding of the constraints (what can be bent and what cannot be bent). And, after a democratic vote, what controls do they think the majority should have over the minority?

I am an elementary teacher who has been using democratic meetings and self-management for several years. But we have a room of our own we stay in a whole lot - two rooms now, actually - with space for decorating building, doing art, doing drama, lounging, reading, playing chess... and therefore a 'clubhouse' of our own that requires running, requires committees, decisions... in fact requires a community of actions over and above the academic, which then gives our class meetings purpose and meaning - gives our meetings real life problems to deal with.

We also discuss how the school bureaucracy works - the metacognition of the context - what is and is not realistic to try and do for teacher and students (to quote Alinski: "tactics is doing what you can with what you've got"). I ask them to work with teachers as allies/business partners; to bend what can be bent as much as possible to work with the teacher to free him up to push and expand (by not getting in his way and forcing him into the role of policeman). And by being partners in the underground expansion of freedom.

What can you realistically expect given the circumstances of your situation? Can you actually create the school context necessary to pull off what you want to pull off, or are you over reaching? Have you investigated the possibilities versus the dream? A little victory to start with is better than a big defeat. Little victories prove the opposition wrong. And give you the right to push a little farther next time round.

You are to be admired and congratulated.

#### **14<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**From Stuart Stiohard**

Hello. Here is the web page of the program that our school is being asked to push, as one of the terms of our grant. It seems to be a very progressive program and overlaps nicely with democratic education. I would be interested in any comments people have on this program, or similar experiences.

<http://www.leadershipsolutions.com/education/educ.htm>

#### **15<sup>th</sup> MESSAGE**

**From Leonard Turton**

Yeah, I know what you mean about younger teachers, especially those on probationary contracts, wanting to toe the line. I find that if there are a couple of older teachers, who will help them lower their anxiety levels, it helps a lot. (Our famous relaxer is the Simpson Factor - the fact being that Homer Simpson was so impossibly incompetent and never lost his job, so how the hell could anyone else ?)

Also, we show them the politics of schools: show them where, when and how corners can be cut for personal sanity and student benefit; what grades and what subjects have assessments, and which ones don't; we show 'em which demands are real, which are bogus; which deadlines need to be met to gain trust so that you can not bother with a bunch of other deadlines that really don't matter. We also help interpret particular principals and administrators for them so they know what they can bend and how to bend it.

So, at least in my local Canadian experience, the younger teachers often start to relax. Their eyes begin to twinkle, they begin to reconsider, and then often with a grinning glee they begin to mess about. The cool thing is that as they try the stuff they find that the kids respond so well. Their job becomes so much more interesting and creative and they get hooked.

It's great when they come bursting into the room raving about how easily little kids take to meetings and problem solving and self-government. They can't believe it. And, finally, they learn more and more that they can get away with a hell of a lot if they just do it.

Administrators around here become rather disarmed when rowdy kids become involved, participating, authority-sharing human beings. And principals? Well, they may not know exactly why the school is running better but if it is they ain't gonna' mess with a good thing

...I have just finished a week with 20 grade 8's, and no one can believe they are the same class as last year. Within half a day they simply reverted to the great group I had when they were in grade 6. They have set up a more easy going structure for themselves, because of their age, and I have made myself even more invisible as they went about their business, finding projects of my own to do unless someone called me over for help. They have gone through the week as if we are just a bunch of people doing neat stuff together, except for when the teacher they had last year had to teach them. They reverted instantaneously to acting out their old script as a bunch of malcontents, and she left the room totally shaken. I walked in and sat at the front, they gathered round,

and then we continued as usual. (This teacher has now talked to me several times since about what she might do to change the situation.)

When this bunch was in grade 5 several of them went on strike. They turned their desks upside down and sat on them, leaving the teacher speechless. In grade six they came to me and I gave them democracy. We made up a self-government that fitted them. We made sure we had lots of physical stuff to do and within 10 days they were one of the best groups of people I've ever worked with.

At the end of the second week I said, "I'm amazed... What do you think ... Were you all just waiting for, like a system that made sense?" I'll never forget the response. It still tugs my heart. They just *nodded*. All of them. They knew exactly what I meant and exactly what had happened to them. They knew they were not bad, which was their image (the Really Bad Class). They just needed something goddamned sensible that recognized their humanity.

But maybe I've just been lucky with the new staff here at this inner city school, with tough kids who eat teachers who try to play I'm King of the Hill Power Person and don't learn new ways fast. Take care, Leonard

# GOING DEMOCRATIC

## The First Seven Days of the School Year

By Rob van Nood

I will try to keep a diary of my experience this year on this list-serve. I am working in a public school in Oregon, teaching 9-10 year olds and believe strongly in creating democratic learning environments, especially within the walls of our public schools. I know that I face a very resilient status quo, but I can't do it any other way. This is the only way I can teach with conviction and joy.

I have started the year with a bare room. All the tables, chairs, bookshelves, computers and filing cabinets are sitting in a corner, along with the boxes of supplies. I sent a letter home, and spoke personally with most kids, about coming to school on the first day with a map that showed what their 'ideal' learning environment would be. I told them that as a class we would be designing the classroom together (and later on, the curriculum).

### TUESDAY

September 5th, 2000

As usual, the first day of school flew by with little going as expected or planned. I did little more than sketch out the direction I would like to go because I can do little without knowing the kids and their interests, experiences and attitudes. We spent much of the morning getting to know each other through various activities like name hunts and collaborative games. Much of the first few weeks is about building trust and I can't understand how so many teachers can fly into the 'required curriculum' without at least a sense of community.

Several students speak no English, but fortunately there were classmates that could assist them and give them support. The kids really came alive after lunch when we broke into small groups to brainstorm lists of things that we would need and want for learning to take place. While they started with a typical list of supplies (pencils, paint brushes, paper, etc), they began to throw in things like patience, kindness, respect, trust, and sharing. We also had a lively discussion about fun and learning, with many either saying that learning had to be fun, or the opposite, that learning wasn't fun. The example of one of their classmates' struggle to become a strong skateboarder seemed to convince many of them that learning is a path with many bumps and bruises, as well as many joys.

The kids are all very excited about getting animals into the classroom, which I am all for. Last year our class had a rabbit that hung around all day with the kids, and was trained to go to the bathroom in the cage. Although she smelled and sometimes ate the wires in the class, she was such a member of the class and the kids really looked out for her. I think that we will have a very animal friendly classroom this year.

Tomorrow we will continue making decisions about what we want in the class and how it will be laid out, and how the design of the classroom can best support our learning.

### WEDNESDAY

September 6, 2000

I went home last night feeling that I didn't have a clear handle on this whole 'designing' project. There are so many variables involved that I was beginning to confuse myself. However, after speaking with a colleague, who

is involved in a similar project with her third graders, I realized that I needed to focus on the physical layout of the classroom.

Having spent much of the first day brainstorming what we want in the class I decided it would be a good idea to start planning where things would go. I came in this morning and set out a bunch of architecture and design books for the kids to look at when they came in first thing. I asked them to use the books as a source for further ideas about layout and needs. The books sparked some real interest in a need for pictures, sculpture and posters for the walls.

One boy suggested that we transform the whole room into a house or environment from another time or place. While several students joked about things like sculptures or apple trees, I took their suggestions seriously. That seemed to make several of them realize that they were really being allowed to use their imagination. I wasn't just looking for stock answers.

It is so sad to know that kids as young as nine years old have already been repressed in their ability to take their own thoughts and ideas seriously. I realize that this is so new to many of them that I will need to be light with my expectations of 'finished' products. When I let go and let them really show who they are and what they know at this point in time, I give myself the opportunity to look beyond my own vision of the project and let them realize their own. I am very relaxed about taking these baby steps now because I know that they will grow in the coming weeks and months. Luckily I have a principal that is also willing to be patient and watch how things go.

After the initial listing of all the things we want for the class, including a time machine, several types of plants and trees, a full dinosaur, a human skeleton, a tent, and fifteen types of animals both wild and domestic (my favorites were the bobcat and the camel), we decided that we needed to move to the next step. What it was I wanted to leave up to them. I usually trust that kids can make the best decisions for themselves as a group.

At this point I decided to remove myself from the focus of the whole group and just became as one of the students. I told them that they were going to have to figure it out as if I wasn't there. This too was a little shocking to some of them, but after about a minute or two of silence and nervous giggles, they realized I was serious and they started throwing out ideas to each other. I find that when I can get out of the way, and not give them a 'teacher' body to rely on, they perk up and start taking control of things.

The conversation was great. Several students emerged who have a good vision of what they think is possible and are willing to speak up. The idea of taking the old maps they each had made and creating a large one for the whole class was something most of them thought was a good idea. After much discussion, they broke into small groups and combined ideas to make 6 'group maps'. They agreed that we would then take the best ideas of all the groups to create the class maps.

After making their maps they presented them to the class. Some students had very detailed maps, including labels and accurate locations of doors, shelves and windows, some created maps that didn't take into account the permanent features of the class or all the items that we already have stacked to the side. Tomorrow we will begin to look at blueprints, maps and scale so we can begin building a map that will be used for the final design decisions.

