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# The Education Revolution

**The Magazine of Alternative Education**

[www.EducationRevolution.org](http://www.EducationRevolution.org)

**COVER PHOTO: cows  
taking tests.jpg**

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## **AERO and *The Education Revolution Magazine***

**AERO**, the **Alternative Education Resource Organization**, was founded in 1989 as part of the not-for-profit School of Living. The mission of AERO is to build, “the critical mass for the education revolution by providing resources which support self-determination in learning and the natural genius in everyone.” AERO provides information, resources and guidance to students, parents, schools and organizations regarding the broad spectrum of educational alternatives: public and independent alternatives, home education, international alternatives, higher education alternatives, and more. The common feature in all these educational options is that they are *learner-centered*, focused on the interest of the learner rather than on an arbitrary curriculum. AERO, which produces the *Education Revolution Magazine* quarterly and maintains the Education Revolution website, is the networking hub for education alternatives throughout the world ([www.EducationRevolution.org](http://www.EducationRevolution.org)).

*The Education Revolution Magazine* includes the latest news and communications from the alternative education world as well as conference updates, job listings, book reviews, travel reports, and much more. With our readers’ support we are helping make learner-centered education available to all students throughout the world. We welcome your participation and involvement.

### ***The Education Revolution***

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## Welcome to the Education Revolution

The other day **David Gribble**, in a letter to me, raised an interesting question. “Sands,” he wrote, speaking of Sands School in Devon, England, which he founded, “like Summerhill, has more students this year than ever before, and new applications keep on coming in. Has something changed?”

Has something changed, indeed! I’ve heard that Sudbury Valley now has something like 250 pupils and it seems that alternative schools all around the world are doing very well at the moment. This may even include some new public acceptance of democratic schools. In this issue you can read about **Israel’s 15 New Democratic Schools** and about the surge of interest in democratic education in that country.

Part of the explanation for this new acceptance of alternative education may be negative. **Bahwin Suchak** implies this in his article about the US government’s new education bill, **Testing Bill Passes**, where he says; “Schools are becoming more like factories with children as the products, mechanically processed under the scanners of standardized testing.”

But I don’t think the reasons for this shift are entirely negative. Society may be finally loosening up a little bit about what it thinks is appropriate education for children. That is certainly one of the implications of the articles in the Changing Schools section about **Magnet Schools** and **Hope For Charter Schools**.

At least there is a stronger sense now that parents ought to have a say in what happens to their children in school. This has certainly been the business of conservatives who want state funding for religious education, which also seems to be a worldwide trend at the moment.

Just as we go to press this month America’s Supreme Court will be hearing oral arguments in a case to do with a pilot scheme that is providing vouchers to parents in Ohio, so that they can send their children to non-public schools. In Cleveland, Ohio, some 96 percent of the 4,266 students currently receiving vouchers, worth up \$2,250 for each pupil, are using them to attend religious schools. A federal appeals court ruled that this program violates the First Amendment’s separation of church and state. Now it may be up to the Supreme Court to decide on the future of vouchers in America.

In this issue we have a feature, called **The Vouchers Issue**, where well known educators, in exclusive statements to the *Education Revolution*, voice their opinions about vouchers. It is a difficult idea to talk about without being affected by our larger knowledge of the powers that be. The inevitability of strings being attached to any money being given away, and the sure sense that the poorest members of society could lose out if money is withdrawn from public schools - these factors color everyone’s opinion on the topic.

The purest and most visionary case for vouchers is made here by a Russian, **Miloslav Balaban**, in his article, in the *Changing Schools* section, entitled **Deregulating Education**. He believes that vouchers “could equalize the social rights of the rich and the poor, in the same way that medical insurance policies already do in many countries.” The key, for Balaban, is to create a system of vouchers that can travel with each individual student, while simultaneously finding a way to destroy the current worldwide system of official educational certificates and degrees. An ambitious plan, but maybe this is a good time for the alternative school world to start planning ahead in some new ways.

Sometimes the hardest thing to do is to think big.

*Albert Lamb*

**PHOTO** Small inset, DSC00026.JPG

**ALBERT** Just use upper center of Albert

# Testing Bill Passes

By Bhawin Suchak

Neatly spun and presented to the public as the “No Child Left Behind” act, the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or Title I, was signed into law by president Bush on January 8<sup>th</sup>, after a relatively smooth ride through congress. The bill’s passage represents the most expensive and intrusive foray into public education that the federal government has ever embarked upon, and further undermines what little remains of public school autonomy.

Ostensibly the bill fulfills the intended mission of Title I by offering a significant funding increase to many needy school districts. But in actuality it will do little more than put teachers and students under the gun of a misguided testing and accountability program, which has long been the vision of overbearing bureaucrats and private educational corporations. Much of the \$26.5 billion promised to the Department of Education will go toward implementing standardized testing programs in math and reading for all students in grades 3 through 8 by 2005, and to provide tutoring services for “under-performing” students.

As details of the legislation come into focus for each state and tests are put in place, pressure on teachers to teach to the test, and on schools to increase the performance level of their students, will surely intensify. Accountability measures, the driving force behind the testing mandates, threaten to shut down public schools and turn them into privately operated corporate entities if scores fail to improve every year. States will be required to release annual “school report cards,” which will dissect and analyze test scores, pitting district against district, school versus school. In exchange for true learning opportunities, children will compete in a testing rat race that will determine their success as students, while challenging the aptitude of their teachers and the viability of their schools.

Monty Neill, director of Fair Test, a Cambridge, Massachusetts based advocacy group that exposes and works to end the abuses and misuses of testing, calls the new ESEA “a bad piece of legislation that will do more harm than good.” With an increased emphasis put on standardized tests, Neill says, “we’ll see even more schools turn into test-prep programs, and obviously that will be a terrible thing for education as a whole.”

While parent and student groups have long voiced their opposition to more testing, criticism of increased testing is now coming from the establishment as well. School superintendents, teachers unions, and state legislators, are beginning to acknowledge that the overwhelming focus on testing and accountability in the latest ESEA are too extreme to be effective. Although the bill does give some leeway to states to devise their own kinds of assessments, the fact remains that within four years all but 15 states (the number of states that already adhere to the new federal requirements) will see a dramatic increase in the amount of testing students must undergo before reaching high school.

The American Association of School Administrators called the new mandates an “impossible task,” saying the demands placed on schools and teachers far outweigh the amount of federal spending offered. The National Education Association, usually supportive of almost every federal education dictate, described the bill as “simply irresponsible,” as it fails to “deliver the support required to help children achieve higher standards.” The National Conference of State Legislators joined in the chorus of criticism, in a letter written to the congressional education committee, accusing the

federal government of unnecessarily “meddling in the governance of K-12 education systems.” The NCSL also echoed the concerns of many who opposed the bill by stating, “no convincing evidence has shown that an effective accountability system must include annual testing in multiple subjects.”

Not surprisingly, support of the bill has come mainly from for-profit educational firms who stand to cash in on the increased contracting out of public school services. According to estimates by US Bancorp, the new testing mandates would more than triple the \$300 million annual testing market. Providing more school districts with standardized tests and test prep materials means profit windfalls for industry giants, such as McGraw-Hill, and ETS (Educational Testing Services). So it was no coincidence last spring when both ETS chief executive, Kurt Landgraf and Edward Rust, who sits on the board of McGraw-Hill, made several appearances in front of congressional education committees urging swift passage of the bill. The most disheartening aspect of the growing corporate involvement in public education is that it is all being done with the blessings of lawmakers in Washington. Dave Schnittger, a spokesman for the House committee handling the education reform plan, recently told the Washington Post that the legislation would help private education firms “showcase” their talents.

Clearly the approach that our government is taking toward public schools needs to be questioned. Parents, children and teachers need to be more skeptical than ever of the direction public education is moving in. Rather than solving some of the core problems that have long plagued poor schools such as fixing dilapidated buildings and lowering class sizes, elected officials have chosen to raise standards and reduce learning to a test score. There is a cold-hearted vision of education that fosters a mistrust of teachers, as it crushes the individual spirit of children in favor of a standardized, mechanized learning experience. In light of the Enron catastrophe and the generally exploitative nature of big business, the fact that this education bill was spearheaded by, and will directly benefit large corporations is even more disturbing. Local control of schools has slipped through the hands of the people and into the firm grasp of profit driven “educational” firms, concerned more with their bottom lines than the well being of children.

Amidst the bleakness there are a few rays of hope. One clear victory is that of homeschooling groups across the nation, who worked hard to get exempted from the bill’s assessment and accountability provisions. The Home School Legal Defense Association and its National Center for Home Education were instrumental in pressuring the Bush administration and Congress to exclude home school activities from further legislative interference. While the HSDLA’s position on the bill remains that the feds have exceeded their constitutional limits in educational policy, President Mike Smith said, “We are pleased that the bill clearly states that home school activities are not the business of the federal government.”

Another interesting semantic twist written into the bill is that technically it doesn’t call for more testing. “Ironically the bill doesn’t actually require any standardized tests,” says Fair Test’s Neill, “it requires academic assessments, so in theory you could do the whole thing without a test, but that’s not likely to happen.” He says the wording does allow states to utilize a mix of local classroom-based evaluations, and standardized testing to create a more balanced approach to the assessment of students; and the public has a right to demand it.

As president Bush sells his corporate-driven public education policy with catchy sound bites and cynical altruism, many are growing weary of a school system that in reality continues to leave far too many children behind. Schools are becoming more like factories with children as the products, mechanically processed under the scanners of standardized testing. It is past the time of reasoning or intellectualizing about the state of public schooling in the U.S. Many are meeting the federal government’s interference with local control of schools, along with a growing obsession with standardized testing, with a critical eye. The number of home-schooled children is increasing exponentially every year, alternative schools are getting more attention for their unique educational

approaches, and resistance to the education plans bureaucrats and bigwigs in Washington have concocted is growing. The time is now to reclaim the schooling of our children.

*Bhawin is a teacher at Albany's Free School*

# PHOTO AERO 34 LUDMILLA (Pic Free Scho

Students and staff at Albany's Free School. Photo by Ludmilla

## Israel Has 15 New Democratic Schools

By Albert Lamb

*Much of our information came from an article "A Lesson in Democracy" published by Leora Eren Frucht in The Jerusalem Post Magazine, November 23, 2001. Our thanks go to David Rovner for his transcription of that article.*

Since Israel's first democratic school was started in Hadera in 1987, fifteen more such schools have been established, four of them opening their doors just this last September. There are plans for ten more democratic schools to open soon in Israel, making this one of the fastest-growing school networks for the non-religious sector of the population.

This burgeoning of what can now be called 'the democratic school sector' is part of a general movement by Israeli parents to start their own schools. But democratic schools seem to be these parents' most popular choice.

Some of these new democratic schools are entirely run and staffed by parents. It is, in a sense, a parent's revolt. All over the country, parents are demanding the right to not only choose but to establish the schools their children attend.

The man who can be given the most credit for parents choosing the democratic model is Yacov Hecht. He is the founder of the Hadera school and the head of the Institute for Democracy, where many of the teachers (and parents) in Israel's democratic schools have had their training.

The first democratic schools were set up within the state system. Then came schools run as satellites to existing state schools. But recently many of the new parent-run schools have been

set up entirely independently and the Ministry of Education has been uncertain as to what it wants to do about them, whether to take them into the fold and offer them funding or whether to close them down.

The Ministry is particularly wary about countenancing democratic schools for older children. Recently, in fact, it has begun trying to close down some of these democratic schools and it is now refusing to approve any new ones. At the same time the ministry is setting up a commission, according to their spokesman Orit Reuveini, “out of apprehension about [the] growing trend of parents initiating . . . schools that are supposedly democratic, but in practice [which are] private exclusive schools that enjoy state funding.”

“State funding” in Israel doesn’t mean that any of their state schools are completely free. They all cost parents something. But the democratic schools have a reputation for being more expensive than regular schools. And the independent democratic schools that have received no state support are, by Israeli standards, very expensive indeed. As it happens, all of these independent schools would like to become part of the state system and receive some financial support.

One kind of state-supported school that is even more expensive than the democratic model is the haredim – the Israeli system of extremely religious schools. Parents have long had the right to choose to send their children to these religious schools, or to get together and start new schools themselves. So there is a precedent of parents first starting their own schools and then getting state support.

Much of the argument against the democratic schools, in their Israeli context, is that they are using state money to set up special schools for the wealthy – since their fees are higher than in regular schools. People are touchy about this as Israel has the second widest gap between rich and poor in all of the western world (only in the United States is the gap wider).

Israel’s democratic schools point to the financial support that they give to their poorer children. Also, many of their schools are placed in deprived neighborhoods. Democratic educators say that if they had assured state support for their schools their fees could be lowered.

In the meantime, while democratic educators wait to hear what the ministry’s commission will decide, the Ministry of Education has been telling some parent-run democratic schools to close and these schools have been refusing to do so. Fortunately, in at least a couple of recent cases, the Ministry has shown it can change its mind after pressure has been applied, so maybe these schools know what they are doing. With a little luck the other embattled schools may receive retroactive approval, too.

# Growing Without Schooling Ceases Publication

Steve Rosenthal

*After 24 years and 143 issues Holt Associates have decided to cease publishing Growing Without Schooling, due to financial considerations. This article is based on an interview with Pat Farenga on November 16, 2001*



John Holt founded Holt Associates in 1970 to make himself available to public schools that wanted to transform the way they were teaching. In the first six years only one school teacher made use of Holt Associates services. Holt found this experience both instructive and disheartening.

At the same time he came to realize that his lectures, at various conferences and campuses across the country, were a form of paid entertainment. No one was putting any of his ideas into practice.

In 1976 John Holt published *Instead of Education*. The book included hundreds of non-compulsory ways kids could learn i.e. karate lessons, Berlitz language lessons. *Instead of Education* called for the establishment of an underground railway to take kids away from the destructive force of school.

Sometime in 1977 John Holt was contacted by parents who explained to him that there was no need for an underground railway. They had simply taken their children out of school and were teaching them at home. Holt was very impressed with this idea.

He began publishing *Growing Without Schooling* that year to give these families a place to talk to one another and exchange ideas. GWS was to be about figuring out what the interesting questions were, not just what the right answers ought to be. It was to be about paying attention to children, to what readers wrote in to say, to the lively and various phenomenon of the world.

Homeschooling was still uncharted territory in the late 70's. Holt Associates together with homeschooling parents worked at uncovering ways around compulsory attendance laws. John Holt felt you have to approach schools the way you would approach a wounded animal. Flooding the districts with paperwork seemed to be an effective tactic. Legitimizing homeschooling was a district-by-district fight, but homeschoolers were winning.

In 1981 John Holt wrote *Teach Your Own*. He tried very hard to be a facilitator and commentator, not a guru. (Holt had come to education from politics. In the 40's and 50's he organized for the World Federalist Society. He was concerned with how groups came to be more concerned with perpetuating themselves than in their original mission.)

John Holt died of cancer in 1985. Before his death he instructed his staff to keep his works in print and keep GWS going. Pat Farenga was invited to speak at homeschool conferences in Holt's place. By the early 90's Holt Associates started sponsoring their own conferences.

Before the final issue of GWS Susannah Sheffer had begun helping adult prisoners to reflect on their lives through writing, and she plans to continue to do so. Pat Farenga will be responsible for keeping John Holt's books in print and is currently working on a revised edition of *Instead of Education*.

In reflecting over the history of *Growing Without Schooling* Pat feels that alternative education organizations need to take a hard look at the advantages of hierarchy versus the advantages of democratic organization. Pat believes that while the democratic process works well for small organizations, mass movements can get bogged down without hierarchy.

## In a Box

From an open letter on the GWS website:

Dear GWS Friend,

This is not a letter we want to be writing. After 24 years and 143 issues of *Growing Without Schooling*, we must announce that this is the last issue we will be publishing.

When John Holt died in 1985, he left most of his estate to Holt Associates. GWS #49, the issue that came out just after his death, explains, "In the past, Holt Associates has lost money every year, and John has made up the deficit with his personal savings. We are now going to have to try to at least break even." In the 16 years since then, Holt Associates has published GWS continuously and carried on John Holt's work in all sorts of ways. But alongside those joys and creative challenges, financial worries have been constant and troubling companions. While thinking up features for the next issue or brainstorming ways to spread our message or planning the next book or conference project, we have continually struggled to pay the bills, to make ends meet. Keeping Holt Associates afloat financially has been a tough job for as long as any of us have been involved with it.

The situation has now reached a point where it is no longer financially viable. Although for years we were able to use John Holt's estate money to make up our losses, that well has run dry and it is clear that we cannot continue to operate at a significant loss every year.

As we know you can imagine, this was a very hard decision to make. On the one hand, we look back at the 16 years since John Holt's death and realize how significant it is that the magazine did keep publishing all that time. On the other hand, we feel deep regret that it cannot continue beyond this point. We have always considered it of the utmost importance to keep GWS going, and we would not be ceasing publication now if we had not explored every viable alternative.

In running an operation like Holt Associates - one that is more about spreading ideas than about making money - there is always an inherent tension between trying to make information and support available to people who need it and trying to meet the expenses involved in doing that work. Some of the ways we've tried to cut our expenses and increase our income over the years have worked, but ultimately this has not been enough to sustain the entire enterprise.