Many students thought that we should 'test' out every map design to see if they liked them by actually building each one in the class. I think they will figure out that probably isn't the easiest way to go. Unless a better idea comes up I will probably steer them toward making scale cut-outs of everything in the room, adhere them to magnets and use them on the large scale model of the floor. This will hopefully allow for flexibility in decision making. This should also prove to be handy in the coming weeks and months when any other changes need to be made, and will be a great way to work on measurement and scale.

Many ideas and questions are coming up, so I have decided to put up some butcher paper where the class can record things that need to be addressed soon or down the line.

## THURSDAY

September 7, 2000

Almost the whole day was devoted to figuring out how we were going to take the group mapping ideas and turn them into a single map, which the class can work off of. We did branch off for almost an hour to talk about trapezoids (the shape of the tables we have in the class). I was amazed at the amount of time most of the class could be engaged in a conversation about the shape. A 'what-do-you-notice-about-the-shape?' question started with 'four-sided-and-four-cornered,' answers and evolved into questions of symmetry and patterns. Eventually we began to use one of the students as a measuring tool because he was exactly the size of one side of the table.

I wanted to head toward the idea of scale, which is not an easy concept to grasp, especially when you want a deep understanding of it. In order to begin creating a scale map, we need to understand scale. But the kids are really antsy to start having the desks out, and that makes the time factor more difficult. I always feel like I am not doing the right thing by the kids when I 'feed' them something for the sake of time, but in this case I think that we can come back to it later for more depth. I can tell that I am shooting over their heads with concepts or ideas when they become really chatty and unfocused. Plus, by the end of the day, they are ready to take a break from it.

I find that I have really high expectations, but I am learning to read the fed-up signs and not fight them. There is no use continuing when most of the class is burned out. A goal of mine this year is to really accept those

signs and take appropriate breaks. Besides, I love working with maps (and have found that kids find them fascinating), and we will have lots of opportunities to explore them as we continue to build the curriculum.

Tomorrow we will be ready to start mapping out the room and everything in it, and making movable magnetic pieces for the scale map of the class. By Monday I think we will be ready to start placing some of the furniture.

Although we have been working extremely hard as a class, people looking in from the outside are often not convinced. Although there is already a wall full of maps, writing and lists of ideas for the construction, it is easy for parents, administrators and other teachers to think that nothing is really going on because the tables, chairs and boxes of supplies remain stacked in the corner. One child said that her parents thought that we were just playing.

In order to alleviate that outside family anxiety I am having each student write a letter to the principal and their parents about what is actually going on and what they are learning. This gives them a great opportunity to do some authentic writing early on in the year, and lets me get an idea how they are as writers. (Not everyone is concerned. Many parents have mentioned that their kids are having a great time and are excited about being in the class.)

## FRIDAY

September 8, 2000

This will be a short one as I am really exhausted from the week. We started out the day by measuring the classroom for our scale model map of the room. After we had made sure our measurements were correct we used a large sheet of 1-inch graph butcher paper to create our map. Once this was created we all made scale paper cut-outs of the trapezoid tables, as these were the most difficult to create and I wanted everyone to feel comfortable before I turn them loose to measure out everything else on their own. Although several kids struggled to make sense of the scale concept, this hands-on construction was making sense to most, and now we have a large set of scale model tables, which we adhered magnets to so they could be moved around on the map (which was placed on a dry erase board). On Monday we will begin to measure all the furniture and make paper cut-outs to scale. Then we can begin to make decisions about how we want the room arranged.

After recess we came back to read Louis Sachar's *Holes* (which I love to read aloud to the class) and began working on the final letters to the principal and the parents about what we have been doing in the class this week.

After PE they weren't too excited about getting back to mapping the room so we sat down and spent the last 50 minutes of the day drawing each other.

I like to connect (if only briefly) at the end of each day, so I do something I call the 3 H's. Before they leave I ask for a handshake, a high five, or a hug. It's a nice way to say goodbye.

## MONDAY

September 11, 2000

The kids were eager to get the tables out today. I think that they didn't realize it would be so much work to begin designing the room. We spent the first few hours of the day making scale model cut-outs of all the things in the classroom, and then began talking about where things should go. We decided that it would be a good idea to have several areas in the room (a library space, a science space, a place to keep an aquarium, an art space, etc.).

I wanted to be able to have the tables set up for Tuesday so at least they would have somewhere to sit, and thus gave groups of kids trapezoid pieces to start thinking of ways to lay out the tables in the room. Many groups created geometric figures like faces, question marks, and flowers. Others preferred straight lines or clusters of tables. Eventually the class decided they liked the flower shaped layout.

After they went home I took all 12 tables and set them out as in the scale model design. The tables are taking up most of the room and leave little space for anything else. However, I feel that it is important for them to be able to see the physical layout themselves and decide if it really is the best one. While making maps does help do some planning, eventually you can only really get a feel by trying things out. While I don't think it will be a very comfortable space I want to give the class the opportunity to make the final decision. It doesn't do much good to give the freedom to make all these plans if I am going to take the real choices away from them. My job will be to help them see the positive sides of their design and the drawbacks. This is a long process, but a very important one if they are going to feel involved and invested in the work we do this year.

The principal came into the classroom today to respond to the letters that the kids wrote to him last. It is wonderful to have an administrator who cares so deeply about what is happening in each class and cares enough to respond in person to a letter. I have been fortunate to have his support in the work that I am doing. What a change from years past.

As a way for them to begin to introduce themselves to their classmates and schoolmates, I am having them select an important time in their life to write about. I am a firm believer in writers workshops and selecting your own topics, but I have found it is often important to do some ground work at the beginning of the year. One of the things that I try to stress is the importance of knowing your purpose and audience. Without knowing those things, writing is pointless. Too often children are asked to write solely for the sake of writing.

This first piece of writing will be to share an important event in their lives. It is usually easier to write about something that has happened to you than it is to have to make it all up. With that in mind I asked everyone to brainstorm ten or more possible topics they thought would be interesting for others to hear about. Eventually I would like to have a short written piece to go along with the paper cut-out portraits we will be creating and mounting either inside the class, or out in the hall.

I have borrowed an idea from Steven Levy's *Starting From Scratch* that I thought I would share as a last paragraph for the day. I use a Tibetan bowl in the classroom when I need everyone's attention (the kids also use it when they need to make an announcement). I ring it three times and by the last ring I ask that everyone has at least stopped talking and is ready to listen to any instructions or questions. I find the three rings give them a chance to finish up if they are in the middle of a conversation. While it has been a successful tool, there have been a few instances where kids continue talking. For those who have not finished talking there is no punishment, rather they must apologize to the bell in writing and present the apology in front of the class. As Levy calls it, we are feeding the bowl, which gets hungry when people don't listen to it.

## TUESDAY

September 12, 2000

Coming into class everyone realized that the layout they had selected had looked better on paper. Almost everyone thought that the way the tables were arranged took up way too much room. We discussed a few more possibilities and eventually came up with a plan to make six shaped tables, spread out mostly in the middle. While this arrangement takes up less room, it still doesn't leave much room to move around in. We'll have to see how things function. Nothing has to be permanent. However, there was a definite joy in being able to get those chairs out and actually sit at a table. I told them that they could sit wherever they wanted to. I'm not much for assigned seating, as everyone should be able to move around during the day.

After the tables were set up we began thinking about the other possible areas in the room (the library, the animal/aquarium area, the art area, space for storage, a science area, the cubby area, etc). We arranged things on the map in a way that we thought would work and then broke up into small groups and each moved the various objects (file cabinets, tables, couch, shelves, etc). I had a small group help me during recess to make some small adjustments and eventually we had the basic classroom layout complete. Not bad for six days of work.

After lunch recess I usually like to give the kids 45 minutes to an hour of reading time. SSR (silent sustained reading) is a time for kids to choose any type of reading material they want. It also gives me a chance to visit and read with individual kids or groups of kids who have all decided to read a book together. I love to read and books are a mainstay of our classroom. I have collected about 400 of my own books as well as stacks of library books for the class to use. Because all the books have been packed away, we have yet to have any time to use them.

With the completion of the library area, I thought it would be a great time to get them out. I use a color coded system to make arranging easier (yellow stickers for fantasy, blue for realistic fiction, red for historical fiction, orange for poetry, etc). Most of the books I bought this summer had no stickers so I had the kids make decisions about what colored stickers needed to go on what books. Not only did it save me many hours of work, but it also gave the class an opportunity to explore the new books, talk about genres (Does a book of Chinese poetry with both English and Chinese go in the poetry or the foreign language tub?), and it gave me a chance to see what they knew about books.

After this big sorting endeavor the kids were both wired and exhausted at the same time. At 80 degrees the temperature didn't help their concentration for the remainder of the day. Many of the students do struggle with staying at a particular task for long without some redirection. I still haven't figured out if it is just lack of freedom in the past, the weather, the start of the year, or the fact that they are a new social group. It's something that I will keep on thinking about and talking with them. I breached the subject with them today.

I asked them what was going on to make them so fidgety but there was little desire to pursue that conversation. I guess after a summer of physical freedom, many of them find it difficult to have to sit still, which is totally reasonable. They are children and they love to move. While we have been designing and moving things around all day there may be more that I can do for those kids that really need a kinesthetic environment.

Of course it's easier to put my focus on those kids rather than the ones that have found a quiet place to write or read and just won't stop. I need to be careful not to lose sight of anyone in the class. Not easy with 28 kids (I know that some classes have many more).

## WEDNESDAY

September 13, 2000

The major part of setting up the class has been completed. Today we dug through all the boxes of supplies found spaces for the contents and created some more order to things. Each group had to investigate their box, determine what we had and then inform the rest of the class of the contents and whereabouts in the room. In that way everyone would know where everything is.

With the basics finished we will move on to the bigger items. The kids are really interested in having

animals and plants in the class, but to make the animal/aquarium/plant idea possible we will need to do some fundraising. That means phone calls, letter writing, interviewing, etc. I just bought some used silk-screens this summer at a garage sale and would love to use them to have the class make t-shirts. But we shall see.

Once the class is set up, we will continue building the community through investigations of each other and ourselves. Eventually I will use an integrated approach (*a la* James Beane), where the curriculum will be centered around two questions: "What do I want to know about myself," and "What do I want to know about the world."

With the structure of the class basically in place we have begun to work a little more on the individual stories we are writing about our lives. Yesterday we focused on beginnings and how we can draw our audience into the things we are writing. I read a few beginnings of stories and we talked about their differences and similarities and what made them interesting. Then students stood on their chairs and read their own beginnings and we discussed how they could be better. I like to have kids stand on their chairs because it allows them to see everyone and to project their voice. It also feels like you are doing something special or different.

After the discussion many students wanted to go back and make changes or even start their rough drafts over. It was nice to see some excitement from a class that mostly admitted that they didn't like to write.

# CLUB HOUSE DEMOCRACY

By Leonard Turton

## The Journal Begins

I have several years of experimenting with meetings and self-management at my school to look back on. It has twisted and turned in shape as I have become more experienced, and as the kids have, year after year, taken up previous classes' ideas and run with some of what went before and then added new things.

Last week, for instance, we introduced the idea of a 'strong warning', which I stole from my Summerhill visit last July. I didn't intend this, but a situation came up that seemed to fit such a meeting proposal, so I told the kids about how Summerhill used the idea, and they immediately adopted it. I imagine it will remain as an option for some time to come.

I'm not sure where to begin... The whole business at my school changed drastically with the retirement of old teachers and the arrival of young people who were interested in what I was doing. This year, for the first time, there is the prospect of students starting the process of what we call 'Club House Democracy' at 8 years of age and moving through five years of teachers who are committed to the same ideals of sharing power with children.

Last year the grade 4 and 5 teachers, Brad and Naomi, began adopting my basic methods with considerable success. However, another teacher, in her first year, took my grade 6 kids into grade 7, and it didn't work out too well. She was sharing responsibilities with a very undemocratic teacher (a tyrant), and the class I passed on to the soon fell apart, often reverting to either out of control or passive-aggressive behavior, depending on whom they were with. This year is turning out quite differently: the tyrant has left, I am seeing my 'last year's class' at least once a day, and they are ardently pursuing class government and management - with the encouragement of that new teacher, who is going to be very good indeed.

So now I have moved up and am starting the year with grade 8 instead of grade 6. We have initiated grade 6 and 8 meetings and activities to help make it all seem like one unified place. There is a concerted effort to get all five classes on the top floor feeling that they have common democratic foundations by mixing up teachers and activities and meetings as often as possible.

The question mark is going to be the grade 6 class, who had the Club House Democracy concept introduced to them in grade 5. They have ended up with two teachers, neither of whom know anything about what we are doing. We have promoted our ideas, given them workshop benches and tools and supplies, encouraged them to start meetings and so on, but they are a bit older and more experienced than the three young teachers in grades 4, 5, and 7, and so are more conservative - and a bit afraid to bust things loose (after all, democracy ain't in the curriculum).

Last week, however, one of the teachers took me up on an offer to help with meetings and to help with getting the workshop going. The kids here are not the issue - they can run the meeting and run a workshop - it is the teachers (who are willing, but hesitant and inexperienced).

So this sets the scene... Brad had his very first meeting with the grade 4's last week. We chatted beforehand

and then he went in and basically said to them, "Listen, I'd like to share my authority with you. I'd like you to make rules and solve some problems yourself. Would you like to share the authority or do you want me to make all of the decisions?" He took a vote and of course 100% voted to share with him. He then proceeded to chair a first meeting which, to his astonishment, ran to recess - at which time an 8-year-old raised his hand and made a motion adjourn and then continue after the break.

## Nancy's Class

Nancy, the grade 7 teacher, had a supply teacher as a replacement on Friday. Nancy was there for the first hour. The supply teacher was a young guy, and the class not one that in the past did anything but torture supplies.

In grade 5 they were quite traumatized. They had two teachers as a result of contract stuff, and the one they saw the most hated them (really). When she wasn't predicting that they would all end up in jail she was away so much that the supplies - short and long term - must have been there at least a third of the time. So when they got me in grade 6 I promised them I wouldn't *not* be there unless deathly ill, and I managed to keep my promise. Even on days when I was due time off I would give it to others and teach them instead - in order to prove to the children that I did care about them.

When this supply teacher arrived to teach the new grade 7 we all looked at one another. He looked about 17 and we thought - Oh well. However, Nancy had time to let the kids run the start of their day and she explained how we involve them in decisions and a bit about our philosophy. This fellow, attending teacher's college, had of course never heard about the type of program we were running but was very much taken by it. The kids knew he had made the effort to come in early to see them do things, and when Nancy left he was able to get into that space. The result to our general surprise, was a decent day for all.

## The 'Mess Up The Class' Game

Brad is trying to get the grade 4's to loosen up a bit (they had quite an old fashioned teacher last year), and at the same time he wants to get them to be disciplined in certain areas. Last week, after their second Class Meeting he came to me and said: "Gotta find a way to get them to vote against a motion. They always pass everything."

I said, "Make a motion to cancel Phys. Ed. and double math and see what happens."

Anyway, Brad and I play 'mess up the class' games, where I come into his room and change things around, take things that are his while the students are there, or if he leaves (on purpose), I come in and ask the kids what they are working if the teacher isn't there, and challenge them to stop, or get them to leave the room with me and hide, etc. He, on the other hand, tells them I am going to do this and asks them not to let me interfere.

We were doing this in the area where the class 4's enter - they have two flights of stairs and a long hallway to walk down. This is hard for little kids, who see an empty space and want to run into it. It is also an area of bureaucratic surveillance. So we try and get the kids to relax and be invisible.

Anyway, as they were coming in I smiled at Daisy, who is a bundle of natural energy - it bursts out of her body. I yelled, "Let's dance Daisy!" and ran over and put my arms out. She grabbed my hands and we proceeded to sing in nonsense and dance in circles in the middle of the hall.

Suddenly, though, she looked around and went, "Oh no!" and ran back in line. I tried various ways of disrupting the rest, grabbing at sleeves, standing in front of them, growling and so on. They kept on going.

This is only a useful exercise if it is properly followed up. If Brad doesn't follow it up properly it is quite wrong. Daisy must be told that the dancing was great, that her desire to play was wonderful and so on, and then she must be told that the only reason that she is to ignore me is because of the time and place.

## The Town Within The School

In a state school life is very complex. The 'town' is upon you. The kids are in the soup, in the fish tank of the town. Just as Summerhill has rules covering the behavior of community members while out in the town, we try to develop rules for the 'town' within the school. Which is tricky, because the town here isn't a place. It is a *time and situation*. The kids are clever though. They catch on quickly.

As a counter balance it is important that outrageous behavior be encouraged. The kids and I steal stuff from other teachers, kidnap other students, invade other classrooms - singing and shouting until everything is disrupted into a laughing celebration. I throw mock tantrums. I walk on desks as I teach. We toss boxes of paper clips in the air and so on.

Near the end of the year last year the kids were having a dance. I stay out of the dances and let them run and control them by themselves. I remain in the room for 'legal' reasons. At one point all of the kids were dancing to rap number and Alex jumped up on the outside ring of tables and pretended to sing. Then a few other boys got up behind him and became his group. Linda, a bit concerned, looked my way. I just smiled. Before long the whole class was up and dancing on tables, in a completely safe way. When the song came to an end they all cheered and jumped carefully down.

A little while later, Maureen jumped on a table and started to scream. Immediately several other kids told her to get down. She stopped, and did so.

## Deconstructing Teachers

We try to deconstruct some of the mythology of teacher control and power. With the 6's I always play 'me as teacher', which children love. I tell them that teachers like nothing better than to have kids fear them. I pretend to be working at the blackboard and then a student dares to cough. I turn about with a glare and they all scream in terror and then laugh hysterically.