In one way or another, through writing, speaking, consulting, and other projects, we feel confident that we will carry on John Holt's work. As we have for years, we will continue to be the stewards of John Holt's writing and will work to keep his books in print. For those who still want to give GWS issues to friends or homeschool resource centers, back issues are available through the FUN Books catalog, [www.fun-books.com](http://www.fun-books.com).

We will still be receiving postal mail, phone calls, and email at our usual addresses and numbers, so please feel free to be in touch.

Our very best wishes to you,

The Staff of Holt Associates ---

Patrick Farenga, Susannah Sheffer, Meredith Collins, Ginger Fitzsimmons, Mary Maher

## The Vouchers Issue

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Graduates of Liberty School, Blue Hill, ME. Liberty is based on the 100 year old New England voucher law

*Vouchers are one of the most controversial issues among alternative education professionals. In an effort to stimulate a thoughtful discussion on the subject we asked for the opinions of several well known alternative education professionals, from various sides of the alternative education community, to give us their thoughts. Here they are – arranged in alphabetical order.*  
Steve Rosenthal

## Marianne Alsop

The Association of Waldorf Schools of North America

Independence in education is vital to the teaching of Waldorf education. Waldorf schools generally do not accept state voucher money due to the number of restrictions placed upon the curriculum and the freedom of the teacher. The exception to this is in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where the Tamarack School has been able to utilize a flexible, city based voucher program for low-income families, which has no curricular restrictions. In Canada, Waldorf schools receive provincial support, which does have certain restrictions, mainly in the areas of teacher certification and student evaluation. In general, the Association of Waldorf Schools would be interested in supporting voucher legislation that does not significantly restrict the freedom our schools currently have by being independent.

## David Bly

MN Conference Committee Chair,  
International Association for Learning Alternatives

A favorite tool for some politicians to promote accountability and alleged reform is to invoke the ‘sacred’ practice of competition, and one of their favorite suggestions is vouchers. Vouchers, they say, would give parents the ‘choice’ to send their children to the school that was the best in their eyes. If this diverted money away from the public schools it would force them to improve.

I don’t deny vouchers may help one student to find a smaller school where he may have a greater opportunity to connect with a teacher. But, they do nothing to improve the school the student has left.

Public Schools are required by law to avoid discrimination and to continue to separate church and state. If a school is truly failing have the courage to shut it down. But, then replace it with something that can have a prayer of succeeding because it is given the funding it needs.

## Patrick Farenga

Holt Associates

Giving vouchers for schooling seems to me like giving parents vouchers for fast food: a choice among McDonald’s, Burger King, or Wendy’s is hardly a choice. Since it is unlikely vouchers would support anything but conventional schooling, I think it unlikely that homeschoolers and alternative schools would benefit from supporting them. Demands for accountability for public education expenditures are increasingly tied to test scores; the higher the score on statewide and federal assessments, the better the chances are for your school to receive continued funding from these sources. Schools and home schools who are accountable to the needs of the individual children and families rather than to the needs of standardized tests are probably not going to benefit from vouchers. If we really want to change the nature of schooling, to allow a wide variety of people, places, and things for children to learn with and from, we need to think well beyond education vouchers.

## Marshall Fritz

Alliance for the Separation of School & State

While tax-funded vouchers will initially increase sorely-needed variety in schooling, the flow of tax funds to private schools will eventually destroy variety. This is especially true of democratic education where the children are allowed to direct their own academic progress.

By creating a flow of money from the state to private schools, vouchers pave a new avenue for regulations. The most common, in the name of “accountability,” is to require voucher-redeeming schools to administer standardized tests. All educators concede that testing dictates curriculum.

Today’s hundreds of democratic schools are at risk. If tax-funded vouchers become widely available, they will have the option of knuckling under to the incessant testing or not accepting it.

If they refuse the testing, they will lose customers, maybe half, to upstart schools that will mimic much the language of true democratic schools. Loss of half of their customers will destroy the culture of many of the schools, and within a year or two they will go out of business, or themselves accept the subsidy and the controls.

Some believe tax-credits are better than vouchers. They may avoid some “constitutional battles” and even postpone government controls for a decade or so, but all tax-credit systems proposed to-date are just camouflaged vouchers that will ultimately harm education. Even Arizona’s approach of a tax-credit for money “contributed” to private scholarship foundations is merely a money laundering scheme to make education look like voluntary contributions.

Charter schools are just as flawed. Many are former private schools, fostering the sad trend toward more dependence upon government and less on the family. And while charter schools are on a slightly longer government leash, a dog on a long leash is still a dog on a leash.

Politics and education don’t mix. Let’s stop trying. You can do your part by signing the Public Proclamation for the Separation of School and State at [www.SepSchool.org](http://www.SepSchool.org): *I favor ending government involvement in education.*

## John Taylor Gatto

Author

Let me start by saying that in spite of any apparent drawbacks, I’m 100% behind the concept of vouchers, even in its worst manifestation. As a person who’s spent ten years in around-the-clock investigation of the inner structures of American schooling, I can say with confidence that - as the teacher union correctly deduces - forced institutional schooling will be hard-pressed to survive any voucher project, even a bad one. And wrecking this monopoly ought to be the prime target of any serious school reform effort; the folks who spend their time mooning about Pestalozzi and Rousseau, or worse, trying to build a better math, reading (or whatever) mouse-trap, are no friends of school reform (although I’ll grant that they don’t understand the huge amount of harm they do). Destroying the state monopoly is where the game is at, and vouchers are one way to bring that about. Not the whole strategy, but an important part of one.

Jonathan Kozol  
Author

Vouchers represent a dagger in the heart of public education. They're like "life boats" for a fraction of the population. The vast majority of children would remain in public schools and they'd be more impoverished. The least poor of the poor - the children of the most aggressive parents - are the ones who benefit from vouchers. Once they enter private schools, their parents of course no longer advocate for those who have been left behind.

Vouchers would rip apart the social fabric of our nation. We are already divided; but the public schools, at least in principle, represent a common ground on which our kids may someday meet. Under vouchers, there would be no common ground. We would have burned the last bridge that connects us to each other as a nation.

Chris Mercogliano  
Albany(NY) Free School

I hesitated before agreeing to write on this subject. Like abortion, or war, or the drugging of non-conforming schoolchildren - a subject I have researched and written about extensively - school vouchers is another one of those issues that so easily becomes polarized. The essential question of how to help all children grow into happy, confident adults quickly gets lost amidst all the ideological ranting and raving.

Do I think government funding of private schools will lead to the aforementioned goal? I suppose anything is possible, and there is something seductively egalitarian about the notion of providing all parents with a measure of escape from schools that are failing their kids. Like Spiderman, however, I feel my spidey-sense tingling; an inkling there might be danger lurking in the shadows.

But won't my school, the Albany Free School, an independent inner-city alternative, benefit from its families suddenly having the means to pay more than the minimal tuition they can currently afford? Lord knows we could use the money.

More seduction, I fear. It's hard to imagine the money not coming with significant strings attached that would compromise the autonomy so integral to our ability to work miracles with the kids the system has forsaken. I'm sorry, but I simply cannot envision our government supporting approaches to education that have children's real needs as their first priority. Especially right now.

**PHOTO** DSC00087.JPG

Chris Mercogliano doing cake auction at the Free School

## In a Box

A General Accounting Office report released in October on publicly-funded vouchers contained clear statistics that repudiate charges by choice opponents of 'creaming' and 'balkanization.' The report verified that family income for voucher students is less than that of district public school student families (by up to half) and that students using voucher programs are less racially

segregated than students in the traditional public schools. *The Center for Education Reform Newswire*

# In a Box

## **MOST CLEVELAND VOUCHERS USED FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS**

Virtually all Cleveland children who receive taxpayer-supported vouchers this school year use them to pay for tuition at religious schools, according to a study released by Policy Matters Ohio, a Cleveland nonprofit think tank. All but 25 of 4,202 voucher students - 99.4 percent - attend a religious school, according to an analysis of the latest state figures. In 1996, the program's first year, about 77 percent attended religious schools. Voucher foes want to bring those figures to the attention of the U.S. Supreme Court, which hears arguments on it February 20. The case is described by both sides as a potential landmark decision in church-state law. A ruling is expected in June. The Cleveland program is the first to permit public dollars to go for a religious education. According to Michael Charney, professional issues director of the Cleveland Teachers Union and a board member of the think tank, the program is unconstitutional because it is a public subsidy of religion. Backers of the state-operated program argue the public voucher money flows to the religious schools as a result of parent choice, not government decree. Ohio Attorney General Betty Montgomery has compared the program to using public money to attend religious-oriented universities, such as Notre Dame. *Scott Stephens*

"Study: Most voucher schools religious" The Plain Dealer, January 24, 2002  
(<http://www.cleveland.com/news/plaindealer>)

# One Girl's Fight for Free Speech

By Albert Lamb

## **PHOTO AERO 34zzzzzzzzzzKATIE1.jpg**

Katie Sierra

During the last few months there has been a debate in public schools across America about what is appropriate free speech in schools during a time of extreme sensitivity, such as the one we are living through now. Should kids be allowed to criticize their country's foreign policy when America has been attacked and their president has declared a kind of war?

In the first such case to be taken to court a West Virginia judge ruled in favor of a school and against a pupil, saying that the disruption a protesting student caused at her school overrode her right to free speech. Circuit Court Judge James Stuky commented that free speech is "sacred" but that such rights are "tempered by the limitation that they... not disrupt the educational process." This followed the ideas of the school system's attorney, Jim Withrow, who said: "Public school is not the same as the public square."

The teenager, a 15-year-old named Katie Sierra, was suspended from her school for three days in October for wearing a homemade anti-war T-shirt and for trying to set up a club to discuss anarchist ideas. The long message which she had written on her T-shirt read "When I saw the dead and dying Afghani children on TV, I felt a newly recovered sense of national security. God Bless America." Other kids at school, Katie had noticed, were already wearing political T-shirts but with messages that said: "Osama: Dead or Alive."

It appears that this issue flared up when the principal, Forrest Mann, was personally offended by Sierra for some reason, which tempted him to pick a fight with her and make a big deal about it. As the whole thing escalated he repeated school gossip to the press - that Katie wanted America to burn and Afghanistan to win - even though Katie is a pacifist. This story was then picked up by the local media and Katie has been given a lot of grief on the radio talk show circuit.

Katie's family is actually rather conservative. Her father fought in Vietnam, one of her brother's fought in the Gulf War and another brother is in the army now. Her mother, who disagreed with Katie about her position on the war, felt that Katie's right to free speech was being violated and helped her file a lawsuit. Physical threats were made against Katie at school, where she was pushed against lockers and spat at. Her mother took her out of high school and is now homeschooling her.

At a school board meeting that Katie and her mother attended a school board member accused her of treason. The principal of the school said about Katie and his school: "The anger is entrenched there. Education at Sissonville High School is really impaired at this point . . . To my students, the concept of anarchy is something that is evil and bad." In an interview Katie has said that she thinks anarchy "means not necessarily an absence of government, but an absence of government with leaders, and, I think - to work together peacefully."

The school board lawyer argued that the anarchy club shouldn't be in the school because "Anarchy is the antithesis of what we believe should be in schools." During the meeting Katie Sierra said: "I don't believe in fighting. I don't believe in hurting people. I don't fight."

According to Katie's version of the board meeting, when she was reading her statement: "Then they interrupt me. 'You think you're funny. You're trying to overthrow the government,' comments like that. Then parents just started screaming at me, talking about KKK and rebel flags, and I'm like, 'What?!' And I'm a nervous wreck. There's like a hundred parents behind me, and the board in front of me. I'm all shaky and stuff, and then some lady stands up and says, 'If you're so bored, start a car wash.' And everybody started screaming at me. I just started crying."

At the end of November the West Virginia Supreme Court voted three to two to not review the lower court's verdict. Further legal options will be explored later in the year. In the meantime we can feel thankful that the first American test case focused on the rights of freedom of speech for teenagers in school has at its center such a mature and engaged young person as Katie Sierra.

## IN A BOX

## SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL REOPENS

Today we started with our full primary school class. For the last six months we have been running more or less as a pre-primary with two primary aged children. Today we opened, after our six-week summer holiday, with 11 children in the primary group and 21 in the pre-primary group.

What an amazing day! Our primary group is made up of the two older children who started in June last year; four who have been in the pre-primary for at least two years; four who had been in the school previously, but have been in regular school for one or two years (and had bad experiences there); one who has never been here before, and has been in a Montessori class in a regular school. During the day one boy who was going to be in the pre-school transferred into the primary because it was clear this is where he is happiest.

The division into pre- and primary is really just an interim measure to enable the children to settle in and to allow the older children to learn about the democratic procedure without being constantly interrupted by the three and four year olds. The younger children can gradually integrate into this as they become able to appreciate the importance of their involvement in the decision making process, and develop sufficient awareness and self control to not disrupt the work of the older children. We envisage a complete integration by the end of term.

What really amazed me was how the 'old' children welcomed the new children and helped them settle in. We had a fairly long meeting to draw up some interim ground rules and discuss the role of chairperson, secretary etc, and to elect these office bearers, explain how and where the agenda will be written up, familiarize everyone with what is available in the room and how they can go about changing things they don't like, etc.

The children were all calm and relaxed and chose such diverse activities. Quite a few did math although I never suggested it. Others asked if I would teach them cursive writing. When I said I would their response was "cool!"

One boy found the math books and completed page after page of addition and multiplication on his own without asking or even telling me he was doing it. He did this work purely for his own pleasure. Others read, played chess, made tea (one child went in search of mint and lemon verbena in the garden to mix her own herbal brew). Others drew pictures, listened to music and sat about talking to each other.

When I offered to read Roald Dahl's *Magic Finger* they all chose to join the group to listen. Today worked out just like we hoped things would be. It's almost too good to be true.

I have been able to get this far due to the inspiration I have received from many, many people - some direct and some indirect. Among these are all the wonderful people I met in Australia in March last year, at Coonara Community School, Pine Community School, Plenty Valley Montessori, Caulfield Montessori, Brisbane Montessori, and mostly, Booroobin Sudbury Valley School (especially Lois Tarling whose influence on my thinking was profound). The writings and direct encouragement from Alfie Kohn, the writings of John Taylor Gatto and David Gribble, and everything I have learnt from everyone on the AERolist kept me going when I felt like throwing in the towel.

What was most heartening was reading in the latest Education Revolution magazine the quote (I can't remember who, and someone has borrowed my copy so I can't even look it up) about small alternative schools springing up around the world spontaneously and independently - all of a sudden I felt part of this huge community of like-minded people rather than an isolated nutcase in a town no-body has heard of.

I have raised the possibility of starting an alternative education resource / support group in this area as there is a "Montessori stream" in a local regular private school, and a handful of teachers in regular schools who would be interested in looking beyond their usual horizons. There is also quite a big home-school lobby here. I remember some time back you mentioned AERO offering support to this sort of group, but I was very tied up in getting the school off the ground and didn't pay much attention. What can you offer in this regard? Especially what can you suggest / offer in respect of getting the democratic process up and running in a class. For example, a web search on human rights led to very little that is usable in a classroom.

Because our Rand is now in free-fall and totally worthless, we cannot afford to buy all the wonderful materials available commercially and have to restrict ourselves to what is available free



or at very low prices.

Regards,  
SHARON CALDWELL, [nms@imagnet.co.za](mailto:nms@imagnet.co.za)  
(See also the International section of Mail and Communication)

# Being There

## With Jerry Mintz

The Met, a new kind of Public Alternative Model

### PHOTO A

Met co-founder Dennis Littky

### PHOTO B

Central room at the Met

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 2002, I visited the Met, a new public alternative in Providence, Rhode Island. The night before I arrived late to the hotel in Seekonk. I had a message there from Dennis Littky waiting for me. I gave him a call though it was past 11:00 PM to make sure that the schedule for visiting The Met, his school, had not changed for the next day. He wanted to greet me and said that things were as we had arranged: I would be visiting the school in the morning and meeting him for lunch.

It was snowing the next morning. I left about 7:30, grabbed some breakfast, and headed toward downtown Providence on Route 195. Soon after getting on to 95 I got off according to my directions, but somehow managed to get lost and so had to be guided in to the school through a labyrinth of downtown streets by cell phone. When I came in, people seemed to know that I played ping-pong and they said that they had a table ready to go. It was actually still in the box, so the first thing I did was help them assemble the table.

I was given a little tour of the school, which has 100 students in this campus, 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and they have a second campus that also has 100 students. They are building four more schools that will have 100 each on a plot of land in another part of Providence. They are state funded. They also have a grant to set up six locations for schools in other parts of the United States. I think it includes Detroit, Brattleboro, Vermont, New Hampshire, Federal Way, Washington, Oakland and El Dorado, California.

Technically the school is a vocational school, yet all of its graduates have been accepted into at least one college. The school has no set classes and arranges internships, job experiences, for each of the students. Each student has his own learning program that is designed especially for him or her. These could include whatever classes they want to take at the school or even in a college, internships, independent studies, etc. Every day they are not, the advisor meets with the students assigned to him or her, and they go over some of these activities. At 9:00 they have something called "Pick Me Up," which is kind of a gathering together for announcements and inspiration. Today I was introduced during the Pick Me Up and talked a little about AERO and table tennis. Tuesdays and Thursdays are the main internship days but there are a certain

percentage of kids who don't have internships on those days, so there are always kids in the school.

Every computer in the school is hooked up to the Internet and they also have a computer room, various other advisory rooms, and a room for editing videos. I didn't see the second location but I think it's in quite a different environment, part of the fourth floor if a downtown office building, whereas this is a newly constructed school building with a big central core and a bunch of rooms around the outside.

Instead of having grades, the kids do demonstrations of their activities. I saw a fantastic one that day in which two 10th grade girls who were studying the civil rights movement just finished a four-day tour down South. They had to raise the money for this, which included flying and staying places. They went to where Martin Luther King was shot, they heard James Meredith speak, and they went to where the memorial for Medgar Evers is, and where the civil rights workers were shot and so on. The girls were very moved by this experience. They talked about how difficult it was to organize and how they almost gave up on it a lot of times and then they finally pulled it off. They were both 10th graders. People who came to this evaluation session included some of the people who had been on the tour with them, including somebody from the University of Rhode Island who is hoping that someday they will come to his University. The mothers of both girls were also there and were very proud of their accomplishments. A staff member told me that one of the girls said that the thing that really hit them during the trip was that people had died for their right to go to school.

I played a quick game of ping-pong with the principal of the school whose name is Charlie. Then one of the staff coordinators drove me downtown for a meeting with Dennis Littky and his co-director Elliot Washor. They introduced me to several people including Eliot Levine, who had just written a book about The Met called *One Kid at a Time: Big Lessons from a Small School* (Teachers College Press, 2002). We talked for a while and then went to a local restaurant.

Dennis said that his main interest in talking to me was in trying to get some help in finding teachers for all of these new schools they'll be opening; they'll need 20 for next year. They have their own training program in the summer, but they need to find the teachers. They need another 20 for their schools in other parts of the country. They've got a grant from the Gates Foundation to open twelve Met-model schools nation-wide..

I got a ride back to the school with one of the teachers. Wayne and I played a little ping-pong; He's the Assistant Principal and he's in a program they have that is training future principals.

I did a little videotaping and I took some pictures. Then a bunch of the kids wanted me to teach them some more ping-pong, so I played with some of the staff and taught several of the kids and stayed until they were about to lock the doors, about 4:30 PM.

Although the school has mostly minority students, low income and middle class white student make up 40% of the student body. They told me that compared to other public schools in Providence, the Met has one third the absentee rate, one third the dropout rate, and one eighteenth the rate of disciplinary suspensions.

Overall I was very impressed with the Met and I think they have created an important prototype for a very new approach in public education, one which works, and works with minority, inner city, public school students.

## PHOTO C

Met students at work

## A Homeschool Resource Center Has A Trial Run

Jamie was the mother of four children who were going unhappily to public school. When she came to the first AERO Action Group meeting eight months ago the last thing that she would have thought possible was that she could become a homeschooler. She thought that she needed a school, one that would do a better job than the public school system had been doing, to take care of the needs of her children.

This week we had a three-day trial of the homeschool resource center. We decided to pick a three-day period which would center on a Monday school holiday, so that children still going to school would only miss one day. So we chose the Martin Luther King Holiday weekend (Free at last...Free at last!)

We rented a lounge in the Ethical Humanist Society building in Garden City, NY for \$55 a day. During the three days, 12 students, 8 parents and three AERO staff members participated.

The first day, Sunday, we met for only three hours, from 1 PM to 4 PM. We started out with a pot luck lunch, which was quite nice, and the Ethical Humanist people let us use the kitchen area for that. Actually, we sort of spread out through several rooms while we were there. One reason I picked this particular building was that years ago a free school, the Learning Tree, had started in the same building.

People brought a lot of resource materials and the students went at them right away. No "encouragement" was needed. They included K'nex, a couple of laptop computers, computer games and educational materials, books, cards, art materials, musical instruments, walkie-talkies, and a video camera.

After people got to know each other for a while, we had our first democratic meeting. One of the issues was what we would do for lunch the next two days. At first the most support was for everyone to bring their own lunches. The lone dissenter was Mary, 11, who wanted us to have pizza. But after a fair amount of discussion, determining who would be coming and re-voting, it was passed that we would order pizza for the second day and bring our own lunches the third. This was a good demonstration to everyone that the ideas and opinions of one student can affect the whole group and change a meeting's decision.

Another item we discussed was the issue of computer and video games. Some parents and students wanted to bring them in and use them, but another group of parents thought they should be banned or restricted. After some discussion it was agreed that we could use them for the trial. This may have led to one parent and two children not returning to the Resource Center. The prevailing thought was that people learn from all situations they choose to participate in, and that the interactions around the games are quite important. For example, there was a meeting about how to fairly share the use of the games. Also, a nice moment was when the youngest student, a 5 year old, was instructing the oldest, 15, on how to play a particular game.

There was a children's Suzuki violin recital going on in the mail hall of the building and several parents and students watched it.

On the second day most people were late and we discussed, at a later meeting, how that affects a group as small as ours. We had a class about how to organize for Mary Addams' radio show, scheduled that night. Whoever wanted to go on could do so. We also talked about how to arrange a visit to a veterinarian, which several of the students were interested in doing. After the pizza arrived it was rapidly consumed!

About a dozen people participated in the radio show, *Parenting 2020*, on the Nassau Community College station. Several of the students spoke, and Mary (the student Mary) interviewed Jamie and her daughter Laura. There were two callers (one was Kris, the student Mary's mother, and the other was Jerry's mother!). The kids loved doing the show.

In the third day, which was a public school day, we had a meeting to decide on what to do that day. We agreed to have a group go to the North Shore Animal League in Port Washington. We went in the AERO van and Jamie's van.

Although we didn't have an appointment for a tour there we were able to get a lot of information from the volunteers. The students got to hold a lot of the animals and ask a lot of questions about their care.

Those of us who went on the field trip stopped to eat at a Chinese restaurant on the way back.

When we got back to the Ethical Humanist Center we had a meeting to evaluate the trial:

Some of the favorite experiences from the week included playing various games, going to the animal shelter, doing the radio show, playing spelling games, and many cited “the community feel.”

Some things that were disliked were waking up early on a holiday, not enough resources, “feeling I had to be there all the time,” “a week long trial would have been better.” And many people felt the meetings were too long. They then immediately had an hour-long meeting to discuss the future and resolve a conflict about one of the games!

On a scale of ten, the average of the group in rating the meeting space was 7 (range from 4 to 10).

On a scale of ten, the average rating of the whole experience was 8.

It was proposed that we move ahead to establish the homeschool resource center as soon as possible. This was passed with 10 in favor and two abstentions. An organizational meeting for that will be on February 6<sup>th</sup>.

Jamie has already started homeschooling her two youngest children two weeks ago, with Mary Addams’ help. At the meeting she said that now that she has taken that giant step, she feels like a lot of the pressure is off, that she’s now looking at things from a different perspective, even though she knows there’s a lot of work ahead.

# PHOTO DSC00016.JPG

Students at Homeschool Resource Center Trial Run

## MAIL AND COMMUNICATIONS

Edited by Carol Morley

## GENERAL COMMUNICATIONS

The **Guidebook and Directory of Consultants for Creating Learning Communities** is now off the presses and ready to mail. A Coalition for Self-Learning is an ad hoc group of individuals and organizations that has been coming together on the Internet for three years to discuss WHY we learn, HOW we learn, WHEN we learn and WHAT we learn. We have tried to think outside the school/teach/educate box, and to go beyond the ‘fix the schools syndrome.’ We have recognized that the way we learn shapes the society in which we live. We envision a world without schools - creating a world of learning communities. For the last year the vastly expanded Coalition has been working on a *Guidebook and Directory of Consultants for Creating Learning Communities*. The *Guidebook*, released November 2001, defines learning Communities in three modes, communities that learn, communities that provide learning opportunities, and communities of learners. It lists over 75 individuals and organization that

provide help to groups of families who want to establish local learning centers, resources or services. A Coalition for Self-Learning Website: [www.CreatingLearningCommunities.org](http://www.CreatingLearningCommunities.org). For information regarding the Guidebook, contact Christine Gable, Natural Learners, PO Box 203, Penryn, PA, 17564-0203.

From **Never Mind the Inventive Curriculum. One Test Fits All**, by Michael Winerip, *NY Times*, "Nov. 18, 2001: For years, Vermont's education commissioner, Dr. Richard P. Mills, championed the liberal alternative, statewide portfolio assessment — a collection of students' class work, including writing and research projects. But in 1995, when he was hired as New York's education commissioner, the Board of Regents and the new Republican governor wanted an aggressive test program, and overnight, Dr. Portfolio became the Scorekeeper. The Scorekeeper introduced record numbers of state tests: five new Regents tests that everyone will soon have to pass to get a high school diploma, as well as assessment tests for elementary and middle school kids. Results are published in newspapers, with most-improved schools getting personal calls of praise from the Scorekeeper. The result? Test frenzy. At meetings of the Westchester County principals' association, members trade tips on the best test prep workbooks. Districts hire consultants to raise scores.

"'Everybody's caught in the rat race,' says Scarsdale's superintendent, Dr. Michael McGill. Teachers and parents here were angry and eighth graders felt buried; they now take up to seven state tests each spring. It wasn't that they couldn't do it, but they hated what testing was doing to their school. Fed up, a majority of eighth graders, with their parents' support, boycotted the tests last spring. With standardized testing, everyone must conform. In a recent letter to the district, Dr. Mills noted that 10 percent of Scarsdale students typically did not pass the test and warned that because of the boycott, they were at risk of 'failing to be identified.' In reality, that is nonsense. Scarsdale has used a sophisticated assessment system for years that identifies the 20 percent most at risk. The district assigns teachers to one-on-one tutorials for those 20 percent. Every American child should be as at-risk as the lowliest Scarsdale kid. The state letter also accused teachers of calling the tests 'purposeless' and gave the district until Nov. 30 to submit a plan to ensure that future testing goes smoothly.

"Friday, asked whether state tests might be purposeless for Scarsdale, Dr. Mills said: 'I can't ignore what they did. We're looking for uniformity.'

"There's the misdeed: not the boycott, but the homogenizing effect on creative teachers and bright students by one curriculum set in Albany." ♦

**Hundreds of Students Walk Out to Protest State Takeover in PA.** This story ran on page A10 of the Boston Globe on 11/30/2001. "Hundreds of high school students walked out of class yesterday to protest a planned state takeover of their school district and Governor

"Mark Schweiker's plan to privatize dozens of the worst performing schools. The largest walkout took place at Strawberry Mansion High School, where up to 500 students left about 9:30 a.m., district spokesman Paul Hanson said. They were dispersed by police, he said. State and city education officials are negotiating a sweeping overhaul plan for the school district, which is plagued by dismal test scores, a teacher shortage, a \$216 million budget deficit, and crumbling buildings. Activists have complained about Schweiker's proposal to hire private companies like Edison Schools Inc. to run 60 schools. Under pressure from Mayor John F. Street, Schweiker backed off his demand that Edison run the central administration of the school district. But opponents reject participation any private company in the school district. A group called the Coalition to Keep Our Public Schools Public filed a lawsuit yesterday asking the state Supreme Court to block Schweiker's plan and declare the takeover unconstitutional."

**High Court Hears Case On Privacy Of Students**, by Linda Greenhouse, *NY Times*, Nov. 28, 2001: "The Buckley amendment, a federal education law intended to protect the privacy of students' records, is being examined by the Supreme Court. A federal appeals court ruled that an Oklahoma school district had violated the Buckley amendment by permitting students to mark

one another's homework and tests and to call out the grades for the teacher to enter in a grade book. The school system, the Owasso Independent School District, near Tulsa, appealed that decision, arguing that grades derived and recorded in this common practice known as 'peer grading' are not 'education records' within the meaning of the law, formally the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. The law prohibits the 'release' of 'education records' without parents' consent. It defines education records as documents or other material by which an individual student can be identified and that are 'maintained' by a school or by someone acting on the school's behalf."

**D.C. to Shave 7 Days Off This School Year**, by Justin Blum and Andrew DeMillo, *The Washington Post*, Nov. 30, 2001: "The D.C. school board voted to cut seven days off this school year, saying it needed to furlough employees to balance its budget. Board members also agreed to cut funds from various programs, including summer school, special education, substitute teachers and an arts center used by students from several schools. Board members said the cuts were necessary to make up for predicted budget overruns of about \$26 million this fiscal year. They expressed deep frustration, saying that they did not want to make the cuts and that city leaders and Congress have repeatedly given the school system insufficient funding. The board recently reduced the budget for central administration, and members said there is no excess spending to cut. Faced with options that included laying off hundreds of teachers, board members said the cuts they agreed to would harm students the least. D.C. schools have required 180 class days, but that number would be decreased if the board follows through with the approved furlough plans."

**Smaller, Safer, Saner, Successful Schools**, *Boston Globe*: "Size does matter when it comes to the quest for better student performance, according to a new national report that studied the advances of 22 small schools, including three in Boston. School systems will spend about \$84 billion in the next two years on construction, and the report advises using the money to break up large schools into smaller parts - or simply create schools with fewer students. The study also reported that schools sharing space with other organizations, such as a community college or a museum, often outperform their unconnected counterparts."

**Examined Life: Stanley Kaplan & the SAT**, newyorker.com: "The S.A.T. is now seventy-five years old, and it is in trouble. Earlier this year, the University of California - the nation's largest public-university system - stunned the educational world by proposing a move toward a 'holistic' admissions system, which would mean abandoning its heavy reliance on standardized-test scores. The school backed up its proposal with a devastating statistical analysis, arguing that the S.A.T. is virtually useless as a tool for making admissions decisions. The University of California is one of the largest single customers of the S.A.T. It was the U.C. system's decision, in 1968, to adopt the S.A.T. that affirmed the test's national prominence in the first place. If U.C. defects from the S.A.T., it is not hard to imagine it being followed by a stampede of other colleges. Seventy-five years ago, the S.A.T. was instituted because we were more interested, as a society, in what a student was capable of learning than in what he had already learned. Now, apparently, we have changed our minds - and few people bear more responsibility for that shift than Stanley H. Kaplan."

# In A Box

# Protecting Democratic Schools Online Petition

To: UN, UNESCO and governments around the world:

We, the undersigned, urge the UN, UNESCO and all the governments around the world to value and protect democratic schools and those based on children's rights.

This is an urgent need as at a time when governments and the UN are discussing how we can learn to live together in peace, how can we strengthen democracy and the rights of the individual through education, there are schools around the world based on rights and democracy that are threatened with closure.

Summerhill School, England, is the oldest school in the world based on children's rights. The British Government, through its Department of Education and inspection system, threatened it with closure last year. Summerhill won its case in the Royal Courts of Justice and is now the most protected school in Britain. But it ONLY won because it is famous throughout the world, supported by the UN, many politicians and educators, and managed to raise over £160,000 to pay for the country's best barrister and solicitor.

Most democratic schools cannot get the same national and international support as Summerhill, and will be closed without such support.

Two schools threatened with closure at the moment are:

1. Auckland Metropolitan College is threatened because Government Inspectors are using criteria for inspection that are not appropriate to the college.
2. Pei Cheng Autonomous Experimental School, Taiwan is being threatened with closure because of a new Mayor in Jan 2000, Ma Yin Chiu, refusing to let the school register new students. The school had the full support of the previous mayor, Chen Shui Bien.

To find out more about democratic schools around the world you can visit [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org). To view the petition in its entirety and/or to sign it see [www.PetitionOnline.com/asneill/](http://www.PetitionOnline.com/asneill/). ♦

## PHOTO DSC00043.JPG

Summerhill School at August, 2001 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

New Moon Publishing's **2002 Turn Beauty Inside Out** campaign will focus on how girls and women are portrayed in film. Too often girls and women are shown as dependent on their male counterparts for everything from safety to their own self-esteem. This is a chance for kids to send filmmakers the message that girls and women can, and should, be portrayed as strong, independent, fully developed characters. Kids 16 and under are invited to enter the contest by selecting a recent movie (within the last five years) and writing a 600-word-or-less essay on how you would change it to send girls and women a more positive message. Essays can be submitted in writing or emailed to [michellej@newmoon.org](mailto:michellej@newmoon.org). Send to: New Moon Publishing, Attn: TBIO Essay Contest, PO Box 3620, Duluth, MN 55803. Web: [www.newmoon.org](http://www.newmoon.org).

**School personnel often pressure parents to medicate children.** Minnesota has created legislation to prohibit schools from requiring parents to medicate children for diagnoses like ADHD. Arizona, New Jersey, New York, Utah and Wisconsin are considering similar bills.

From Michael A. L. Balboni, **New York State Senator**, "...budgets are not the only thing educators and lawmakers have been talking about: standardized testing is another hot topic of

discussion. Although the goal of these tests as set forth by the New York State Board of Regents is to improve scholastic achievement, numerous concerns have been raised by parents, students and teachers. Critics of standardized testing say that it detracts from classroom time, and causes additional stress on teachers and students. Although we all support higher standards in education, perhaps we should re-examine whether the standardized testing initiative places unnecessary burdens on our schools...and our kids.”