Another favorite is 'Here comes the teacher'. I stand at the door and say, "What a fantastic class. It is such a relief to be able to trust you all to keep on working and not go crazy while I leave to run off these papers." They leave and they all scream and bang as loud as they can. One student is posted at the door. After a couple of minutes I nod and that student says, "Here comes the teacher." By the time I enter they are busy pretending to work away. I then say, "Wow. I can't believe it. You people are the best." Kids will ask to play these games many times over. It energizes them completely.

The purpose of these games is to shake up phony good behavior, make the kids understand the reasons for disciplined behavior - that will end up being to their advantage, and to debunk some of the stereotypical teacher behaviors and learning situations found in the state school.

As I said, it is a bit complex, and does have to be done properly - because in many ways we are walking a very thin line between guerrilla teaching and reinforcing the status quo.

## The Physical Foundation

The foundation of Club House Democracy is in the physical environment, although I did begin using democratic meetings from my alternative school days before I had this completely figured out. Kids need room to do stuff. Without it there is no *place*, no Club House. There is just some kind of mini insurance company office.

About the third year of teaching regular classes I had decided that it was necessary to blow up the classroom started by getting rid of the big metal desks that I had in class 6 and trading them for some middle sized but real old and run down wooden ones. After measuring the area of the big ones and the medium ones and multiplying by 32 I discovered that I could gain a ton of area by using the old ones. Then I messed about with configurations until I could get the desks into as small a space as possible. When the children came into the room that year I explained why I had done all of this, and said that if the tight space became a nuisance they could pass a motion to change things. They didn't.

I teach in an old school, with large rooms and very high ceilings and great wide hallways. My next challenge was to find a way to get rid of the coat area in my classroom, so I could use it for a work space. I had control of the computer lab across the hall because I was the site manager. I used this role, and the rapport that I had established with our old principal, to get him to let my class put their coats in the computer lab's back coat area. Presto, we had workshop space.

I had desks on one side of the room, and to the left I had a lounge with a rug and chairs (this later became drama area when we built a stage). At the back we put workbenches. We had an area for junk and wood storage and tables for crafts. There was also a sink and counter and cupboards. That was our art area. At the front there was a class library. Here and there we put chess sets (we eventually got 15 chess sets - grade 6's are often che-



mad). I also used a variety of partitions to give the illusion of many separate areas, and to give the space some visual interest.

So we had a Club House. And this place had to have rules and committees to run it, and meetings had to be held for this - and to discuss problems that arose from having a 'living' space. The democracy, therefore, had some reason for existing. This place became their own.

## How To Go Democratic

Politics comes into this, and experience. It is necessary to get to a free school or an alternative school, and read about them - I ran one for eight years. Without that perspective I would not at times know what to bend, how far to push. You need to see kids in a free environment to know what they are capable of.

And I decided to stay in one place, one with the right architecture, because if you stay in one place while it is around you - teachers, principals - come and go you end up - not with power, but with a whole lot of influence. You also have to know how to deconstruct the personalities of a wide range of administrative types. Know how to gain their friendship, know how to deliver the goods they want, so that they trust you. Then they will leave you alone and let you experiment.

Last year one of the younger teachers said to me in a joking way, "Yes, well you can do that because you're Leonard." What that means is what I just talked about - influence, not power. Giving in when giving in will give you back what is much more important, creative freedom.

## Club House Areas

Kids need to do things, to hammer and saw and create. It siphons off bound-up energy, it lets non-academic thinkers gain pride and self esteem. It fosters meditative focus on freely chosen action, which is the lynchpin of learning. It allows kids at school to come closer to the state of play. Which is essential. Club House Democracy is playful.

When we set up the stage at the side of the classroom there was another creative explosion, equal to the one caused by the workshop and art areas. It is, I feel now, an absolutely essential part of a Club House.

How are these areas used? Well non-academically as much as possible. In other words you give the kids the supplies, get the supplies they want, and leave them alone unless they ask for help. You can also adapt the areas to curricula. Last year in a Space unit we built Mars Stations, which was a way of taking three weeks and letting kids bring in and dismantle stereos, vacuum cleaners, tape decks and so on and then reassemble them in a cornucopia of constructions with glue guns and hammer and nails. They spent hours at this and the results were amazing.

## Soothing Terminology

The school I am at now knows that I visit Summerhill, and I have given younger teachers information about Neill. At a meeting of the Junior/Intermediate classes that I lead I have spoken of Homer Lane and Neill. The principal knows about this, but I don't go out of my way to discuss it with her.

We are now up front about our influences because the system we are using works in an inner city school known throughout the city for its unruly children. It worked for me first, and so for several years I was simply asked to civilize the most outrageous groups. Then last year it worked for Naomi and Brad.

When I first decided to start democratic meetings and kids sharing in teacher authority I had to come up with some rationale and some terms that wouldn't worry administrators. I figured I had to stay clear of saying *free*, or *alternative*, and *Summerhill*. What I did was to co-opt new ideas in corporate management, figuring that it would fit right into the business rhetoric. So I read books like 'Business Without Bosses,' which has references to a variety of international corporations, and books like 'Self-Directed Work Teams,' and 'Delegating For Results.' I used the phrase 'student self-management' - which was a hit! It is now, of course, more sophisticated and called Club House Democracy.

## Last Year's Deal

Club House Democracy, then, had been a success with grade 4, 5 and 6 classes. In January of last year, the principal sent me a little note that said, "Would you be interested in teaching grade 8 next year?" These kids, as you may remember, would be the class I had taught in grade 6. I thought about it and then went to see her. I was able to say what I said because of politics. I had cemented a very trusting relationship with her.

So I said, "Well, it would be interesting, but the grade 8 curriculum is crap. In Junior you get to let them do as they please. In grade 7 and 8 it becomes overly academic and a lot of the kids are not ready. A lot of the ones who are not ready become frustrated and hostile - and end up in the local gangs. It also makes kids who are good in areas other than academics feel like failures. Then they are supposed to choose an academic or vocational high school - when they choose vocational not because they feel smart about that kind of thing but because they feel stupid about academics, which is absolutely idiotic. So, except for math and English, I would want freedom to play and bend the curricula, and I would need tools and a workshop and a stage. In fact I would want to keep my old room."

She said she agreed with me. I continued: "And the other problem is size. All the classrooms from grade 1 to 8 are the same size but the kids get bigger and bigger, so that in grade eight all you see is a sea of people crammed into large desks with no space to do anything at all. I'd like to move the computer lab into the basement and use the old room as a multi-use space that would be managed by the grade eights - for building, art, science, drama and so on."

She agreed to that too. So I said yes, I would take the 8's. In addition, I get to see the 7's (my last year's grade 6 class) at least once a day. And we moved the 4's upstairs. Naomi and Brad and I are on the same floor, with Nancy and the two new grade 6 teachers. The bonus is that the grade 8 class is very small, so that I didn't have to change the basic layout of the room.

But how would the 8's respond to Club House Democracy now that they were two years older? I was determined to fashion a kid environment. To let them play. To let them have a chance to drop phony sophistication.

Last year too many of the 8's were deep into street gangs and drug taking and some into drug dealing, and the 7 and 8's were into threats and persecution. It was one nasty scene. The good kids were left impotent and despondent. Their teacher was a huge man who ran the classroom like a police state.

Naomi and Brad and Nancy and I were determined to turn that around. In preparation, and with the help of the principal, we 'graduated' a few kids to early high school programs, refused to take others who were on alternative school forms, and prepared a top floor for Club House Democracy.

## Making A Start

At the start of school year the grade 8's group was familiar with the Club House Democracy structure, from their year in grade 6; class meetings, taking ownership of their own classroom as a social and learning environment, the sharing of authority and so on from their previous experiences with me. There was an easiness, then, with the layout of the land.

However, there wasn't much of a social cohesion. Last year the class had been ripped apart by feuds and connections with outside gangs and threats and intimidation outside of the classroom that bordered on the illegal. This was not helped by last year's grade 8 class, many of whom were, for lack of a better word, criminal apprentices connected to drugs and drug dealing and with gangs that were in the high schools.

There were, then, hard feelings and cliques. The group had shattered into singles and pairs and threesomes. This, of course, was not a positive situation for Club House Democracy, where the majority must care about the community. Add this to a stale year of learning. The group's sense of adventure, of the desire to act out of their own creative and play energies, was pretty much blocked. I could tell the first day. They were grumbling and all set open textbooks, and do old fashioned classroom learning. Other than that they appeared - well, catatonic. I was somewhat alarmed how one year had turned an absolutely vibrant group into... sheep.

So I decided to scrap regular learning. I wasn't about to give them what they thought they wanted - which was to have their time filled up with directives from above, and then follow a variety of passive or aggressive theatrical scripts with the teacher-authority-figure.

There were several students who volunteered for positions of action/authority, and the class went ahead and approved a variety of committees almost out of rote memory. But most of what they voluntarily voted to do was

acted upon. There were hardly any rowdy days or situations. Most days were calm and easy going, but dysfunctional nonetheless.

Those who chose to be on committees or lead meetings were 'younger' in outlook, more Junior students than anything, who were enjoying improving self-esteem by taking those positions. Needless to say there were days when the others didn't pay a great deal of attention to them.