“‘Certified teachers means qualified teachers’ has been a theme of **teacher certification** advocates for years. The Abell Foundation took a look at 150 studies going back 50 years that have been cited as supporting the concept. The conclusion? ‘The academic research attempting to link teacher certification with student achievement is astonishingly deficient,’ suffering from conclusions without evidence, serious statistical errors, inaccurate evidence and ignoring negative findings. *CER Newswire*, CER@lb.bcentral.com

“**The College Board** is working overtime to save the SAT from losing it’s favor as the primary tool which guides college and university placement. Ever since the University of California president recommended ending the SAT requirement, there’s been debate about how useful the tool is.” *CER Newswire*, CER@lb.central.com

“A new study by psycholinguists Ann Senghas and Marie Coppola shows that **children can create their own language**. Deaf children at the Melania Morales School for Special Education in Nicaragua developed their own sign language - now known as Nicaraguan Sign Language - over a 20 year period. NSL is based on no known shared language and the children have never been exposed to sign language.” *Mothering Magazine*

**John Taylor Gatto** is posting a free online version of his book *The Underground History of American Education*. He’s doing it one chapter per month; so far the prologue and chapters 1-4 are available online. You can read them here: <http://www.johntaylorgatto.com/chapters/index.htm> This book can be ordered from AERO with no shipping costs. Call 800 769-4171 or order through our website, [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org)

David Gribble writes from England: I have just heard that **Martin Auer’s superb book of children's stories, *Der seltsame Krieg*** (The Strange War) has been translated into English and can be found at <http://www.peaceculture.net> When I visited the site I saw it had been translated into dozens of other languages too. I highly recommend the stories, which are even more topical now than when they were written.

**The AG Educational Trust** supports educational projects whose aim is the development of the whole human being. Some of the projects it supports are Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary and the Centre for Learning in India, Brookwood Park School in England, Zastava Study Centre in Russia, and Stream Garden Retreat Centre in Thailand. For additional information, contact AG Educational Trust at PO Box 267, Winchester, Hampshire S023 9XX, UK.

**Liberty School** A Democratic Learning Community in Blue Hill, Maine is starting a new program in June, 2002. The Liberty School of Homesteading and Community is a one year program open to students of post high school age or older who want to learn homesteading for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The homesteading school is located on a 22 acre farm on Cape Rosier, ME and will be teaching sustainable living skills such as organic gardening, food preservation, livestock management, solar construction, alternative energy options, and cooperative living skills. Apprenticeships would be available in various home industry skills. Ten students will be accepted for the first year. We are also accepting resumes for potential faculty. We are looking



for a Farm Manager and a Construction Manager. For more information contact Arnold Greenberg Liberty School Blue Hill, Maine 04614 [grnbrg@downeast.net](mailto:grnbrg@downeast.net)

Last year marked the third consecutive year in which enrollment averaged more than 30 students at **The Meeting School**. They opened this school year with 18 new students and 19 returning students. The school continues to achieve more than a 90% retention rate among eligible non-senior students. It is located at 56 Thomas Road, Rindge, NH 03461. Tel: (603) 899-3366. Web: [meetingschool.org](http://meetingschool.org).

**Schumacher College** was founded in 1991 on the conviction that a new vision is needed for human society and its relationship to the earth. The college offers rigorous inquiry to uncover the roots of the prevailing worldview; it explores ecological approaches that value holistic rather than reductionist perspectives and spiritual rather than consumerist values. Courses for this year include Where Earth and Soul Touch, Living Off the Sun, and Everyday Magic: Bringing the Landscape Alive. For brochure and further information, contact the Schumacher College, The Old Postern, Dartington, Totnes, Devon TQ9 6EA, UK.

Dedicated group with a **shared vision of opening a school** that engages the hearts and minds of students. We seek the support and advice of those who might have walked this road before us. Educators skilled in the fields of alternative teaching or developing curriculum and professionals in marketing are needed! If you share our discontentment with the public education system and our sense of urgency to make a change for the benefit of our children, please become a part of our vision! Our group is based in southern New Jersey. Contact Rachel at 609-268-9151 or [rachelatbbc@aol.com](mailto:rachelatbbc@aol.com).

## MONTESSORI

**George S. Morrison**, a Professor of Early Childhood education at the University of North Texas asks, "How will public Montessorians respond to Standards based reform?"

First, he believes public Montessorians have to work with early childhood teachers to show them how to implement state standards through the Montessori method. Secondly, he points out state standards have tremendous implications for the curriculum and content of Montessori programs. Montessorians have to assure themselves and parents that they are teaching the curriculum content of the state standards. Public School Montessorian, 2933 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> St, Minneapolis, MN 55411

Montessori Schools teach children peace. The Montessori Foundation and International Montessori Council have formed a partnership with The Lion & Lamb project, a non-profit organization of parents whose mission is to stop the marketing of violence to children by helping parents, the toy industry and government officials to recognize that violence is not child's play. Among other things, the Montessori Foundation invites parents to join together to organize a violent toy trade-in.

## WALDORF

In Waldorf schools there is typically very **little or no testing** in the early grades. In about the sixth grade children become more aware of their own capacities and want to measure themselves against objective standards. As the authority of the one class teacher begins to wane-typically in the seventh grade-children begin to find new authority figures in other persons they admire. They

also seek the authority of facts and figures. In the maelstrom of adolescent emotions, figures represent objectivity. There are other, much more important means of assessment and review used in Waldorf schools. These include teacher reports, parent evenings and school assemblies.  
*Renewal*, 3911 Banister Rd, Fair Oaks, CA 95628

## HOME EDUCATION NEWS

**Life Learning – The International Magazine of Self-directed Learning** is a new, bimonthly subscription magazine dedicated to providing trustworthy, inspiring information and discussion about self-directed, life-based learning. Editorial coverage includes profiles of and interviews with deschooling families, self-educated people of all ages, and movement veterans; how-to information; philosophical discussion; and reviews of books, website, CDs, courses and other resource material. Writers include well known authors from North America and abroad (such as John Taylor Gatto, Marty Layne, children's entertainer Eric Nagler, Jerry Mintz, Jan Hunt, Katherine Houk, and more), as well as parents and self-educated young people. Editor Wendy Priesnitz is the founder of the Canadian Alliance of Home Schoolers, Canada's original home-based learning organization, and the author of nine books. You can subscribe to this international bimonthly magazine by contacting: Life Learning, P.O. Box 340, St. George ON N0E 1N0 Canada. Tel: 1-800-215-9574. Email: [learning@life.ca](mailto:learning@life.ca). Web: [life.ca/hs/lifelearning.html](http://life.ca/hs/lifelearning.html).

In her book, **Homeschooling Our Children, Unschooling Ourselves**, Alison McKee tells the story of her family's journey into homeschooling. An experienced teacher, she relates how they made the transition from traditional education to child-centered unschooling. The book offers insights on how children learn, practical advice on unschooling, and opinions on the state of education today. It is available from Bittersweet House, PO Box 5211, Madison, WI 53705-5211. Tel: (608) 238-3302.

From **LifeSite News**, "Homeschooled Children have Better Social Skills says Study", Vancouver, BC, Oct. 15, 2001: "Home schooled children are, on average, more academically and socially advanced than public and private school students, according to a new study, 'Home Schooling: From the Extreme to the Mainstream,' released last week by The Fraser Institute. Contrary to the concerns of the educational establishment, the typical homeschooled child participates in a wide variety of extracurricular activities, including afternoon and weekend programs with public school students, daytime field trips and co-operative programs with groups of other homeschooled kids. Ninety-eight percent of homeschooled students are involved in two or more outside functions on a weekly basis. Research also suggests that homeschooled students are more sociable than their school peers, as well as more independent of peer values as they grow older. 'Popular belief holds that home schooled children are socially backward and deprived, but research shows the opposite: that homeschooled children are actually better socialized than their peers,' says Claudia Hepburn, director of education policy at The Fraser Institute. 'Some studies have shown that homeschooled children are happier, better adjusted, more thoughtful, mature and sociable than children who attend institutional schools.' In 1979, just 2000 Canadian children were home schooled. The largest study to date in Canada found that homeschooling students, on average, score at the 80th percentile in reading, at the 76th percentile in language, and at the 79th percentile in mathematics. The Canadian average for all public and privately educated students is

the 50th percentile. The study is available on the Fraser Institute website at [fraserinstitute.ca/publications/pps/51/homeschool.pdf](http://fraserinstitute.ca/publications/pps/51/homeschool.pdf).

Recent post to the Washington Homeschooling Education Network listserv: "I would like to pass on a message written by Paula Harper Christiansen regarding a great lady of the homeschooling community, the originator of the WHEN list I believe, **Janie Levine Hellyer**. It is with a heavy heart that I tell you Steve Hellyer called to tell me Janie Levine Hellyer has died. Janie was 50 years old and is survived by her husband, mother, and 3 children. Janie will truly be missed by the homeschool community she graciously served for over 20 years. She taught for many years a homeschool qualifying class in Olympia that helped establish many a new homeschooler on the way. Two years ago, wishing to honor her longtime contribution in the Thurston County area, she was selected to receive an award for her contributions to homeschooling at the Southwest Washington Homeschool Convention. For those who knew her, Janie was a marvelous lady. I know her family already knows that, but I wish them to know that many in the homeschool community knew it too. Much love goes out to them at this time." Sherry Stacy, Organizer of the Southwest Washington Homeschool Convention, President of the Board of Directors of the Olympia Christian Homeschool Group, Region 10 Contact for WHO. Website: [homestead.com/WaHomeEdNet/WHENmain.html](http://homestead.com/WaHomeEdNet/WHENmain.html).

The same Federal bill that requires public schools to test 3-8 graders annually specifically states that none of the bill's provisions to be interpreted as applying to home schooling. Throughout the course of the year the **Home School Legal Defense Association** worked with the administration and members of the House and Senate to protect home schooling from regulation in this bill. In fact, one key congressional committee members called HSLDA and said he had received 100 calls and letters from home schoolers during one day! He promised to work for home schooler's interests and in exasperation asked HSLDA to stop the calls. National Center for Home Education, [www.hsllda.org](http://www.hsllda.org)

A piece of Federal legislation that is currently under consideration would allow **Coverdell education savings accounts** to be used for home schooling expenses. National Center for Home Education, [www.hsllda.org](http://www.hsllda.org)

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, **850,000 students were being homechooled** during the spring of 1999. This figure is disputed as being too low by many homeschool activists. Homeschoolers accounted for 1.7 percent of students nationwide, ages 5 to 17, with a grade equivalent of Kindergarten through grade 12. Though homeschooling may have primarily been a trend within a homogeneous subgroup of white, middle-class, Christian families, growth in homeschooling may be reaching a broader range of American families and values. Characteristics that distinguished high percentages of homeschooling were two parent families, especially when only one parent participated in the labor force; large family size; and parents' high educational attainment. The percentage of homeschoolers living in a city was about 9% lower than the percentage for nonhomeschoolers. Office of Educational research and Improvement, USDE, 19990 K St, Washington, DC 20006

## PUBLIC ALTERNATIVES

***One Kid at a Time*** by Eliot Levine tells the story of the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, a unique public high school in Providence, RI. All students at the Met School have a personalized curriculum and complete real-world internships based on their interests. Students stay with the same teacher for four years, and parents help to plan and assess their child's learning. There are no classes, no tests, no grades, but high achievement is expected of all

students. Based on the Met's first four years, the book offers powerful ideas and sensible strategies for improving schools. Published by Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027. Web: metcenter.com. (See story on Met in Being There section)

**Gates Foundation Targets High Schools**, by Linda Shaw, *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 31, 2001: "According to Tom Vander Ark, head of education giving for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, San Diego's High Tech High, a small technology-rich school on a former naval base, is the kind of school the foundation wants to spread across the nation. From now on, the foundation will focus its considerable clout on changing high school as we know it into smaller, academically rigorous places such as High Tech High. In Washington State, Vander Ark wants to start a network of High Tech Highs, and he is lobbying everyone from school superintendents and business leaders to Gov. Gary Locke for help. Across the nation, the foundation has given \$114 million directly to high schools to create schools of no more than 400 students and to dismantle big schools into units of that size. There are concerns about the costs involved, the benefits gained and what might get lost, including the breadth of curriculum many high schools offer. Many educators also are not convinced high schools need to be as small as Vander Ark promotes. (For more information about High Tech High, visit <http://www.hightechhigh.org>).

In her article, **How Well Are Students Doing? Portfolios as One Response**, Kathleen Blake Yancey says that most portfolio advocates value portfolios especially because of the reflection that accompanies them. "In asking how well students are doing, we ask a very complex question. Portfolios, because of their ability to include a range of tasks, to show development, and to include the learner's perceptions, allow a complex answer, one that is worthy of us all." In another article by Chris Jennings entitled **A Portfolio Model that Works**, the author describes a portfolio model initiated by Tidewater Community College and Salem High School in Virginia Beach, VA. "Students who participated in the model gained confidence in their writing.... Moreover, teachers who adopted the portfolio model realized they had assumed the role of instructional coach and facilitator as they developed procedures for authentic evaluation of classroom learning and gained greater control of assessment outcomes." The articles were published in the **National Dropout Prevention Center Network's Newsletter**, College of Health, Education, and Human Development, Clemson University, 209 Martin Street, Clemson, SC 29631-1555.

**Maryland Plans Statewide Online High School**, by Jonathan Aiken, *CNN.com*, Sept. 10, 2001: "Next year, Maryland educators hope to put a statewide high school online, expanding a program already used in 10 of the state's 24 counties. About 350 students would be able to sign up for cyber-classes in the sciences, math, literature and even macroeconomics. Maryland's Web-based learning project is proposing to open a virtual school that will support students who need high school credit and also professional development for teachers. Homeschooled students and those with disabilities can easily use the systems. They are also cheaper than building more classrooms. Twenty-six states offer some form of computerized learning now - most of it designed for use in the classroom, during school hours. Of America's 16 million high school students, 30,000 have taken an online course, according to Associated Press reports.

The first alternative education conference in Montana was held in Early January. Contact person: [sharyl\\_allen@gfps.k12.mt.us](mailto:sharyl_allen@gfps.k12.mt.us), Skyline Education Center, 3300 3rd St NE, Great Falls Montana 59404

## CHARTER SCHOOLS

The 2001-02 school year has seen the **opening of 467 new charter schools** bringing the total operating charters to 2,370. 67 new charters are authorized to start next year. *Center for Education Reform*, [CER@lb.bcentral.com](mailto:CER@lb.bcentral.com)

A majority of teachers at **Island City Academy**, a charter school in Michigan, publicly complained that “the [teachers’ union] is seeking to protect its own agenda and...is causing the district to spend precious resources of time and money that could be used to improve the compensation of teachers or to better meet the class room instruction needs of students.” They then voted to oust the Michigan Education Association as their collective bargaining agent. *CER Newswire*, [CER@lb.bcentral.com](mailto:CER@lb.bcentral.com)

(See interview with **Joe Nathan** in *Changing Schools* section)

# PHOTO D

Students at Santa Rosa Charter School, in California. Photo by Alan Muskat

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS AND COMMUNICATIONS

### BRAZIL

After nine months of intense search, **Semco Foundation** finally found a building in Sao Paulo to establish the first Brazilian democratic school. Now we will start to rebuild and we hope it will be in good condition next February. If we have students enough, we will open on August with children from 4 to 6. After two years working in this project, you can imagine how excited we are! Semco organization was started in 1990 by Ricardo Semler to promote the democratic relations in schools in the country. As you can imagine we are facing serious problems in many fields. The director of Semco Foundation is Agop Kayayan, the representative of UNICEF in Central America and Brazil for more than twenty years. We have decided to consult you about the experiences you had in starting your school and if you know foundations in your country that could help us. Web: [www.semco.com.br](http://www.semco.com.br).

### DENMARK

A new booklet entitled ***The Danish Free School Tradition: A Lesson in Democracy*** by Robert Powell has recently been published. The intention of the booklet is to convey something of what is going on – almost uniquely – in Denmark, and to suggest that those who live and study in other countries might have something to learn from the Danish approach to education and life. Danish schools and colleges have deep roots in a long tradition of democracy and a respect for human rights. One of the consequences of this tradition is that there is an enormous diversity among schools and colleges. For more information, contact AERO or The Quaker Bookshop in London at: Email: [Bookshop@quaker.org.uk](mailto:Bookshop@quaker.org.uk). Tel: (44) 20 7663 1008. The Quaker Bookshop does Visa/Access and will send anywhere in the world.

## FRANCE

Last spring, an agreement was signed allowing for the integration of **Diwan** schools into the national education system and giving them the status of state schools. Diwan schools are Breton-language immersion schools. This agreement constitutes "important political events which will allow France to develop towards an open and pluralist Republic, which shows its concern for diversity by legislating for the recognition of its languages." From an article by A.V. Chapalain in the September The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages **Contact Bulletin**. Web: [www.eblul.org](http://www.eblul.org).