## Dreadful Art

On the second day of school I introduced an art lesson with many choices and options. The results were dreadful. The next day I took the artwork, and held it up; "I gotta tell ya - and you know I like you all - but this stuff..

"...is no good," volunteered one of the kids.

"Well, yeah, actually it's worse than that."

They laughed. Then I pointed to some of the banners they had designed in grade 6, which were still hanging from our high ceiling. "Now, look at this, and this - and that one - those are really good. They show some care and enthusiasm," and so on. Then, one by one, I held the new stuff up again and we all went *Blech*.

Then, with good humor, I told them that in my personal opinion they were, well, they were - apathetic catatonic (not catatonic, which were atomic cats, I pointed out) - and I said that they seemed to be waiting for the teacher to organize their lives. I said I wasn't going to do that. I then said that we were going to put on a conceptual art show and that we would start the next day and they could either take part or find other things for themselves to do. I didn't care what except they had to leave others alone. My feeling was that the kids would either benefit from the group action on the art, or with being presented with empty time that they had to fill.

## The Meditation-Learning Loop

I balanced all of this with very short and specific academic lessons, during which I told them about the brain and how it 'turns on' when a person is interested and turns off when not. I told them that one of the difficult things about a classroom was that most of what they do they don't want to do. I discussed the meditation-learning loop how concentration on an action loops back when they are involved, and allows them to 'zone' into an action with superior results. We talked about the concentration they experience when skateboarding or doing other chosen activities. I said that all activities that allow them to concentrate in this way provide practice for learning better.

I said that if they could teach themselves to find whatever they could to hang onto, of a positive nature, during learning in the artificial environment of a classroom, then they would do better. And I said that if they could make this trick work for them then I didn't have to give them as much regular work. I told them that one reason that teachers give so much repetitive work is that they know students don't care and don't try, so that the results are not good. Teachers think the only way to get kids to improve is to repeat and repeat. I said that if they did their best they could give them, say, two writing assignments instead of ten. Then we could do neat stuff with the extra time.

This is hard to write about... because it looks like lectures but actually it was all delicately slipped in over many days at appropriate times; quickly, and most often light heartedly.

## Introducing the Art Show Idea

The Art Show was to be a vehicle for several things. I have my extra room this year and I have convinced the principal that it should be a multi-use studio managed by the grade 8's. My hope was that the 8's could imagine whatever they wanted to do and do it, and that they would naturally end up interacting as older and wiser community members with the younger kids along the top floor. I also hoped it would help the non-academic students gain self-esteem, since I was sure that there would be a strong physical/practical component to all of this.

I had visited the Tate Modern and Hayward Galleries in London during the summer and was delighted with the large sculptures, the conceptual and industrial art. I thought that it would be a neat thing for kids to do.

So I introduced these ideas to the class. I showed them pictures from the galleries. I described the art, especially that which could be experienced by participation. I threw out a few ideas. I outlined my ideas for a show.

I was concerned about pushing all of them at this but I also knew that they needed a concrete example of how to

room could be used, and then I figured they would take it from there.

Five weeks in, this does seem to be the case. At the last class meeting they decided that they wanted to build a haunted house for Halloween and after that hold a Play Festival for the top floor. They have already circulated a letter to the other classes asking the class meetings to vote on whether or not they want to participate.

So, with the Art Show decided upon, I simply gave them time, many periods, many hours, and each day would throw out ideas and ask if anyone would like to follow up on them. I would also start a piece of art and then ask if anyone wanted to continue it. We produced conceptual art through a combination of individual work and collaborative work, and sometimes with students acting as my assistants, all of which seemed appropriate since they had no real experience with these modern art forms.

## After A Month

The 7 and 8's went to Queenston Heights for the day to play last week. It is a huge park and no one was there. We hiked. They played on the little-kid climbing equipment. They played capture the flag in the woods with Nancy. We had hot dogs and hamburgers. They played tennis and hide and seek. Marty, the special ed. teacher that I had asked to help out, said; "I can't believe them. How well behaved they were on the bus, and at the park."

Later he came to me again at the school and said, "It's just happy up here. All the kids are smiling. The old ones are mixing with the younger ones. It's like a totally different place." That was after one month.

## Schoolwork

As well as preparing for our Art Show we have also done math, media studies, spelling, geography and science in a stripped down way and all, as much as possible, with their input. I emphasized that there were certain things they simply had to do if they weren't going to be blindsided by high school.

They asked, "Why?" and I said; "Well, look, some of it makes sense, yeah? The other stuff is like this... Let's pretend that in high school, the kids have to hop on one leg from classroom to classroom. Well, it's pretty stupid, but if we didn't spend a little time hopping about this year you'd fall over next year." They laughed, but got the point.

Spelling was interesting. The spelling book has a lot of language in it, and can be of some use in that area. On the other hand there is no way that a good third of the class will be able to spell a lot of the list words. So I told them we weren't going to do tests, just the work. And I explained that I thought that it would be useful, and showed them why I thought that. Then I made a motion to do two spelling units and then evaluate. This was passed. At the end of the second unit I gave them a survey:

1. Did you find anything useful... if so, what?
2. If you want to do spelling, do you want to choose the exercises you think would be best for you, or do you want me to choose?
3. Do you want spelling tests?

Most kids said yes to number one, and most said they wanted to choose their own exercises but 90% voted against tests. This was intriguing, so when I reported back what they had decided I said that since so many thought spelling was of some use, why the anti-test vote?

Their answers: "I know the words anyway." - "By the time I'm finished the unit I know the words so what's the point?" - "I can't spell most of them and studying a list never did help. If it did, then how come after nine years of school spelling tests I still can't spell?" - "It's generally a waste of a period when we could be doing something a little more interesting."

I didn't say what I thought - that for most kids it was a genuine phobia from when they were little. At that point their self-esteem had been challenged weekly by the slavish adherence to a weekly test.

Even when I proposed that we just do the test for fun, for their own information, it was soundly voted down. In general, they really had covered the Above, the Average and the Below: the Above, "why bother?" the Average, "learn most of it by working the exercises," and the Below, "I ain't gonna learn 'em anyway."

## Building an Art Show

As the Art Show work progressed we had a lucky accident. One of the parents knew of a cabinetmaker's shop that had tons of scrap wood. She started to bring in boxes of it, all shapes, all sizes. Suddenly there was a flurry of cars and trucks being made by the boys. A number of students also began a large abstract sculpture. All of these objects put together, generally, with the use of glue guns and small nails.

There were a few students who wanted to read, or play chess, or do homework. Every day we kept inventing new projects:

Fish Tank Lasagna - a fish tank turned into a see through lasagna. Wood for pasta, chess pieces, rulers, marble pipe insulation etc. for fillings. Shaved plastic for a cheese topping.

A large black and white striped board with striped black and white disks nailed all over it, that could spin and change the overall pattern.

A board painted black covered with science goggles, white eyeballs of cardboard in the glasses.

A large black rectangular box edged with wood and covered deeply in popsicle sticks. A step ladder at the end with fake binoculars to look down at this. Pictures of trees flattened after a volcano, and a meteor on the ladder.

## The Meaning of Art

The kids had great fun discovering that their ideas and perceptions could be changed by the art. They also discovered that humans want to have everything have an *obvious* meaning, or they can become frustrated.

One piece for the show was a large black rectangle covered with two sizes of wooden wheels. It just looked cool. When a teacher came in and asked what it was one student said, "Wheels on a board."

The teacher said, "Oh."

Then a second student said, "Or the Milky Way."

The kids were amused that the teacher preferred this. It gave the piece a 'reason'.

I brought in a ton of wire and copper pipe and pipe insulation and anything else I thought would be fun. I would hold it up in the morning and ask, "Anyone want this?" Or sometimes I would think of a funny idea and ask what they might want to do it.

One day I was walking home from school and I saw a crew threading plastic piping through an underground sewer. I said, "That's neat stuff. It'd be good for my art class." The young fellow smiled and cut me a whole section. The next day John drilled holes through it, threaded cut up black foam insulation through the holes, and made a centipede.

Another day I brought in a bag of black plastic pull-ties and the kids ended up pulling them tightly around a long piece of wood, with the ends sticking out. Then they stuck a white Styrofoam ball on the end of each.

"What's that?" I asked.

"A caterpillar."

## More Art

When the boys had finished with their cars and trucks they got a board, edged it with wood, and ran out to the back lot to get a bucket of sand. They made a sand hill and arranged the vehicles over the top.

Melanie wanted to make a maze from small wooden blocks. So we got an old drama wing and she made four mazes on it, and we hoisted it up and bent it at the hinge. She then painted the edges of the wood black and white and hung a bell at the end of each maze, made a stick with a wheel on the end and began to blindfold people and ask them to figure out the mazes.

The kids would sometimes all be at the art, or sometimes they would lose interest and all be doing something

else. One day, during a lull in the proceedings, the boys started to cover another series of strange looking vehicle with pipe insulation and then drive them off the worktable. This gained momentum over a couple of days until I was running out of insulation. Cars totally covered in rubbery insulation would be dropped and bounced and collided with others and off the walls and so on. Needless to say we had to make some rules.