## ISRAEL

I am the father of two children who go to school at the **Modi'in Democratic School**. The school was established in 1999, following the general model of the Sudbury Valley School, with the official approval of the educational authorities. The school is public in the sense that it is partly funded by the government and by the local municipality, although it is not recognized as an independent school; rather, it is formally under the auspices of another school in town (with which we have no practical connection). It is private in the sense that there is a private adjunct which handles the tuition and pays most salaries and for most school activities. At the moment, the age range at our school is nursery school through 6th grade. There are children who have completed 6th grade, and new children, who should now be in 7th and 8th grades, 21 in all. However, the Israeli Ministry of Education will not allow 7th and 8th graders to enter our school (even though there are two democratic schools in Israel that have kids all the way up to the end of high school). The Ministry isn't "fond," to put it mildly, of "unique" schools, and has decided - quite arbitrarily - that 7th and 8th graders cannot be part of our school. The Ministry has agreed to open a democratic 'track' in one of the city's junior high schools, physically far away from our school. We have appealed to the Israeli Supreme Court. The Court ruled in favor of the Ministry of Education, and we then appealed to the High court of Justice. We are waiting for its decision. The idea of homeschooling for those 21 kids has come up. De facto, that is what is done. Officially, however, the parents are breaking the law, because they did not register their children at any school. For homeschooling, the law requires individual applications that are reviewed by the Ministry. We were told that the chances of having homeschooling approved for these kids, as a group, are slim. Despite several moves in the last few years towards de-centralization of the educational authorities, groups of parents and communities are far from free to establish private schools and learning centers. Avishai Antonovsky. Email: [msavish@mscc.huji.ac.il](mailto:msavish@mscc.huji.ac.il).

## NEPAL

During a recent fundraising visit to the United States, we arranged a meeting between Sri Aurobindo School founder Ram Chandra Das and Edwards Foundation President David Gamper. Edwards was able to provide a second grant to the school, which is home for 40 orphans in Kathmandu.

# PHOTO E

At a recent meeting at the Gamper Manhattan apartment, From R to L, Gisella and David Gamper, Jerry Mintz, Ludmilla from Stork School in Ukraine (she had worked as an intern at Albany's Free School), and David's sister who will soon take over as the new president of the Edwards Foundation

# PHOTO AERO 35 ganesh.jpg

Ganesh, a 13 year old student at the Sri Aurobindo School in Nepal. Contact AERO if you know a student who would like to be his e pal)

## SCOTLAND

On February 7 there was a **Freedom in Education** march on the Scottish parliament to preserve the freedom currently enjoyed by every family in Scotland to educate their own children according to each family's wishes. This was in response to a document published by the Scottish Executive which is encouraging local authorities to obstruct families choosing to educate their children at home and exhorting them to track down home educated children using confidential medical and census records.

The march's organizer, Jackie Turner, a home educating parent of three children in Edinburgh, has said, "For many families, home education is the only alternative available to state education. If home educators are compelled to be monitored according to state school criteria, then these families will have no choice but to follow state-controlled teaching methods – and we know how many children this is failing in our schools."

Author Roland Meighan, who was until recently special professor of education at the University of Nottingham, is critical of the concept of the monitoring of home education by Local Authorities. "Local authorities have their understanding of education limited to the crowd control necessary for teaching within a classroom situation. They are in no position to competently assess, monitor or make input to guidance on how home educators go about educating their children," he says.

The march was a great success, with a bright carnival like look and atmosphere. The post-march rally was addressed by several Ministers of the Scottish Parliament, as well as home educators and home-educated young people. Brian Monteith MSP announced at the rally that he was putting forward a private members bill to try and introduce deregistration on demand.

For further information email Jackie Turner at [info@freedomineducation.org.uk](mailto:info@freedomineducation.org.uk) or Schoolhouse Home Education at [info@schoolhouse.org.uk](mailto:info@schoolhouse.org.uk). Web: [www.freedomineducation.org.uk](http://www.freedomineducation.org.uk).

## SOUTH AFRICA

**New South African School.** At the moment our school is called Nahoon Montessori, but we are thinking of changing it to The Learning Community. The reason is that I foresee some friction arising with Montessori purists who say that you can't mix Montessori with other approaches. While I don't see any conflict between Montessori and a democratic approach in the class, there are quite a few who do. We are completely avoiding anything like a regular school structure and tending towards a Sudbury Valley type democracy. We have applied to the Education Department for registration as a private school. So far we have had inspections from just about everybody concerned. We're full for next year and already have a waiting list for enrollments! We've just finished our first term with Primary children and the general conclusion is that it was a success despite the disruption caused by not having proper facilities. We are situated in the suburb of Nahoon in East London. Chris is definitely happier and more motivated, and is learning math at a pace that I can't keep up with. Ray is not quite as happy about things (but still says she prefers it to her old school). I think the problem is in adapting from a very authoritarian environment - she seems to want a lot more direction from me than I feel she needs. She's still worried about getting into trouble for not doing things in a specified way. It's really scary how the system can suppress children, and deprive them of self-confidence in this way. *Sharon Caldwell*. Email: [nms@imagnet.co.za](mailto:nms@imagnet.co.za).

## UKRAINE



I'm glad I can reach you again and thank you for the wonderful and a very interesting issue of *The Educational Revolution* with my granddaughter on the cover.

We have some good news. We're just back from Kiev where Stork School took part in a grand international exhibition, called Education in Ukraine'2002, and we were awarded a Diploma of Honor. we were in Kiev in a group of 33 people, including 20 children aged from 7 to 17.

My daughter-in-law was invited for Netherlands to make contacts with one of the Dutch Montessori Schools, that celebrated their tenth anniversary at the same time as we. She says the school in many ways similar to ours. Sometimes she felt as if she were at home. Now we are expecting them to come to see us.

Another piece of news. One of the officers of the UNESCO National Commission proposed that we organize and host an international conference of UNESCO Schools. We've worked out a project to organize an International Festival "Yes! to the Culture of Peace and Non-violence". Out of a number of projects aimed at getting the support of UNESCO fourteen were qualified for consideration by the UNESCO National Commission and out of that number five were picked out to be sent to the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. Our project is among them. Ultimate results are expected in the middle of March. So hopefully we'll host the Festival.

Another conference is supposed to be held on basis of our school by the National Academy of Pedagogical Science! It was expected to be funded by UNICEF, but their priorities have been recently shifted, so our project was turned down. The conference will take place anyway, but its scale will be more modest.

Although we are exhausted by all the work we had to in short time to prepare the projects and the performance in Kiev, we are happy to feel that it means recognition of our school, as we were invited to do all these things by the Academy of Pedagogics, the UNESCO National Commission, the city and regional boards and others. Moreover, many of the values and ideas we started with in 1990 have now become leading ideas of the reform of education declared by the Minister Kremen.

That makes us think that our efforts and your efforts of your support and great friendship were not in vain and it is another reason to thank you for all you've been doing for us through this decade.  
Love, Oleg &Stork, [aist@sovamua.com](mailto:aist@sovamua.com)

## PHOTO DSC00137.JPG

Oleg Belin and granddaughter Nastya in Moscow at Festival ship dock

## TEACHERS JOBS AND INTERNSHIPS

**Cedarwood Sudbury School** (Santa Clara, CA) is seeking candidates for the position of staff member for the 2002-2003 school year. Cedarwood is a nontraditional school for students aged 5-18. Students control their own time and activities and vote in the democratic bodies that govern the school. The school was founded in 1995 and currently has approximately 25 students. Further information about the school and its educational philosophy can be found at the school's website, located at [www.cedarwoodsudbury.org](http://www.cedarwoodsudbury.org). Cedarwood is modeled on Sudbury Valley School, and prospective staff candidates should familiarize themselves as much as possible with the literature about Sudbury Valley. Reading the book *Free at Last*, by Daniel Greenberg, would be a good start; it is available from Amazon.com or Sudbury Valley School (telephone (508) 877-3030 or on the web at [www.sudval.org](http://www.sudval.org)). Typically new staff members are elected to work part-time, working one to three days per week. It is usually only after people are sure about a new person's usefulness and commitment that the school elects him or her to a full-time position. Please contact us at [Freekids@aol.com](mailto:Freekids@aol.com) if you have more questions, or call at (408) 296-2072. Stuart Williams-Ley, Staff Recruitment Committee.



Every student at **The Met School** - a public high school in Providence, Rhode Island -- builds a personalized curriculum around their strongest interests and does extensive projects and internships in real-world settings. Teachers work closely with the same group of 14 students for all four years of high school. Assessment is through student exhibitions (not tests) and teacher narratives (not grades). We now have two schools of 100 students each, and in September 2002 we are expanding to six schools. Rhode Island has great attractions, commutes, and housing costs, and Providence was among Utne Reader's "Top Ten Most Enlightened Towns." Please see [www.metcenter.org](http://www.metcenter.org) for details and how to apply.

**The School Around Us** is looking for interns to assist in creating and implementing alternative holistic ways of educating its students. The school founded in 1970 by Marilyn Wentworth is run by parents using the process of consensus. Students when making decisions that affect the whole school also use consensus. Currently there are 25 students from 5 to 14 years of age. Please write to: School Around Us, 281 Log Cabin Rd. Arundel, Maine 04046 Attn: Rebecca or email us at: [olivia@adelphia.net](mailto:olivia@adelphia.net)

A teaching position is currently open in a **Pittsburgh, PA, Charter School**. The school has an enrollment of 118 children, K-5. A relocation package is available. For more information, call Debbe Parker at (412) 351-9309. Email: [dparker.wgtucker@ix.netcom.com](mailto:dparker.wgtucker@ix.netcom.com).

We are reinforcing our English at the **Naleb School** in Guatemala and need four English teachers, either couples or single persons. We are offering lodging, some meals and salary. We would like them to have experience teaching English and working in alternative schools, so we can share experiences in this field. This could be an opportunity for them to improve their Spanish. The school is near Guatemala City and we work from January to October. Email [ritanaleb@hotmail.com](mailto:ritanaleb@hotmail.com) or call (502) 201-8442 for more information. Rita de Vizcaino.

**Program Coordinator-Teacher** sought to shape formation of small, innovative, non-traditional private high school to be connected to Roanoke museums. Must be flexible, creative, and able to work collaboratively with students and museum partners. Bachelor's degree, teaching experience, and familiarity with non-traditional education required. Send letter of application, resume, and statement of educational philosophy to High School. Search Committee, Community School, 7815 Williamson Road, Roanoke, VA 24019.

A **Chief Administrative Officer** is needed to supervise the development, implementation, and monitoring of the adopted curriculum which yields continuous high academic achievement. The incumbent will also ensure that the highest level of programs and activities are implemented with the Charter School guidelines as mandated by the Pennsylvania State Department of Education. The ideal candidate will have a passionate commitment to children, and have demonstrated professional interpersonal skills, and be a creative problem solver. For further information, please contact Deborah Parker at (412) 351-9309. Fax (412) 351-9195. Email: [dparker.wgtucker@ix.netcom.com](mailto:dparker.wgtucker@ix.netcom.com).

**Alternative School #1** in Seattle is hiring a special education teacher to work within our inclusive school environment. AS#1 is a vibrant learning community that focuses on multiple intelligences and hands-on experiential learning. It is a school where mutual respect with children can be fostered. To put it simply, AS#1 is a place where children are allowed to be children! For more information, contact Lori Goff at [lori@goff.com](mailto:lori@goff.com) or Ron Snyder at Alternative School #1 at Pinehurst, 12th Ave. NE, Seattle, WA 98125. Tel: (206) 366-7830.

**Nikki Lardas** is looking for **SERIOUS** people interested in starting a **Sudbury**-type school in either Georgia or Florida. Some ideas include buying land and building the school, having animals and plants, room to start musical groups, creating a very experiential learning environment. The nucleus of this group is very dedicated to a child-centered active and inclusionary learning environment. email [lardas@space.com](mailto:lardas@space.com) or call 912-653-5749. We are looking to begin ASAP. We even have relocators from California coming to investigate the possibility of joining our group.

**Little River Community School** is seeking an experienced teacher and an intern teacher for the 2002/2003 school year. Little River is an alternative community school with 15-20 students, ages 5-17. The teaching position is open to teachers with at least several years of teaching experience, preferably in an alternative school setting. We are seeking a teacher that would be looking to stay on at least a few years and share in some of the responsibilities of running the school. For the intern position we will train a new teacher in this unique one-room schoolhouse setting by pairing an intern with an experienced teacher. The intern will have full teaching responsibilities in exchange for training, room, board and a stipend. The school is located on Birdsfoot Farm, an intentional community with 8 adults and three children on 73 acres. Birdsfoot is a certified organic vegetable farm and we live together cooperatively, sharing meals. Housing at Birdsfoot Farm is an option. For more information contact Steve Molnar, Little River Community School, 1227 CR 25, Canton, NY 13617. Tel: (315) 379-9474. Email: [molteng@northnet.org](mailto:molteng@northnet.org).

**Developing Waldorf School** in Boise, Idaho seeks one additional kindergarten teacher and a first grade teacher for its second year (Fall 2002). Please reply to Lark at the Cottonwood Grove School [lark@rmci.net](mailto:lark@rmci.net)

**Liberty School** A Democratic Learning Community in Blue Hill, Maine is starting a new program in June, 2002. The Liberty School of Homesteading and Community is a one year program open to students of post high school age or older who want to learn homesteading for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The homesteading school is located on a 22 acre farm on Cape Rosier, ME and will be teaching sustainable living skills such as organic gardening, food preservation, livestock management, solar construction, alternative energy options, and cooperative living skills. Apprenticeships would be available in various home industry skills. Ten students will be accepted for the first year. We are also accepting resumes for potential faculty. We are looking for a Farm Manager and a Construction Manager. For more information contact Arnold Geenbergh Liberty School Blue Hill, Maine 04614

I am an **environmental education teacher** who is looking to explore different realms of the education field. For several years I have taught ecology in residential and day programs as well as working in program and curriculum development. In addition I am a ropes course facilitator teaching team building, conflict resolution and communication skills. I am seeking schools or programs to become involved with that center their studies around ecological or cultural sustainability with long-term contact with students. I am particularly interested in schools that use organic agriculture, cultural exposure or wilderness excursions as teaching tools. I have a degree in Environmental Studies and Anthropology with a passion and commitment to making a difference in students' lives. If you have any information that can help me please contact **Jessica Small** at Box 805, Unionville, PA 19375 or [Leapingbear@hotmail.com](mailto:Leapingbear@hotmail.com).

I am an **experienced educator** seeking a school or organization that will allow me to match my talents and vision with its mission and needs. I have been teaching in a wide variety of alternative, experiential schools, including 5 years of classroom teaching and 10 years of instruction and course directing for Outward Bound. I have a B.A. from Swarthmore College and a Masters in Education from Tufts University, as well as a history of dance, writing, art, rock climbing, and

outdoor expeditions. I am passionate about educational reform, designing interdisciplinary and thematic curriculum, creating a safe, open school community, using the arts and outdoor challenge opportunities to enhance academic learning, and student-led course design. I believe in a school that looks at education not just as an academic mission, but as an opportunity to guide and empower student-learners to become holistic, well-balanced leaders in their community and in the world. I am interested in gleaning educational practices that work worldwide, such as the Montessori and Waldorf methods, Gardner's multiple intelligence theory, organizational behavior, and Kurt Hahn's educational philosophies. My previous positions have been as a high school English and Environmental Studies teacher. I am looking for a position that could involve teaching, grade head, curriculum design, consulting, or school reform starting in the late summer of 2002. Please contact Tinsley Daily at [susantinsley@yahoo.com](mailto:susantinsley@yahoo.com) or (828)242-2302.

I have taught French language and literature in primary and high schools in Italy for nearly 20 years as a **French mother-tongue teacher**. I am now looking for a new teaching experience in alternative schools, mainly in Europe, but also in the USA and all over the world - either for a brief period or longer ones. I have a French "Maitrise ès Lettres Modernes" (4years) and an Italian "Laurea in Lettere Moderne" (2 years). I also have the Italian State certification and training for primary and high school teaching. My two main hobbies are sports and athletics and also chess playing and would gladly organize such a course. In Italy I am also looking for parents who would like to try and experience homeschooling and alternative schools. Please contact and e-mail [Philanfr@libero.it](mailto:Philanfr@libero.it)

My name is **Joseph Anderson**. I am an **experienced outdoor educator** and mountain guide searching for a long-term position in outdoor oriented company or school. With most of my experience on the teaching and guiding end of a program, I am also interested in gaining administrative experience. I would be especially useful for creating or expanding outdoor programs in order to develop confidence, motivational, and group dynamics skills with students. I am also very knowledgeable in Ecology, Meteorology, Ethology, Environmental Politics and snow science. (Ed. Note: Joseph is newly married to Michelle Senzon, a former AERO staff member, and is a graduate of Prescott College.) Email: [Josepharm@hotmail.com](mailto:Josepharm@hotmail.com).

## CONFERENCES

**Partners in Progress: Creating Learning Communities to Meet the Needs of the Whole Child**, March 15, 2002. Bear Mountain Inn, Bear Mountain, NY. New York State Alternative Education Association. Contact Joan Roehrig, Assoc. Principal, Nassau BOCES, PACE, 195 Brookville Rd., Brookville, NY 11545.

**The Idea of Education**, April 8-9, 2002. Oxford, Oxfordshire, UK. This cross-disciplinary conference marks the launch of a new project to provide a vigorous forum for the examination and evaluation of university education. Committed to the tradition of liberal education, the inherent value of the pursuit of learning and the principle that knowledge must be an end in itself, the forum will use the conference series to broadly examine the nature and aims of university education, its guiding principles, its practical functions, and its role in society. Website: <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ioe1.htm>.

**Whose Truths? Perspectives, Perceptions & the Public Good**, April 25-27. Wyndham City Center, Washington DC. The Education Writers Association's 2002 National Seminar. The conference will feature the ethics of covering testing and accountability, new reading research, quality issues in early childhood education, and more. Tel: (202) 452-9830.

**NCACS 24th Annual National Conference**, May 8-12, 2002. Antioch College, Yellow Springs, OH. Tel: (888) 771-9171. Email: [ncacs1@earthlink.net](mailto:ncacs1@earthlink.net).

**HES FES 2002**, May 11-18, 2002. Manor Farm, Charmouth, Dorset. The World's Biggest Home Education Event. Details of next year's event to be announced at [www.hesfes.co.uk](http://www.hesfes.co.uk). Send ideas or suggestions to [info@hesfes.co.uk](mailto:info@hesfes.co.uk).

**Escaping the Old – Envisioning the New**, May 12 – 15, 2002. Silverton Resort, Silverton BC, Canada. New Conference designed to bring together educators and non-government organizations from across North America and Europe to examine whether we are educating for sustainable development in an effective way. For those unable to attend, there will be an online conference for a small fee. Contact Peter Collins at (250) 358-2353. Email: [peter@efsvisions.com](mailto:peter@efsvisions.com). Web: [www.efsvisions.com](http://www.efsvisions.com).

**Heart and Soul of Learning in Holland**, May 31- June 2, 2002. Web: [www.shapersofeducation.org/hsl/](http://www.shapersofeducation.org/hsl/).

**Ninth Annual International Conference on Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child**, 20 to 22 June 2002, Southlands College, University of Surrey, Roehampton, United Kingdom. What is the educational response to terror? What is/should be the role of schools in helping children understand conflict? How do teachers help young people deal with fear and achieve inner peace? Speakers include Alan Smith, UNESCO, Professor Ron Best, Tel: 020 8392 3374 (e-mail [R.Best@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:R.Best@roehampton.ac.uk))

**Powerful Options for Learners!** June 28-30. Duluth, MN. The International Association for Learning Alternatives 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference. For more information, contact David Bly, Northfield ALC, 1651 Jefferson Pkwy., Northfield, MN 55057. Tel: (507) 664-3752. (see detailed announcement in this issue)

**SepCon2002 – Politics and Education Don't Mix!** June 30-July 2, 2002. Doubletree Hotel, Arlington, Virginia. Gatto, Sproul, Sobran, Coulson, Taylor, and Fritz. For the SepCon2002 registration form visit [www.sepschool.org/SepCon/02/reg.html](http://www.sepschool.org/SepCon/02/reg.html).

**WorldView 2002: Futures Unlimited!** July 20-22, 2002. Loews Philadelphia Hotel, Philadelphia, PA. Annual Conference of The World Future Society. Topics areas: technology, futures research, business, education, values, health, creativity, social change, environment, and more. For more information, contact WFS, 7910 Woodmont Ave., Suite 450, Bethesda, MD 20897-1406. Tel: 1-800-989-8274.

**Restoring The Passion: Thriving in a Standards Environment**, July 25-28, 2002. Bethesda, MD / Washington, DC. The Whole Schooling Consortium and Rouge Forum will co-sponsor this national conference linking issues of literacy learning, inclusive education, democracy, the standardization of education, and social justice in education. For more information see <http://www.ncte.org/wlu/conference/2002.shtml>.

**International Democratic Education Conference**, August 15-21, 2002. Sponsored by the Tamariki School, Christchurch, New Zealand. For more information contact the AERO office, or write to Pat Edwards at [tamariki@clear.net.nz](mailto:tamariki@clear.net.nz)

# CHANGING SCHOOLS

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*Since 1973: The Journal of Alternative Education*

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Edited by Albert Lamb

## Deregulating Education

Miloslav Balaban

*Miloslav Balaban - of Moscow State University, and the Educational Park of Open Studios (EPOS-school) - is an inspiring Russian alternative educator. We recommend this dense and sometimes difficult article of his as very much worth whatever effort it requires.*

# PHOTO DSC00156.JPG

Miloslav Balaban at his house in Russia, near Moscow

## Introduction

If we substitute the more definite term ‘grade-schooling,’ for the vague term ‘traditional education’ we can begin to take into account the real nature of this kind of schooling. The ideology of grade-school education was originally formed as part of the cult of Pansophy preached by the Comenian sect of the Protestant Church (‘Pansophy’ is defined in my dictionary as ‘universal wisdom or knowledge’ ed.). Its doctrine still distorts the growth of pupils’ minds by depriving them of more natural mental food.

The idea that “Traditional education emulates the factory model which developed in the industrial revolution” should be presented vice versa: the factory model emulated grade-school education, which had appeared a century earlier. John Comenius first tested the technology and he described it as a complete procedure for milling ‘wild’ illiterate children into literate adults in his *Magna Didactica* in 1756.

Grade-schooling distorts the growth of many pupils’ tender minds by depriving them of more natural mental food. Having become versed in the intricacies of classroom obedience, rather than learning about some of the rougher matters badly needed in our common life, such ‘educated’ graduates are often doomed to the fate of any broken-in (trained) horse - that of being fit for nothing but hired labour.

All educational innovations are doomed unless this almighty mechanism for the mental sieving and grading of each new generation is destroyed. This grade-school church

should be disestablished: currently it inverts the human right to learn into an inhuman sentence to serve a very long term at the established (by the state) grade-school.

There is an interesting, and inherent, incompatibility in the basic principles of operation of cultural and educational institutions. Cultural institutions (including libraries, museums, art galleries, theaters, cinemas etc.) serve their customers as *leaders*, while the educational establishments do their work as *drivers*. Driving, the repressive and oppressive aspects of grade-schooling, are usually attributed to the pressure of certain strictly established general curricula. But its universal acceptance is evidently connected with the kind of hope for privileges that such mental and spiritual obedience to a ruthless oppressor can earn.

Educational reforms in the past have failed, because they lacked due measures in ideology and economy. Grade-schools should now be deprived of their 'holy' Pansophic heritage: This can be done by means of a direct voucher (coming to the student, in the form of a social security policy, and then from the pupil going directly to the teacher) coupled with legalizing some form of resume-certificate - a portfolio of private credential letters - to be appropriately issued to the students by the students' teachers.

As soon as students can get the right to come to any lesson they want and also to go away from it at any time of his or her own choosing, grade-school will turn into a much more decent establishment. It is widely known that Socrates, Plato and Aristotle held their studios situated in the parks of Athens. They did not have to award any officially valid degrees, diplomas and certificates to their pupils. At best, they might have given them a sort of a credential letter. But now all the graduates of schools and colleges receive such official certificates issued by the authorities of educational establishments as a sort of legal document. The direct voucher - coming from the pupil directly to the teacher - could change this status

Here I have tried to show that the noble desire of those supporting the private voucher, in order to destroy the monopoly of inefficient grade-schooling, is well founded. It will bring much more good to education than is now expected, as long as a transition can be effected without taking too many 'revolutionary measures'. Instead, the experience of radical education accumulated at Summerhill School, Sudbury Valley, and Park Schools should be carefully studied and used.

But evidently only a powerful (national or international) organization can afford to carry out all of the experimental, legal and other projects, in order to make the private voucher really work for mass education. Otherwise I fear that the grade-schooling monopoly will just get stronger, while the better pupils will continue to enter expensive private schools, where the same 'bad (spiritual) products' are produced at ever higher prices.

Pedagogy often involves mistaking fuzzy metaphysical metaphors for the sharp terms. Unlike a term, a metaphor permits us to sustain and support widely different (often logically controversial) opinions, thus helping to disguise a lot of hypocrisies, including, in this case, the true nature of grade-schooling. Our sincere devotion to the cause of sound education permits us to present a less polite attempt to overcome this fallacy, in the form of some nasty questions and answers!

## Q and A

Q: What makes you think that Summerhill, and other valid innovations, eventually become minor deviations of the standard grade-schooling rituals?

A: The monopoly of state-supported certificates of education make all of the schools (including those such as Summerhill) dependent on common educational standards.

Therefore they can be financed only as an accessory, or remedial appendix, to the principal, essential service of Giving (or refusing) Benedictions.

The official distribution of grades is really the main function of grade-schools. If an innovation proves its efficiency in *learning* (which has little to do with the administrative affairs of *grading* education), it is either plainly rejected or becomes a useful accessory such as a new system of heating, bookkeeping, cleaning blackboards, or ringing bells. At best it will remain as a sort of a useful technicality which has very little to do with the main (and quite sacred!) cause of education as performed in the classroom.

Creating various establishments, such as Yakov Hecht's 'democratic village schools,' or Educational Parks of Open Studios (EPOS-schools), does not change anything. They may even be used by the governing educational regime as new methods of grade-schooling. Our Open Studios are often regarded as just more attractive tricks inside the grade-school system.

Q: What forbids financing educational alternatives in a more decent and convenient way?

A: It is the absolute (even sacred!) status of official certification which makes any education utterly state-governed, even if it tries to look like a private service.

Q: What makes the standard formal certificates so omnipotent

A: Their moral and legal power is still derived from the Rationalist mythology developed in the Age of Reason. Scholastic Pansophy, preached by Comenius, attributed the sacred nature of God's truth to some external (for the human mind) rules and formulae of formal Science.

Q: How can it still be happening now, with all of our industrial, economic and scientific progress?

A: Pedagogy is not a science. It is closer to the theology used by clergy to preach Scriptures to the parish - in exactly the same way do the teachers use pedagogical metaphors for preaching textbooks to their classes. The functional structure of grade-school education is closer to a mighty church (with its rigid sets of rituals) than to any modern system of management.

Q: But aren't schools and churches rather antagonistic?

A: Yes, they really are, but - more in the way that different churches always compete. During the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) a ferment of religious ideas gave rise to a lot of 'earnest' Protestant churches. Their belief in the 'sacred truth' was implemented into a special educational 'Machine for Human Perfection' - or so its inventor (John Comenius - the Bishop of Moravian Brethren) has called his system of grade-schooling. The strange position of our mass-education today is the direct effect of this old fallacy.

Q: How could grade-school grow so mighty?

A: It has secretly become an Established Church in the disguise of an obedient mechanism of the public educational service. Such a situation will usually lead to a grave abuse of state power. Being actually a group of people united by common faith, as with any other church or political party, the state-established school 'clergy' managed to get access to state power. During the last two centuries it has grown in size and influence

Q: What is so dangerous and perilous about it?



A: As with any other spiritual tyranny, this 'Church of Established Pansophy' (CEP), as I call it, was implemented in a specific CEP-system of education via grade-schooling and became a sort of 'mental' monopoly. It has markedly changed the course of the cultural development of European civilization. Universal compulsory education is now used to form a culture of absolute belief in the strange God of Pansophy. This belief sanctifies the external financing, certification and other formal rituals, of the CEP-school itself.

Q: If its church-like nature hinders the development of a decent educational service, where is the way out?

A: There is no direct way out, of course. Nothing, including a cultural revolution, can directly destroy such a deeply rooted and nicely disguised religion as this one: Comenius's Pansophy (Supreme Wisdom). The CEP-school makes any attempt to officially disestablish it look like an inhuman act depriving a lot of people of their right to get a free education.

Q: What action can save dissenters from being integrated into the Pansophy-church?

A: In order to remain 'alive and kicking' outside of the Established Educational Ideology of human knowledge, the innovators will eventually need legal equality. City as School, Educational Parks, etc. remain spiritually illegal outside of the official cognitive space of CEP-school.

Only special legislation can introduce a common legal status for *internal* (personal) and *external* (official) knowledge. In practice, it can be achieved by officially equalizing the civil power of a 'portfolio of private credentials' to that of an official diploma.

Q: How could a teacher's private credential acquire the adequate legal power of a valid document (e.g. in the civil court)?

A: It must be issued as a financial document. In other words it must be a sort of a receipt, confirming that the teacher has provided educational services, which have been paid for by the customer - the pupil.

Q: Does this mean that schools must return to the ancient way of the teacher being paid directly by the pupil himself?

A: Yes, it does. Why should the classroom (if it is not a church any more!) be different from any other shop, where the same child pays for what he or she wants? Any earnest business takes place only in the *open* legal space of civil relations.

Q: Would this require abolishing the 'human right' of free and equal access to educational service?

A: No, it would not! On the contrary, the direct way of financing a producer always decreases the loss of the taxpayer's money, which is so often wasted on the support of many intermediate officials. The 'direct' educational voucher (by which the pupil directly pays for the teacher's services) may be issued by some kind of a state-supported foundation, as well. It could equalize the social rights of the rich and the poor, in the same way that medical insurance policies already do in many countries.

Q: In what way is the right to choose a church (or a school) different from the right to choose a shop for purchasing goods?



A: The difference is in the aim of those doing the choosing: either you go school or church to obtain some sort of status in society or in Heaven, or you go to a shop to receive some kind of direct service. But grade-schools (which are really useful in taking care of the children left by the parents who cannot work at home) pretend to give the status in a much more compulsory way than any church does.

Q: What makes this cult of Pansophy so tyrannical?

A: The grade-school cannot be attended by chance, when you would like it.

Q: Let us suppose that closed grades and classes were liberated and turned into open studios featuring your idea of Direct Access Learning. What would be the actual benefit of such reform for the society, state, teachers and students?

A: All of us would be liberated from the constant need to waste a lot of resources and effort on the very expensive ritual of trying to solve evidently absurd, but 'eternal' problems. The CEP-school tries to implement (in mass education) Luther's dogma that "man does not have free will." Luther held that "man's will is like a beast of burden. It is ridden either by God or by the Devil and does whatever the one who is in the saddle directs."

So, a teacher in the classroom is a sort of 'Godly driver' directing his team of students in the true way. In order to be always 'right' and never 'wrong', the teacher-driver's rule of force must be supported by didactic instruction.

Grade-schooling drivers (as well as their official bosses) still need such didactic instruction, some of them believing that such instruction will help them to drive the pupils to happy future. But the majority of them simply feel safer under the protection of absurd official texts!

Q: What would replace such safeguards in your Direct Access Learning schools?

A: No one will need them there. Who needs some highly official curricula with a detailed calculation of lessons allotted to definite subjects, etc., if, in your Direct Access Learning school, there are no grades, classes, lessons, time-tables or even school bells?

Q: How can the state (which will neither be issuing the official certificates, nor paying the salary to educators any more!) supervise, coordinate and secure the necessary contents of mass education?

A: In the same marketing way, as any decent state does with all of its other commercial and social services.

Q: But will the economic yoke be any more beneficial for the cause of human education?

A: Yes, of course! Educational service maintained on a normal business footing is sure to be open to all the needs and trends of social and industrial development. It will drop the hypocritical 'conventions' of formal knowledge, because any real business can be done only in earnest.

Q: Are there any subjects or habits that can be taught better in such Direct Action Learning schools?

A: Direct Action Learning schools can successfully teach all the really productive varieties of actual knowledge. But Direct Action Learning knowledge usually comes tightly coupled with the useful habit of self-reliance - the ability to make one's own responsible choice in the here and now.

Q: Do you mean that simply by inverting the flow of financing it will be possible to solve almost all the problems of the pedagogy and methodology of mass education?

A: Yes. Adam Smith proved the universal effectiveness of more liberal finance, over two centuries ago.

# Hope For Charter Schools

An interview with Joe Nathan

By Jerry Mintz

**Jerry:** Our guest today is Joe Nathan. He is in some ways the father of the charter school movement. Joe's book is called "Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Education." Joe, what is your title?

Joe Nathan: Director of Center for School of Change at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute.

**Jerry:** I've known you for many years: The first time I met you, you came to the small alternative school that I was running in Vermont and you were actually studying, I think, the voucher idea, is that right?

**Joe:** Right. I had been a public school teacher and administrator in Minnesota since 1971.

**Jerry:** I was just looking through your book and it's interesting you talk about the roots of the charter school movement...you say in some ways it goes back a couple of hundred years. What do you mean by that?

**Joe:** There has always been a desire on the part of people in this country to expand opportunity. Of course, voting rights are where we started off saying only white men with a certain amount property were allowed to vote; gradually we expanded voting right opportunities. The same thing is happening with educational opportunities. The charter movement is really a part of that whole idea of expanding opportunities, particularly for low and moderate-income families.

**Jerry:** You talk about the connection between the free school movement and public alternative school movement. How did that lead into the development of charter schools?

**Joe:** Well, you and many other people in the 60s and 70s said the traditional way of doing public education doesn't make sense; it's actually a sort of Soviet-style where there is just one option, just one program in every district, and kids go to school basically depending on where they live. Which means that low-income people have no choices and rich people have lots of choices.

So, as I recall your program in Vermont said no, we're going to provide another kind of school to young people who were not particularly happy with the traditional secondary school.

**Jerry:** Even though ours was a private school, we had no minimum tuition, so in fact many of our kids, most of our kids were low income. I think that many of us who were involved with this movement were doing just that: We were trying to demonstrate that there is a better way.

**Joe:** Right. In Philadelphia in the late 60s people said there should be a different kind of public school, so they created a program called Parkway. In Minnesota in the late 60s and early 70s people said that right within the public education system families ought to have choices. So all over the country right within the public education system, people began to offer magnet schools and alternative schools and options. What people found in many cases was that although the schools often worked very, very well and many people and many educators appreciated the chance to have different kinds of programs, what happened over and over again was that the district contract provisions made it difficult for those programs to retain true integrity.

**Jerry:** Even in the public alternatives?

**Joe:** Absolutely. In a Montessori program, for example, people in many school districts began to be assigned according to seniority rather than whether they were really committed to those principles of Montessori education.