Finally, Nate said, "Let's make a video of the demolition and put it in the show."

"Brilliant!" shouts I. And so we all went down in the gym. The car-makers got up on the stage. Sharon worked the camera and the rest of us pretended we were an audience, cheering and chanting on cue. The cars flew off the stage at an increasing angle until all but one had shattered. Bill, the winner, pretended to run from autograph hunters and then was interviewed by Carol. We all rushed upstairs to watch the video. It is, as planned, part of the show. At the base of the TV and VCR stand we have spread the car debris.

## Stealing Candy

One final description, because it has turned out to be a hit with our audiences: We got four desks and hurled strips of foam insulation from the underneath, so it looked like spaghetti. We put the desks together and covered them over with green and red sheets and piled more insulation over all of this - so we had a tunnel - and we pointed this object toward a corner set of shelves. On the bottom shelf we put a red spot shining up, and also a small board to protect kids from touching it. And in front of all that we put a huge pile of candy.

At the entrance to the tunnel a sign read, 'CRAWL SLOWLY TO CANDY.' When you looked through from the end you saw the black forest of insulation - and at the end a glowing red. Behind the candy we put a sign that said 'DON'T TOUCH THE CANDY.'

The 8's have been bowled over by the moral dilemma they have accidentally set up for visitors. Thursday grade 6 students were beside themselves.

"Can we take a candy?" they asked.

We would answer, "That's up to you. If you want to steal a candy or not."

They pestered me as the authority figure. "Give us permission to steal a candy!"

I said, "Nope. You have to decide."

"What will happen to us?"

"Well, I have no idea."

Finally one of them took a candy and came back beaming, eating it. None of us said or did anything. Soon they were all going through time after time and taking candies and jumping and leaping about with a crazy glee. Kare, probably my most brilliant student, was beside herself with laughter at how the piece she had helped set up was having such a strong effect on our gallery visitors.

## Nate's Boat

I wanted to tell you a lot about all of this to let you understand that the four weeks up to the opening of the show were very complex indeed; that the show was a very important experience; that, luckily, it had worked in the way I had hoped. I won't go into the setting up of the gallery, advertising, making a catalogue, taking photographs, staffing the gallery, deciding on changes as we found out how people moved and reacted in the space and so on.

As all of this was going on the students began to interact more intensely, work and socialize in a variety of groupings. On down days, when they needed a break, they began sitting around in the lounge area talking and laughing or playing cards. One afternoon that's all they did. We just laughed and socialized because that's what they needed to do. On other days there were anti-social actions that had to be resolved, or students became bored and didn't know what to do, or they took up totally different activities for a few days. For instance, one day Nate built a powered boat and sailed it across the sink.

It was all an intense, involving, and community shaping experience. As the weeks have passed the apathy has begun to fade, and students have also started to take up a variety of individual projects. Oh... before Nate had perfected the boat he came running out of the class at noon and confronted four teachers.

"Hey teachers, check this out!" he yelled. He held the boat from a long wire and turned on the motor. The boat floated up in the air and began to fly around in the hall. Everyone laughed - and remembered how anti-social and

unhappy he had been last year.

In our class he has been given the freedom to explore his mechanical nature. His father cannot read. His whole family is poor with language. I am determined that when he chooses a vocational high school it will be because he is happy about his considerable mechanical talents and not because he is an academic failure. He is working very hard at all the academic work I have given him, and I can see his determination to do better steeling inside him. Next week when he goes to lessons in the shop class at the local high school he has decided to take a bundle of wood. He wants the teacher to use a table saw to cut the ends flush. He plans to build a replica house, with wiring, plumbing and so on.

## Freeing Children

It *is* possible to free children to be themselves. I urge you to do it. Yes, the underpinnings are boring, but our 'games' and our 'clubhouse' make the kids feel like it's their own place. It also gives them a structured say in things rather than me whimsically being a 'nice' or 'empathetic' guy. The attempt is to give them a quasi-democratic 'bill of rights' through the evolved classroom structures. If nothing else it helps keep me in line, reminds me to adhere to the rules we all make together.

I wish there were others of similar experience working with me. The young teachers I work with are copying me at the moment. I have way too much clout here. Right now I'm out on a limb of my own making, and it's very easy not to be critical enough, or to think that what I have is the best that could be done under the circumstances, which is of course not true.

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360 574-4017

1201 NW 109<sup>th</sup> St, Vancouver, WA 98695

Four strands:

\*Innovation and Choice Within the Public School System

\*New Roles and Responsibilities in a Paradigm of Choice

\*Alternative learning opportunities: Meeting the Needs of All Learners

\*Beyond Schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Proposals or Registration may be sent to:

IASC 2001, 1201 NW 109<sup>th</sup> St, Vancouver, WA 98695

Before May 1, 2001: \$199

More Info: Bob Lockridge at [boblock@teleport.com](mailto:boblock@teleport.com)

PO Box 98, LaPine, OR 97739

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**PHOTO** Use Top or Bottom Photo at <http://www.alternative-education.org/>

## Note about the 2001 International Alternative Schools Conference:

The conference will be held at the Inn of the 7th Mountain near Bend, Oregon. Flights into Redmond, OR connect via a shuttle - about 15 miles. If you come into Portland, it is about 150 miles away, and a very beautiful drive.

The program is organized around four themes:

Innovation and Choice Within the Public School System

New Roles and Responsibilities in a Paradigm of Choice

Alternative Learning Opportunities - Meeting the Needs of All Learners

Beyond Schooling in the 21st Century

The conference begins with an informal reception on Thursday evening, June 28, but the keynote address and the breakouts don't begin until Friday morning, June 29. We will conclude with a final address and a brunch at noon on Sunday, July 1.

For up to date information, request for proposals, and registration forms see our web site at <http://www.alternative-education.org>

If you have questions, please email me at [eduserve@igc.org](mailto:eduserve@igc.org), fax to 360-574-4017. Bob Fizzell, Conference Coordinator, Educational Development Services, 1201 NW 109th St, Vancouver, WA 98685

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## SOUL IN EDUCATION

By Jennifer Day

"SOUL IN EDUCATION - Spirit of Learning," the international education conference held at Findhorn in Scotland, from October 21st to 28th, - invited participants to a conference designed to strengthen genuine enquiry and fearless imagination within all facets of education.

Sponsored by UNESCO in line with the ideals of its 2000 International Year for the Culture of Peace, the conference focused on bringing universal values into effective action within our learning environment. Attracting speakers and participants from more than 25 countries around the world, the conference was hosted and facilitated by the renowned Findhorn Foundation.

Approximately two hundred people were drawn to this remote and beautiful area of Scotland, where autumn leaves displayed vibrant hues of sunset colors, the air was fresh with ocean salt, and the sea lapped quietly, almost comfortingly, on the sandy shore. The setting alone was enough to awaken us to the soul, and formed the perfect backdrop for such a conference.

Often asked questions such as - How can we strengthen value systems within schools? - How can we develop more ecological awareness in education? - How do we create peaceful schools that are safe? - and, How do we encourage soul conscious expression within the education experience? - were addressed in a variety of way by an impressive collection of prominent speakers and facilitators. But the most important and key question was, of course, What is soul in education?

It is said that "Soul is an immensity that cannot be possessed." Soul is not a thing, it is not visible, not measurable, nor is it something we can assess. Describing it would be like describing an animated energy. However, we all have the experience of soul. When we feel uplifted, inspired, delighted, enlightened, we can literally feel our soul expanding - as if it goes beyond our physical body. On the other hand, when we experience stress, pressure or fear, we can almost feel our soul contracting, shrinking, becoming smaller and almost disintegrating.

So then, what does that look like *in education* - in the classroom? One of the conference speakers, Canadian Professor Jack Miller says; "We all know the saying: the eyes are the window to the soul. When I look fo



soul in the classroom, I look for a light in the students' eyes. The other (when soul is not engaged) is that glazed look that comes over the students. We have all experienced that in the classroom, the glazed look that comes over the eyes!" Miller continues, "The soulful classroom is the vibrant classroom, it's the energetic classroom. To create it, we need to experience soul ourselves. One of the problems we have when we talk about soul is that it tends to become too abstract. We all need to look in our lives for the experience of soul in our selves."

Experiencing soul in our selves is something we all do at times, whether consciously or unconsciously. When we feel our passions and our greatest longings, we are experiencing soul. When we experience deep contemplations and a stillness within, we are experiencing soul. When we are in touch with our 'bliss' and we follow it, we are experiencing soul. And when we feel deep and unconditional love, we are experiencing soul. As such, when we are talking about experiencing soul, we are really also talking about our own personal growth and development.

For decades, the New Age movement and the fields of Psychotherapy and Self-Help, have provided us with books and workshops galore, gurus by the dozen and countless mind-body-spirit concepts that have made us all aware of the need for soul consciousness, personal growth, self-care and nurturing. However, although most of us are still not too adept at self-care - far less the nurturing of soul in our lives - we have as a society become quite proficient at *focusing* on the self.

The closing speaker, Satish Kumar, founder of the Small School movement in the UK, expressed concern for this, offering an alternative to the concept of Mind-Body-Spirit, which he feels has contributed to a tendency towards self-centeredness. He summed up the essence of the entire conference week with his new mantra, 'Soil-Soul-Society'. It was obvious to us all as soon as he'd said it - we *do* need to nurture our earth (soil) and our own souls - and then we must take the results out into our society. It is not just about our own soul and the soul of each child - but it is also about the collective soul, the soul of our schools, our organizations, our workplaces and our communities.

Speaker Linda Lantieri shared her experiences training teachers and students to build communities of caring, respect and cooperation - communities and classrooms that are soul-conscious and soul-filled. As Director of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, which is spreading rapidly in schools throughout the United States, Lantieri had many inspiring stories to tell of the successful nurturing of soul, amongst teachers and students and in schools.

She told of a young man - 17 years old - who was attending his last year of high school and whose class was participating in one of Lantieri's programs. One day she had the class do a Talking Stick process (for listening and sharing), and asked each young person to respond to the question, "What is your main goal in life?" When it came to the turn of the 17 year old in question, he answered, "To live to see my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday." This answer made a indelible impression on Lantieri and she never forgot it.

Two years later, she received a phone call telling her that the now 19-year old had been shot in a drive-by shooting. The bullet wasn't meant for him, he had just been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Fortunately, he wasn't killed. He was however paralyzed - for life.

The news so shocked Lantieri that it took her three days before she felt balanced enough to be able to visit the young man in hospital. On her arrival, she was shown to the young man's ward. Before she entered, looking in through the glass doors, she saw a group of young men all with dark brown skin - all sitting in wheel chairs. As she opened the door, she realized to her amazement that they were all sitting in a circle, and that the young man she had come to visit - only three days after being paralyzed for life - was teaching these other young men processes that he had learned in her program.

This story demonstrates that the work of bringing peace, caring communication and soul into the classroom can work. We only need to begin to *do* the work at whatever level we can - within ourselves, with our students and in our communities, and we will make a difference.

Practically, how does this look? How can we begin to nurture the experience of soul in ourselves, in our students, and our environment and communities? Miller suggests creating what he calls 'a curriculum for the inner life'.

Here is one of Miller's suggestions; "Start by allowing children to keep journals, expressing their feelings. Let them decide whether the journal is going to be open for others to look at or private. Secondly, let the children write their own stories - their autobiography." Miller explains that this can help the teacher discover the soul, the inner life of the child, and then she will view the child differently. Teachers who allow their students to write their autobiography at the beginning of the year, find that their impressions of the soul of each child are formed early on and benefits are reaped throughout the year.

The next thing that Miller suggests is to use imagery, or visualization; "One of the ways to do this with younger children is to begin with storytelling, fairytales, legends and myths. They can have very rich images that can resonate with the inner life of the child. One visualization technique that I often use with students is the water cycle - the student imagines that they are water, then that they evaporate, become a cloud, then fall down as snow sit on the mountain and then the sun melts the snow and they become a river. So they *become* the water cycle. It is no longer something out there but has become part of their inner being."

Using visualization techniques in the classroom can be a powerful tool in many ways. Storytelling, and the use of legends, myths and fairytales, is powerful for all ages, as is discussing dreams and even encouraging students to keep dream-journals. Personally, I have used these tools with children in my practice for years, always finding them invaluable to the learning process.

Another area that can help the nurturing of soul in the classroom is meditation (from early adolescence), and other similar methods that help the young person observe their own thoughts. Use of the arts is known to be important and also being in contact with the earth – for example creating a garden – can give children the opportunity to have a living relationship with the earth and with their environment.

Which leads us to the 'collective soul', - the soul of the school itself. A school with soul is first a place that recognizes soul in the students. It is a place where the teacher is aware of what occurs between her or himself and the student – in the space between them – and modifies or adapts her or his own behavior (for example in their tone of voice and in the management of their own feelings) to meet the needs of the soul of the student.

It is place where the environment supports the soul of the child.

Such a school also provides ritual and celebrations, for example morning circle. This can also provide a voice for the students. All members of a community or school need to be heard – authentically – in order for the soul to flourish.

Finally, there is the nurturing of the soul of the teacher. In order to nurture our own soul we must first take time for self-care and contemplation. Build small gaps of time into the day, where you slow down and become mindful of the present moment. Just being attentive to opportunities for moments of contemplation, can be enough.

Miller, Lantieri and Kumar were not the only inspiring speakers during the week long conference. Many other speakers offered powerful information and advice within an environment that truly embodied Soul in Education. The Findhorn community was the perfect place to fully grasp and integrate the array of experiences of soul, being a community which practices spiritual principles in work, in relationships and in nature.

The entire conference week was filled with experiences I am sure no participant will ever forget. Personally I have been compelled to gather together a group of focalizers\* for soul in education on the island of Kauai, Hawaii (where I live). As a community with 'aloha spirit', we plan to offer the next Soul in Education – SPIRIT OF LEARNING conference, in October 2001. Some of the speakers from the conference at Findhorn will be there, as will many other exciting and inspirational presenters. See you there?

\* Focalizer - someone holding the focus for an event or organization, and bringing it forward to fruition.

Jennifer Day is a parent consultant and family counselor, and author/editor of 5 books for parents, including *Children Believe Everything You Say*. She lives in Hawaii where she has a private counseling and Parent Coaching practice and runs a parent resource and support service CHILDREN BELIEVE, together with her daughter, artist and designer Tammy Day. Their resources, books, games and information services are available at their web-site, [www.childrenbelieve.com](http://www.childrenbelieve.com). She can be reached at *Children Believe*, P.O. Box 253, Kilauea, HI 96754 phone 1-888-615-8889, or at [jenniferday@childrenbelieve.com](mailto:jenniferday@childrenbelieve.com)

The Findhorn Foundation is a spiritual community founded in 1962, which today is a major center for leading edge adult education and personal transformation. It was originally a small community, focused primarily on organic gardening and the relationship of spirit in nature. However, in recent years, it has grown into a large community committed to living education; offering an environment for the exploration of spiritual principles in work and relationships as well as in nature. The SOUL IN EDUCATION conference was the first one relating specifically to education. More information about this and other conferences held at Findhorn can be acquired from the Findhorn Foundation at [www.findhorn.org](http://www.findhorn.org)

For information about SPIRIT OF LEARNING – the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Soul in Education Conference, to be held on Kauai, 4-12 October 2001, e-mail [conference@childrenbelieve.com](mailto:conference@childrenbelieve.com) or phone 1-888-615-8889

# Book Reviews

## *A Different Kind of Teacher*

By John Taylor Gatto

This book brings together sixteen key essays and talks produced by Gatto between 1990 and 1999. He explains how schooling has been bent to the service of business. We are given all the numbers we need to see that seventy-five cents of every education dollar goes to administration. A comparison between the American blood supply system where blood is bought and the English blood supply system where blood does not cost anything is both enlightening and depressing.

However, The value of this book does not lie in its assertions, theories or facts, but in the act of reading the book itself. You can not read the first sentence in a paragraph from *A Different Kind of Teacher* and know what that paragraph is going to be about. John Gatto's writing is like a Jackson Pollock painting - a streak of history here, a splash of humor there, three drops of statistics.

Every sentence is filled with passion. You have to work hard to understand what John Gatto is getting at, but the reward is an invitation to an endless adventure; the search for meaning in life. Berkeley Hills Books, P.O. Box 9877, Berkeley, CA 94709, (888) 848-7903-SR

## ***Waldorf Education and Home Schooling***

**Edited by Informed Birth & Parenting**

Distilled from a two day conference at the Sacramento Waldorf School in September 2000 this book includes practically everything you could possibly need to give your child a Waldorf education.

If Birth & Parenting had published only the fifteen pages of resources like Kinderharps & Musical Instruments, Waldorf and Anthroposophy On Line or The Writings of Rudolf Steiner they would have provided a valuable service. The remaining 145 pages are made up of articles like "Consideration in Lesson Preparation," "Eight Ways to Keep Television from Stunting the Brains Growth" and Putting the Garden Back in the Kindergarten."

If there are no Waldorf schools in your area, with Waldorf Education and Home Schooling you can put a Waldor School in your home. Informed Birth & Parenting, PO Box 1733, Fair Oaks, CA 95628. SR

## ***Failing Our Kids: Why the Testing Craze Won't Fix Our Schools***

**Edited by Kathy Swope & Barbara Miner**

Everyone knows that the current education bureaucracy feels standardized tests are the answer to schools that don't teach. This book, a compilation of 50 articles by parents, teachers, students, community activists and researchers asserts otherwise.

***Failing Our Kids*** takes the reader through the history of standardized tests, explains what makes them racist, documents the growing industry that profits from them, shows how communities can and have fought back and describes alternatives to standardized tests.

In the end it all comes down to this: "Where is the standardized test that can measure passion for learning, respect for others and human empathy."