**Jerry:** Was Minnesota the first place that had a charter school?

**Joe:** Right. The idea developed at a small conference center in northern Minnesota in the late 1980s to give people a chance to create the kind of public schools that they think makes sense and make them responsible for improved achievement. There should be more than one place to decide what kind of education there would be. The legislature decided to allow different kinds of schools with public funding as long as they were responsible for improving achievement. That was in 1991.

**Jerry:** So that was the first official charter school in 1991, and Minnesota was the first state to do this. Was there a particular person or people behind this idea?

**Joe:** Well, it was a group of people which included the president of the Minnesota PTA, the head of Urban Coalition Education program in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, a state legislator, and myself. There were five of us.

**Jerry:** It's incredible when you think about it; in 1991 the first charter school started in Minnesota, you're one of the handful of people that got this going, and now there are how many charter schools?

**Joe:** There are now more than 2300 charter schools.

**Jerry:** New York State just passed a very-hotly debated law, and as I remember the way that Governor Pataki worked it out was he connected it to the proposal for a raise that the legislators wanted. He said that they wouldn't get the raise unless his charter school legislation passed - so he got it. What kind of a law is the new New York State law?

**Joe:** Well, Jerry, generally people talk about effective or ineffective laws. It's interesting because I was talking today to people in Virginia where they have a relatively ineffective law and I was talking to people in New York where they have a generally effective law, and I talked to people in Oregon where they don't yet have a law and they want to have one.

Generally, I think it's important to understand that the charter idea builds on three fundamental American principles and I think that's why it spread so rapidly the last 7 years. The first principle is opportunity: people believe strongly that this is the land of opportunity. Certainly everything isn't perfect about the country but there are enormous opportunities here, and that is one of the fundamental principles of the charter idea - to give people a chance to carry out their dreams of their visions, just as you did in Vermont, and there are literally thousands of people who want to do the same thing.

The second basic principle is responsibility: we really believe strongly in this country that people ought to be responsible for what they do. The charter schools are responsible for improving achievement over a three to five year period using various measures, not just standardized tests.

The third is that we believe in choices, we believe in freedom, but we don't believe in unlimited freedom; for example, freedom of speech, we don't say there is total freedom - the classic argument is that freedom of speech doesn't mean you can yell "fire" in a crowded theater. And that's the way it is with school choice, too. There are limits on school choice and the charter schools are nonsectarian schools, they can't have admissions tests, they're open as your school was in Vermont to all kinds of kids.

**Jerry:** How would you characterize the New York State law?

**Joe:** I'd characterize the new York State law as a relatively strong law because it allows up to 100 charter schools - the first law in the country that was passed here in Minnesota only allowed eight, and now that's been expanded over the last six or seven years to an unlimited number.

**Jerry:** But I heard that the local unions had some strong say; of course a very big factor in education in New York is the strong teachers unions. I heard they had a strong say in the charter schools. Is that true?

**Joe:** In every state that this has been adopted, unions have had a lot to say about it, and I don't think that unions are always wrong. I think that some unions have done some terrific things. One of the compromises in New York was that if people started a new school with less than 250 kids then they can pay the teachers as much as they want. In some charter schools around the country teachers are being paid more than the union salaries because they spend the money more efficiently, more effectively. Part of the deal is that some of the schools in New York will be able to set their own working conditions; whereas, conversion schools - that is, existing schools - would have to follow the local labor-management agreement. That was one of the compromises.

**Jerry:** So there can be conversion schools in New York; that is, schools that are currently regular public schools that convert to charter schools. Private schools, I assume, can't be conversion schools.

**Joe:** That's correct.

**Jerry:** Does that happen anywhere?

**Joe:** Yes, in Minnesota, for example, an existing private nonsectarian school can convert to a charter public school. And we've had some terrific inner-city private nonsectarian schools convert to charter schools there.

**Jerry:** That's the only state that allows private schools to become charter schools?

**Joe:** No, there are a couple of other states that allow it.

**Jerry:** I see. I was talking to some people at a school in California that wanted to have a private school become a charter; what they had to do was disband the original school and start from scratch. I've worked with some New Jersey schools lately and they are complaining that it's very hard for them to fulfill their vision because the laws require them to meet an awful lot of the things that regular public schools have to do. Do you know anything about New Jersey law?

**Joe:** Well, New Jersey's law is considered relatively strong, once again, because you don't have to get permission from the local school board and because a relatively large numbers of charter schools are permitted. Most of the state rules and regulations are waived but you do have to follow the same state testing program as other public schools. But otherwise most of the states rules and regulations are waived, particularly if you're creating a new school; you can come up with your own labor-management contract, for example.

**Jerry:** One of the schools that I was working with was complaining that all of their regular teaching staff had to be certified. Do you think that's true?

**Joe:** It's not true in every state; I don't know precisely what the arrangement is in New Jersey. In many of the states, a certain percentage of the people have to be certified but they don't all have to be certified. I don't know exactly what the provisions are in New Jersey ...good point.

**Jerry:** That was something they were struggling with. One of the things that I've discovered with people who are running charter schools is they are having a devil of a time finding people who are trained in any kind of alternative methods of education.

**Joe:** The training of teachers in this country is unquestionably a problem. Actually we just did a study of what various school administrators in Minnesota think about teacher training in this state and we had more than half of the 2,000 public school superintendents and principals responding. Frankly, one of the conclusions they reached was that although people coming out of colleges of education may know their curriculum area really well, they don't know much about how to teach it. So the whole issue of knowing how to work with kids is a real problem and many of us have real concerns about what's happening in colleges of education.

**Jerry:** I was going to be running a program at a local university here because the Dean of Education wanted me to do it. It was because they didn't have any kind of a training program. What happened is that his curriculum committee, which consisted of old dyed-in-the-wool people from the old school of education, rejected it. Imagine that? The Dean of Education wasn't even able to work it out so we could run a little training program at his major college because the curriculum committee rejected it. If that is happening, how are we possibly going to change this training situation?

**Joe:** We've actually just suggested here in Minnesota that this state identify schools that are clearly making a positive impact on youngsters and allow those elementary or secondary schools to offer training programs right there and the state would allow them to award a masters degree in teaching. We think that there need to be alternatives to the traditional teaching colleges of education. We have a situation here where we have a National Teacher of the Year who some colleges have been thinking about hiring - she's an absolutely fabulous teacher - but because she doesn't have a PhD, people have said they don't know if they can hire her because of the way that teacher-training programs are credited. They're strongly discouraged from hiring people who don't have PhDs, even if they're marvelous teachers, so we've got a real problem with colleges of education. This, of course, is one of the issues in American education: If you don't have enough highly trained teachers, then it's hard to have highly effective schools.

**Jerry:** I think the idea of running training programs out of schools that are actually doing it is the very best way you can train people. You can talk forever about it, but they have to actually experience it.

**Joe:** You and I totally agree, Jerry. It's one of the central issues in public education.

**Jerry:** Now, Joe, there was an article that quoted you recently in the New York Times...what was that about?

**Joe:** As you mentioned, a few weeks ago, the New York legislature passed charter legislation so there's a lot of discussion among inner-city parents about why they want to create charter public schools. Many inner-city parents are just deeply frustrated with the public schools and it's not because there aren't some good teachers - there are some marvelous teachers - but overall these institutions are not meeting the needs of the kids. So this is an article in the New York Times talking about inner-city advocates, some community activists, and minister in the New York City area who want us to create charter schools. I think it might be worth mentioning that Rosa Parks, the Civil Rights legend, recently applied to start a charter school in Detroit.

**Jerry:** You're kidding! She has? Wow! How old must she be now?

**Joe:** Well, she's I think in her late seventies. If you look all over the country you'll see urban coalitions, urban leagues, Hispanic, Native American and African American organizations in many of the large cities saying, "Hey, we really like this idea because it gives us a chance to create the kinds of public schools that we think make sense."

**Jerry:** I know of at least one school that's named after her, which is called Graham and Parks.

**Joe:** Right, in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

**Jerry:** A great little school. Len Solo ran it. He goes way back in the alternative school movement. He's started running that school in 1974. How would you compare a school like his to a charter school? Wouldn't you say that it's pretty similar?

**Joe:** There are both some similarities and some differences. A program like Len ran, which is a part of a school district, has to follow the local contract. So, for example, if the local contract says last hired is the first fired, then they have to do that. Whereas a charter school can set up its own arrangement and doesn't have to be part of a larger system, they can decide who works at the school. So that's one difference.

I'm not trying to put down what a number of public innovative schools have done. They've done some really good things, but one of the problems, one of the things that led to the charter school movement, was that key issues of personnel and budget were often decided outside the school. A second difference is that the budget is under the control of the school, the school decides how to spend money.

One of the more well known conversion school charter schools in the country is in inner city Los Angeles and they converted to charter school status after, among other things, it had taken more than a year to get some computers purchased that they had been authorized by the Los Angeles school district to buy. They were on a national TV show talking about this and ultimately decided to convert to charter status. They were able to save a million dollars cash by purchasing their own things and not going through the LA Unified District.

Now, instead of spending a year or a year and a half trying to get computers which is what happened when they were part of this huge district, they will decide to buy 20 or 25 computers and the 6th graders in the school will call various computer companies and say, "Alright we're going to buy 25 computers, we want computers with these characteristics, and we're going to do this in 30 days, and we pay cash. What's your best price?"

They found that rather than the economics of scale, huge districts don't necessarily get good prices because they don't necessarily get the best deal because the companies know that it may take six months to a year to get paid. The checkbook is right in the school and that is one of the central characteristics of a charter school in states that have strong and effective laws. The schools that have the money right in the school can make the decisions about how to spend the money.

**Jerry:** I was visiting one charter school in New Jersey, and they lost half a dozen kids for one reason or another, gone from 89 to 82 kids, which happens to schools. The trouble is that these charter schools get paid strictly on the basis of the numbers of kids. So they were going to have a \$25,000 or \$30,000 shortfall because of this. The Board went to the teaching staff and asked them to help figure out what to cut in the budget, rather than arbitrarily cutting off the money entirely. I guess that's another example of the kind of thing that's possible with having the funding coming from a local source. It's also one of the pitfalls that you are dependent upon the number of pupils you have.

**Joe:** The vast majority of charters in the country have a waiting list of people who want to get into them. One of the things that that school could do is talk to various people in the community and say, "We now have four or five openings in the school, anybody want to come?"

It's interesting you would mention that people involve the teachers and parents in decisions, Jerry, because another one of the really well-known charter schools in the country was started by a union shop steward in inner-city Los Angeles, a marvelous inner-city teacher named Jonathan Williams. He was really frustrated because just the opposite happened when he was at a school which is a part of the Los Angeles district.

The school board made a decision to have a 40 percent across the board cut in the schools. They simply told the teachers in the schools how it was going to happen. Jonathan and some of the other teachers of this very innovative school in Los Angeles, which was not a charter, said they'd like to have some input and they said No, this is the way it's going to be.

They said, "This is going to decimate our programs, let us come up with some ways to make these cuts without wrecking the programs." The district said no. So, part of the reason that the charter movement has spread rapidly is that there are thousands and thousands of very caring, committed, talented people working in the schools, many of them are just fed up and frustrated by the overall system.

There have been about 30 of the 1100 charter schools that have been closed. Many of them have been closed because of financial irregularities. A few had been closed because they had clear goals about improving achievement but they did not deliver on their promises so they were quite legitimately closed.

**Jerry:** By the board that was sponsoring them.

**Joe:** Right.

**JM:** In some ways, it seems to me, that if these charter schools get closed for one reason or another, it's an indication, it's not a negative thing really, it's an indication that there is some kind of control and that there is something that is going on outside the box, and if you're doing things outside the box, you're going to have a certain number of failures. I think this is not necessarily a bad thing at all.

**Joe:** I totally agree with you, Jerry. Part of the idea is that people have to be responsible for what they are doing. One of the problems we have in public education is that a lot of unacceptable things are going on but the schools keep going on year after year and kids have to keep going and that's just not right. We need more accountability in education and there are going to be some charter schools that deserve to be closed and they are going to be closed.

**Joe:** How often do you hear of a lousy public school being closed down because it's not meeting its kids needs?

**Joe:** Exactly right. That's one of the central points.

**Jerry:** I know that some people point to this as a sign of failure of the charter school movement, but I think it's really a sign of success: That if you're going to try some new things, well, go ahead and try some new things.

**Joe:** Right.

**Jerry:** Some people think the bottom line, the ultimate end of the charter school movement, is in the end the government still controls it. Some people, for example, who are involved in the separation of the school and state movement, centered in Fresno, California, think that ultimately the government is still in control. What do you think about that argument?

**Joe:** Well, I've talked a little with those folks, and they just see the world quite differently. I think it's marvelous when inner-city parents and teachers can get together and create the kinds of schools that they think really make sense and get the tax dollars to follow their kids to the school. And that's really important because the people who believe in total separation of school and state say the money will come from somewhere. Well, good luck. It does cost money to buy computers, tables, chairs, pay for heat and light for our schools. I believe very strongly that the charter movement brings together these ideas of opportunity and responsibility.

I do think there's a responsibility, frankly, to have some thing that all publicly funded schools are going to do. I have visited parts of the United States where there are people who want to teach racial hatred. I know in some discussion about school choice, people get very nervous about this, but there are some people who want to teach certain kinds of racial hatred. I think that we ought to have certain kinds of agreements about what schools that are funded by the public ought to do. I'm comfortable with the idea that there will be some limits on what the schools that are publicly funded will teach.

**Jerry:** Does that mean that any kind of a public alternative, including charter schools, could never be as free to do what they want educationally as a private school?

**Joe:** In some ways, yes. There are private schools that very clearly teach the superiority of one religion over another, and there are some people who want their kids to go to such schools. I think that we have reached compromises in this country, and one of them is that we're very nervous about public funds going, at least at the elementary and secondary level, to schools that teach that this or that religion is superior to all others. As you look around the world you see a lot of religious strife in certain parts of the world. I think we have come to some compromises in this country, one of which is that we will allow people to go to religious schools, but we're not going to fund them publicly.

One of the central characteristics of charter public schools is that they are nonsectarian. Of course, there are some who say it doesn't go far enough, there are some who want to have vouchers, and I understand their frustrations. One of the things that has been very intriguing is that you have all these places all over the country where inner-city parents who are deeply frustrated come forward to create charter schools. In many cases, the charter schools have produced major improvements in student achievement for inner-city kids - also for rural schools. I haven't talked much tonight about rural charters, but some of the most exciting charters in the country are rural schools in places where people were very frustrated because they were told they had to have massive consolidation to send kids 20, 30, even 40 miles from home. The charter movement has allowed people to have their own public schools in communities near to their homes rather send their kids a long way away.



**Jerry:** What do you think about the idea of the voucher system as opposed to the charter system?

**Joe:** Personally, at this point, I'd like to give the charter movement a real shot before we go to vouchers. I have some good friends who believe that vouchers should be given a try as they are right now, in Cleveland and Milwaukee, and we'll see what happens. The charter movement is different from vouchers in several ways. One is that the charter movement says that schools that are publicly funded must be nonsectarian. Secondly, the charter movement says that schools that are publicly funded have to be responsible for improved achievement. Under voucher programs, if people want to send their kids to school, regardless of whether there's improved achievement, the school get the money. I think there are some advantages. The charter movement is a better approach than the voucher movement - and I recognize that that's a controversial point of view.

**Jerry:** Recently, in fact, there were some judicial decisions that said they could have voucher money going to religious schools.

**Joe:** That's right. The Wisconsin Supreme Court decided that that was acceptable.

**Jerry:** What do you think is the future of the charter school movement, Joe?

**Joe:** I think it's just going to continue to grow.

## In a Box:

**Jerry:** You have a new book out on charter schools, called "Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Education."

**Joe:** It's available at a discount at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and [bn.com](http://bn.com).

## In a Box

More information can be found at the federal government's site : [www.uscharterschools.org](http://www.uscharterschools.org). Also, a marvelous graduate student in New York State, Jude Hollins, has a useful website at [csr.syr.edu](http://csr.syr.edu). And of course, there's the AERO listserv.

## Magnet Schools

By Judy Stein

In an article in Education Week entitled "Can Equity and Excellence Coexist?" Harvard's Dr. Charles V. Willie wrote of America's emphasis on excellence in education and its absolution of responsibility for equity in education. He began by examining the particular role of schools in affecting for good or ill, the nation's racial and ethnic harmony.

When the chronicle of public education is written for the twentieth century, a little known piece of legislation passed in 1984 may very well be heralded as the only educational legislation which insisted that the goals of excellence and equity can not only coexist but are achievable in public education. The Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) was initiated to provide federal support for magnet schools that are part of an approved voluntary or court-ordered desegregation plan.

Through eight grant cycles (1985-2001), over one and one-half billion dollars has been provided to school districts to support the development and implementation of magnet schools. A study completed in 1994 by the American Institutes for Research said that approximately 1.2 million students participated in magnets, more than three times as many as in 1983.

Magnet schools seek to foster school desegregation and enhance the quality of American education through public choice. The roots of magnet schools lie in specialty schools, offering special curriculum, that have existed since the beginning of the twentieth century in the Boston Latin School and the Bronx School of Science. Magnets offer special curricula like visual and performing arts or aviation or special instructional approaches like Montessori education or ungraded education to attract students and parents to a school.