**Rethinking Schools**, 1001 E. Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212, (800-669-4192) SR

## ***Homeschooling: A Patchwork of Days & Homeschool Open House***

**By Nancy Lande**

If you're not a homeschooler, did you ever wonder what it's like to homeschool? ***Patchwork*** and ***Open House*** lets you experience homeschooling through the eyes of 55 families. Nancy Lande asked these varied families to keep a one day journal. 30 of these journals make up Patchwork. 25 more accounts and five year follow-up visits to the Patchwork families make up Open House. Here's a chance to replace rumors, second hand stories and opinions with visits to your homeschool neighbors.

Possibly the most valuable part of these two books is the introduction to Open House. In it Nancy shares what she has learned from her project. Observations like "The complexity of family life is often obscured by the hidden forces of idealized images of the way things 'used to be' or 'should be'" and "To bend family culture to suit an inappropriate learning/teaching method...is bound to end in disaster, as one or the other snaps" are worthy of hour of thought and discussion.

Windy Creek Press, 706 Sussex Rd., Wynnewood, PA 19096-2414-SR

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**\*BACK ISSUES of AERO-gramme** 1 through 30 \$5 each.

**New! My Friend Lenny: A Memoir of my Life in Music, with personal stories about Leonard Bernstein, Mike Wallace, Paul Simon and others.**

**By Ouida Blatt Mintz**

Ouida, long-time AERO volunteer, tells the story of growing up with Leonard Bernstein, Mike Wallace, singing duets on her pop demos with Paul Simon, piano-teaching secrets, triumphs and tragedies in her life, etc. **Special to AERO subscribers: \$20 including postage!**

# USE PHOTO FROM #30, just head

**New! The Underground History of American Education**

**A Schoolteacher's Intimate Investigation into the Problem of Modern Schooling (412 pages)**

**By John Taylor Gatto**

Gatto's thesis is that the American public school system is efficiently doing what it was intended to do: Creating a docile, trained, consumer-oriented population which will not question the control of the country by big business interests. He backs this up by quoting the founders of this system, who actually articulated these goals, and in the process, knocks down icon after icon. You had better read this book. You may argue with it, not agree with some of it. But you should certainly be aware of what John has unearthed. AERO was able to get some of the first printed, pre-publication additions. **\$30, and if you order soon, we will send it with no additional cost for postage.**

**NEW! Creating Learning Communities**

**From A Coalition for Self Learning**

"Collaborative homeschooling could replace schools," says a new publication

In 1980 there were about 20,000 thousand homeschoolers. In 1990 there were over 200,000 homeschoolers. By 2000 there were nearly 2,000,000 homeschoolers. At this rate there will be 20,000,000 homeschoolers in 2010, and 200,000,000 million in 2020. Impossible! but it shows that schools may be replaced as more students learn out of school than in school. As homeschooling has grown homeschoolers have started forming "homeschool support groups." In the past year or two there has been a proliferation of cooperative community life long learning centers, learning co-ops, and other forms of collaborative non-school learning organizations forming. This phenomenon is explored in this new book. **\$21.95, and if you order soon, we will send it with no additional cost for postage.**

**\*THE ALMANAC OF EDUCATION CHOICES**, Editor in Chief Jerry Mintz, Associate Editors Raymond Solomon, and Sidney Solomon, with over 6,000 entries by state in zip-code order, and a dozen informative essays about how to start a new alternative, how to start homeschooling, use of computers by alternatives, etc. Includes the Montessori, Waldorf, Quaker, charter, public choice, and at-risk schools. Send \$20 plus \$3 postage. Canada, add \$5. Out of US, add \$10-\$15 for air mail postage. **Special for paid subscribers, only \$15 plus \$3 postage**

**\*SUMMERHILL SCHOOL, A New View of Childhood**, A.S. Neill, Edited by Albert Lamb. This is a new editing of Neill's writings, an update of the original book, *Summerhill*. **\$15 including postage**

**Contact AERO for sets of labels from the Handbook/Almanac database. Entire list is \$60 per thousand names. Subsets can be custom-created.**

**\*My Life as a Traveling Homeschooler**, by Jenifer Goldman, The Solomon Press. An 11-year-old describes her adventures visiting homeschoolers and helping her uncle, Jerry Mintz, start new alternative schools around the US and Canada. Kids everywhere are reading this book and deciding to write their own books! **NOW ONLY \$7.50 for AERO-GRAMME subscribers**

**\*GREEN REVOLUTION, the newsletter of the School of Living. Education Revolution** readers can become members of the School of Living and get a subscription to the *Green Revolution* for half price. The SOL is a 60-year old organization that pioneered the environmental protection movement, consumer protection, and is involved with land trust and communities movements, and is the sponsor of AERO. **\$10 (half price)**

**Campus-Free College Degrees**, Thorson's Guide to Accredited College Degrees through Distance Learning, by Marcie Kisner Thorson. Correspondence study, experiential learning, independent study, group study seminars: organized by subject area, type state. **\$24.95**

**NEW! *National Charter Schools Directory*, published by the Center for Education Reform. It is the 2000 list of all the charter schools in the country, by state, in alphabetical order. \$20 plus \$3 postage.**

**NEW! *The Beginner's Guide to Homeschooling*, Patrick Farenga, President of Holt Associates. 1998 version, a great practical overview of how to start homeschooling. \$10.95**

***Making It Up as We Go Along.*, Chris Mercogliano's book about the history of Albany's Free School. \$15**

#### **AUDIOCASSETTES:**

**AERO has an expanded list of over 100 tapes from our show, *The Education Revolution* on the **TalkAmerica Network and Cable Radio Network**. Tapes may be purchased for \$10 including postage. Contact AERO for a list of programs, featuring interviews with people such as Mary Leue, Joe Nathan, John Gatto, David Colfax, Andy Smallman, Pat Montgomery, Chris Mercogliano, Bob Barr, Arnie Langberg, Zoe Readhead, and many others**

# PHOTO #B

Mary Leue at her home in the Berkshires

#### **VIDEOS**

**\*New! Video of demonstration of democratic decision-making process at Home Education Seaside Festival (HES FES), Charmouth, England, May 2000. 900 home educators with 500 children attended the Festival. 18 minutes, \$20.**

**\*DEMOCRATIC MEETINGS.** A two-hour tape of demonstrations of various democratic meetings, including one at Summerhill, a meeting of Russian students at the New Schools Festival in the Crimea (translated into English), a demonstration meeting with Long Island homeschoolers, age four to 13, a meeting setting up a democratic system for an "at-risk" public high school alternative, and a democratic meeting at a public "choice" high school. **\$25**

**\*HOMESCHOOL RESOURCE CENTERS.** A video of three homeschool resource center featuring the Snakefoot Education Center, at Common Ground Community, Puget Sound Community School and Clearwater School, both in Seattle. Snakefoot is a group of families that created a center in which 15 homeschooled children met three times a week. They also hired resource people. The video also includes an Interview with Andy Smallman, Founder of PSCS and a video of radio interviews with Clearwater. **\$25**

**\*SUMMERHILL VIDEO.** Two videos in one: the 1990 International Alternative School Conference at Summerhill with interviews of Summerhill students and alumni as well as vivid footage of the Summerhill end-of-term celebration. Also, Summerhill's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in August, 1991, featuring more alumni interviews, and a Summerhill democratic meeting. **We also have a 1995 tape of Sands School and Summerhill. \$25 each**

**\* Beautiful International Democratic Education Conference at Stork Family School, in Vinnitsa, Ukraine and the 10<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary Celebration in 2001. \$25**

**\*Nellie Dick and the Modern School Movement.** A fascinating two-hour interview with a 96-year-old pioneer of the alternative education movement. Born in the Ukraine of Jewish, anarchist parents in 1893, she started anarchist schools in England back in 1908, went to the US in 1917 to teach at the Modern School (based on the work of Francisco Ferrer) in New Jersey, and taught at and ran Modern Schools until 1958. Her son Jim, who was a student at the Modern Schools and is now a 70-year-old pediatrician, is also interviewed. There are also excerpts from the Modern School reunion in 1989 which featured the Spanish Modern Schools. **\$25**

**\*Transcript of Nellie Dick and the Modern School! \$5  
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**\*CODE CRASH--For quickly learning the Morse Code.** Hundreds sold! This is a tape in which two 12-year-old homeschoolers learn the Morse code in less than 20 minutes each by our unique copyrighted association method. People interested in getting their amateur radio license will be amazed. It works. We guarantee it. You'll learn it. Show to a whole class. Recently glowingly reviewed in *Growing Without Schooling*; "We were all amazed and impressed with ourselves that we suddenly knew the whole Morse code in an hour." **\$20**

### PHONE CONSULTATIONS:

Want to start a new alternative school or homeschool resource center? Looking for an educational alternative for your children? Looking for a job in alternative education? Set up a private phone consultation with Jerry Mintz. He knows what's going on today in the whole field of educational alternatives and can help you with in-depth answers your questions. Call 800 769-4171 for an appointment. Only \$65. In-person consultations arranged individually.

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# PHOTO #D

Stork Students "play" with ping pong paddle

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