During the 1970's, school districts started to use magnets as a means of voluntary desegregation, to provide incentives for parents to keep their children in the public schools, and to send their children to integrated schools. Although desegregation is an explicit purpose of a magnet school, the introduction of specialized innovative curricula and instructional approaches are utilized to strengthen the educational program in those schools, contributing to improvements in educational quality as measured by student achievement and access to educational opportunities.

Magnet schools are primarily a phenomena of large urban school districts with higher than average enrollments of minority students and in districts experiencing great socioeconomic change. Most magnet programs are theme based with only one in five offering an instructional approach as its attraction.

But what about the major purpose of education - student achievement? Since the onset of widespread desegregation, black 17-year-olds have closed roughly a third of the reading score gap that separated them from whites. A new study conducted by Adam Gamoran suggests that students learn more in public magnet schools than they do in private schools, Roman Catholic schools, or comprehensive public schools. His findings are more significant since, as Mr. Gamoran explained, magnet schools do not segregate the way private and religious schools do. Among those who choose specialized schools, minorities and poorer students tend to go to public magnet schools.

However, as Theodore M. Shaw, Deputy Director - Counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, states, "The prevailing opinion is that school desegregation has not worked. We are told that test scores have not improved, quality education has suffered - and the monetary and emotional costs are too high. In truth, data reveals modest academic improvement by black students and no negative effect on white students' performance on standardized tests in desegregated schools. Whatever the effects of desegregation on achievement, Brown's promise was bigger than test scores. School desegregation cases have addressed many problems afflicting African Americans in public schools, including inadequate resources, discriminatory discipline policies and practices, and tracking."

The Brown decision was also about also how America would treat its citizens - about educational opportunity and basic fairness. Many studies reflect improved educational opportunities and employment access for black students in desegregated schools. It is very unlikely that minority and poor children would have received comparable educational opportunities - opportunities that have enabled many to succeed academically and to go on to college or productive employment.

Although many blacks long for a return to neighborhood schools and say that they are tired of "chasing whites," the evidence is that isolated schools containing poor and minority students impact on student, school and life success. A national study shows that Chapter One

schools, where three quarters of the children were poor, scored substantially lower in math and reading than recipients attending schools where fewer than half were poor.

The return to neighborhood schools is usually accompanied by the promise of greater resources for the schools. However, as Harvard sociologist Gary Orfield has observed, “A less powerful group isn’t going to get disproportionate resources for a long time from a more powerful group. It requires that water flow uphill.”

Because of the debate on the merits of school choice to increase the quality and accountability of public education, magnet schools have come to the forefront of the discussion. The Bush administration provided 175 million dollars for charter schools - a form of public school choice being offered as a departure from the bureaucracy of large urban school systems. Although the administration asked for level funding (110 million dollars) for the MSAP for fiscal year 1998, magnet forces including teachers, students, community members and especially parents, found legislators, both Republican and Democrat, who believed in magnet schools and provided 126 million dollars for fiscal year 2001.

These federal funds are provided through a competitive grant process to local school districts for the only federal program which has delivered on the promise of equity and excellence for over 2 million of America’s urban and minority school children. Equity and excellence coexist in these magnet schools and provide public school choice to an increasingly diverse student population.

# In a Box

In the case of **Brown vs the Board of Education**, which made its way through the courts in the early 1950s, the rights of all American children to have an ‘equal’ education was brought to the test. On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren read the decision of the unanimous Supreme Court:

“We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other ‘tangible’ factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does...We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.”

## Mr. Bill Goes To School

Bill Wetzel

Clutching a packet of tax records, health forms, and references proclaiming my potential as a substitute teacher, I sat down at the desk of the district coordinator. I was wearing what was, for me, an abnormally dressy button-down shirt for the occasion. Folders were shuffled, contact information was entered, and I signed a waiver promising that I would not use corporal punishment in the classroom. And that was it: Just two and a half years after my graduation, and without a day of college under my belt, I had successfully found my way back into high school.

Now, this turn of events was a bit odd, considering my background. Since suffering through the strains of 'Pomp and Circumstance,' I had spent a considerable amount of time touring the country, via bike and Greyhound bus, searching for adventure. My high school years, replete with stacks of busywork, were an advanced placement lesson in educational despair; so I'd hit the road armed with a few alternative-ed manifestos and a vow to avoid standardized-test bubbles for at least a year. I traveled from youth conferences to education conferences, from urban free schools to suburban private schools, and I stayed, along the way, with learning-is-living unschooling families and Bible-toting homeschoolers alike. The more I ed-ventured, the more I realized that surveying blueprints for sweeping educational reform on grassy hilltops wasn't enough; I knew that the only way to make real changes was to get in there with the youth.

Such an opportunity presented itself last fall, after a 6-year-old boy I'd met on the road gave me a call. He invited me to teach him piano lessons and live with his family in a mid-size city in North Carolina. I accepted the offer, and because my cash reserve was dwindling, I soon found my way to the steps of the local high school, where I presented myself as substitute material. Little did I know what the next five months had in store for me.

"Are you a new student?" I was asked as I fidgeted my way into Room C-203 and sat at the teacher's desk. Because I was a 21-year-old who's short and smiles a lot, that question would arise dozens of times over the next few months. But that fine February morning, I was serving as a stand-in for an 8th grade biology teacher.

In accordance with the lesson plans, I showed the class a Smithsonian video on the web of life and the politics of genetic manipulation. The roughly 20 students were obviously not too concerned with their ancient cosmic origins, and the sugar highs from that morning's bowls of Frosted Flakes and Captain Crunch weren't helping any. The principal even dropped by to lend me a helping hand. "This is a very deep and complex issue that requires you to think," he said during a pep talk that quieted the students for about 30 seconds.

I survived that first day, and a few weeks later the ante was upped when I was assigned the in-school-suspension hall for the afternoon. As I entered the cramped, windowless room, where 12 students—half boys, half girls—sat quietly, the morning supervisor issued me a stern verbal warning. "They have already had their bathroom time, and there's no reason they should leave their seats or talk at all," she growled. But as soon as she exited, a voice sprang up from the back row: "I don't like people the age of my boyfriend telling me what to do." My response was "I don't either," which prompted a collective double take.

But soon all the students were talking, a couple of them about boyfriends in prison. "Guys," I said, "I don't want you to get in any more trouble, and I don't want to lose my job. Deal?" After some deliberation, an agreement was struck: The discussions could continue so long as one of them policed the crack in the door for potential intruders; then, if someone did approach, one loud clap would send everyone back to the seats they'd been assigned that morning. All afternoon, there was only one clap, prompted by the supervisor, who peered inside the room and found a polite, orderly class.

As spring arrived, I accepted that I was now working within the system. But nearly every day I was torn between keeping classes 'on task,' as my substitute manuals advised, and committing the educational crimes of allowing laughs and voices to fill my classrooms without consequences. Teaching, for me, had become the art of listening to students and giving them room to think and breathe as I tried to appease the administration. I was also aware, of course, that, as a sub-someone not fully vested, careerwise, in the system-I enjoyed freedoms the teachers did not. Many of the faces I saw in the faculty room were masks of gloom or delirium. While I was talking to a veteran French instructor about my transition, she told me: "We teachers have to

let off steam sometimes or we'd go over the edge. If only [the students] knew what we say at lunch time. Welcome to the other side."

I did feel welcome. Just three years after taking the SAT, I'd become strangely accustomed to taking attendance and going to PTA luncheons. And the students were giving more to me and taking more from me than I ever expected. On any given day, I'd listen to some of them sing "Amazing Grace" as others, thinking I wasn't looking, threw magic markers at their classmates' heads. In the library one day, a student sat next to me and recounted her ancestors' escape from slavery, a trek that took them from the deep South to the Canadian wilds. Amid the hyperactive teenage antics and random outbreaks of dance parties and hair-braiding, I was shown diaries.

I also was asked, "Why do you want to teach bad kids?" and I heard hundreds of young voices begging for ears. Here are a few of them:

"I'm a good student when I want to be. School just seems so pointless."

"All my friends that fall in love, all they get is pain."

"Teachers, man, they just don't get it."

"Five of my friends are pregnant. I gave them stuff for the baby."

"Here are the photos of my relatives who are in prison."

"You dance, Bill?"

Looking back, maybe I shouldn't have been so eager to listen. By the time April rolled around, these same students were suggesting, on a daily basis, that I return next year as a full-time teacher. One student even walked me into an adjacent classroom and said to his English instructor: "I don't want you as my teacher. I want Mr. Bill."

Eventually, the students and I agreed that they would circulate a petition seeking approval of a new, student-centered course. The 'Independent Study Program' would allow them, under my supervision, to create their own innovative means of learning, for which they'd do their own research and present the results in diverse formats. Instead of regurgitating chemistry terms for Friday's quiz, for example, they'd study the chemical makeup of pollutants in the local water supply. And for their Romantic literature course, they'd interview local authors and write their own stories and poems.

In two days, more than 300 student signatures were collected and handed to me—along with reports that some teachers had confiscated copies of the petition. In fact, the vice principal dropped in on me one afternoon and, after throwing his copy in the trash can, suggested I "take this as a compliment."

That same day, I submitted the petition and a lengthy proposal to the principal, explaining how the program would operate and why it would be so crucial for the students. He thanked me and said he'd consider the matter.

The next day, at 7 a.m., I got the usual call from the substitute supervisor. Only this time, she proceeded to interrogate me. Why had the students circulated such a petition? Why was I trying to sneak a program in through the back door? Why was I so sure the students were bored? I explained that I'd talked to students extensively; I even shared some of their stories, to which she responded: "You can't always trust the students."

From that day on, my presence was no longer requested at the high school. Whenever I passed the building from a distance, I couldn't help but remember walking, each day, into a room filled with straight rows of desks, then watching them get more and more crooked and, finally, lining them up again after the ninth-period bell rang. I also couldn't forget the 'motivational' poster on the wall of one algebra classroom that read: "Life is not fair. Live with it."

As much as I disagree with those words, I saw few options at the time and accepted defeat quietly. Still, there were hints that my efforts might have paid off. Every once in a while, as I trotted down the sidewalk, I'd hear a "Mr. Bill!" leap from a car window. That one voice would bring back the thousands of voices I'd heard bounce through the school's brick hallways. And today, I recall the words of one student in particular, a 9th grader. After he discovered I wouldn't be returning, he told me: "This school may think you're bad, but I think you're good."

*Bill Wetzel is the founder of Students Against Testing ([www.nomoretests.com](http://www.nomoretests.com)) and Power to the Youth ([www.youthpower.net](http://www.youthpower.net)). He is currently attending New York University and can be reached at [billw@faradic.net](mailto:billw@faradic.net).*

## **IALA CONFERENCE 2002**

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**June 28-30, 2002, Duluth, MN**

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1-218-726-1111 [www.zmchotels.com](http://www.zmchotels.com) Please add 13% tax to above prices. All hotels are within walking distance of the conference center. For other options check the Duluth website.

Presenter Proposals: If you would like to make a presentation, please send your proposal to: Patti Haasch, Cass Lake ALC; 208 Central Avenue NW; Cass Lake, MN 56633. Phone: 218-335-6529 Fax: 218-335-8826 E-mail: phaasch@clbs.k12.mn.us

For more information, go to MAAP website: [www.geocities.com/maapmn](http://www.geocities.com/maapmn)  
or Eduserv website: [www.alternative-education.org](http://www.alternative-education.org).

Keynote Speakers: Howard Fuller, Susan Ohanian. (US Senator Paul Wellstone invited)

### Themes:

Kids as Resources \* Powerful Learning Options \* Technology in the Classroom \*  
Charter School Options \* STARS Option as a Youth Organization \* Brain Based  
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## 32<sup>nd</sup> A N N U A L C O N F E R E N C E

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Northfield, MN 55057

If you have questions, please contact David Bly at:

Phone: 507-664-3750

Fax: 507-664-3751

E-mail: david.bly@nfld.k12.mn.us

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for Learning Alternatives

1651 Jefferson Parkway

Northfield, MN 55057

If you would like a pdf of the brochure which is still at the printers please contact me (david.bly@nfld.k12.mn.us) and I'll send it to you. --- David Bly

# BOOKS and BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Steve Rosenthal

**Thoughts Out of School**, by William Ray Arney

"There is nothing wrong with education. But there may be something frighteningly wrong with the set of practices called schooling. Perhaps recognizing that difference – between education and schooling – will encourage people to think their ways out of schools and into new ways of learning, teaching, educating.... Instead of turning and running from the schools in a frenzy (an act that often lands us in more dangerous institutional arms), perhaps it is possible simply to think ourselves out of schools," writes William Ray Arney in the introduction to his book, *Thoughts Out of School*. The book is a collection of Arney's 'thoughts out of school' in essay form, reflecting on his observations of the public schools in his experience. Recommended reading for teachers and parents. Published by Peter Lang, New York, NY. Web: peterlangusa.com.

Jan Fortune-Wood's third book titled **Bound To Be Free** examining the hidden costs of institutional education is now available to order online in the UK. It will be published in November 2001.

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/1900219174/homeeducationuk0c>

Roland Meighan's latest book, **Natural Learning and the Natural Curriculum**, is a compilation of the author's columns he wrote for *Natural Parent* magazine. Arranged in a logical fashion,



chapters cover such topics as: Where does the bully mentality come from? - It is not what you learn by the way you learn it - What is a good teacher? - Crowd instruction: the cop without a uniform - Dyslexia and the obsession with literacy - and many more. It is available from Educational Heretics Press, 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ.

**Partnership Education in Action** by Riane Eisler is designed as a companion to her earlier book, *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The latest book is a resource, grounded on the partnership philosophy and values, which provides teachers and students with the guiding principles, tools, strategies, activities and sample curricula to implement the classroom. . Partnership Education adopts a holistic approach which supports relations of reciprocity rather than of control. Both books are available from The Center for Partnership Studies, PO Box 30538, Tucson, AZ 85751. Tel: (520) 546-0176.

**Using Journals with Reluctant Writers** by Scott Abrams, is a language arts tool for teachers, especially those who teach at-risk, alternative, and special education students. Journal topics are followed by non-revealing, non-threatening exercises to introduce writing as a means of expression and to allow students to test teacher reactions. Positive teacher responses then encourage students to move on to material that requires more personal reflection and further elaboration. The book is available from Corwin Press, Inc., 2455 Teller Rd., Thousand Oaks, CA 91320-2218.

**The Loneliness of the Long Distance Teacher** By Edward A. Joseph  
This is Mr. Joseph's account of his career in the Yonkers school system from 1967-1996. He spends 17 years as a founder and teacher in a Yonkers public alternative school, "a wonder-filled educational program that creatively met the needs of its students, as well as, [his] own." However in the end he decides to take advantage of early retirement after moving into administration because he realizes he is "no longer interested in expending enormous amounts of energy working in a system whose central beliefs about education were so different from his own." Xlibris, 436 Walnut St., Philadelphia, PA 19106, (215) 923-4686

# PHOTO

Ludmilla's photo at Free School and item about internships

## AD: PUT IN ITS OWN BOX

Professional Development Opportunity for Women Administrators

A series of professional development retreats for women administrators, "Exploring Social Justice Issues in Our Schools Through the Arts" will be offered April 20 and 21; July 16, 17 and 18 and November 16 and 17, 2002. The sessions will be held in the Mid-Hudson Valley, NY. The retreats are part of my doctoral work through the Union Institute. I am an elementary school principal and will be co-facilitating the retreats with artists. We will use creative non-fiction, Theatre of the Oppressed and visual mixed media. It will be an experiential and reflective process.

I am seeking to create a diverse group of 15 women concerned about social justice issues.  
Please contact me ASAP if you are interested: lshapiro1025@aol.com or 845-255-8890.  
I look forward to hearing from you!

Laura Shapiro

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**New Offer! *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.

[www.myfriendlenny.com](http://www.myfriendlenny.com) **Special to AERO subscribers: Reduced from \$25 \$15 including postage!**

**NEW! *A Free Range Childhood: Self-regulation at Summerhill School***

**By Matthew Appleton**

An updated, insightful account of everyday life at Summerhill. This is the first major book to appear on the school since A.S. Neill's 1960 bestseller inspired an international movement for alternative education. Through graceful and reflective writing, Appleton expands on Neill's stirring call for educational freedom, and explains how the world's most famous alternative school continues to demonstrate that children thrive in an atmosphere of freedom, trust and self-government. \$19.95

***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.**

***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 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 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 several years, 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. **\$19.95, 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 *Education Revolution* 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! *The Beginner's Guide to Homeschooling***, Patrick Farenga, President of Holt Associates. 1998 version, great practical overview of how to start homeschooling. **\$10.95 plus \$2 postage**

***Making It Up as We Go Along***, Chris Mercogliano's book about the history of Albany's **Free School**. **\$15 plus \$3 postage.**

### **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

### **VIDEOS**

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, \$15.

**Two hour video of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Stork Family School, Vinnitsa, Ukraine. Said one person who received it:** "I loved your Stork video. What an amazing school! You have some of the best footage of happy young faces I've ever seen." Call AERO to order. Each sale will support Stork. **\$25 including postage**

**\*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 Any 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**

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

**\*Nellie Dick and the Modern School Movement.** A fascinating two-hour interview with a 96-year-old pioneer in 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**

**CONTACT AERO FOR FOUR OTHER MODERN SCHOOL VIDEOS**

**\*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 to your questions. Call 800 769-4171 for an appointment. Only \$65. In-person consultations arranged individually.

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