

DOUBLE ISSUE

The Magazine of Alternative Education

Education Revolution

Issue Number Thirty Seven

SUMMER 2003

\$4.95 USA/5.95 CDN



SAY
NO
TO
HIGH
STAKES
TESTING
FOR
KIDS

Don't Miss the IDEC!

DETAILS INSIDE!

www.educationrevolution.org

Education Revolution

The Magazine of Alternative Education

Summer 2003 - Issue Number Thirty Seven - www.educationrevolution.org

News

- What's an IDEC?
Dana Bennis..... 6
A Harsh Agenda
Paul Wellstone.....7
It's Happening All Over The World..... 7
David Gribble

Being There

- On the Bounce.....9
Street Kids..... 11

Mail & Communication

- Main Section..... 15
News of Schools..... 19
High Stakes Testing..... 21
International News & Communication.....23
Public Alternatives..... 26
Home Education News..... 28
Jobs at Alternative Schools.....29
Jobs and Internships.....30
Conferences..... 30

Revolutionary Times

- The Changing Face of Childhood
Childhood in the 1950's and Childhood Now
Albert Lamb..... 31
Jerry's Ten Signs that You Need to Find a
Different Kind of Education for Your Child....39
That Dreadful Educationalist
Answering A.S. Neill's Critics
John Potter..... 40
Movin' On Down – And In
The Beginnings of the Free School
Mary Leue..... 46

Books Etc.

- Book and CD Reviews..... 49

AERO Books and Videos

- Our Special Offers..... 14

The mission of *The Education Revolution* magazine is based on that of the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO): "Building the critical mass for the education revolution by providing resources which support self-determination in learning and the natural genius in everyone." Towards this end, this magazine includes the latest news and communications regarding the broad spectrum of educational alternatives: public alternatives, independent and private alternatives, home education, international alternatives, and more. The common feature in all these educational options is that they are *learner-centered*, focused on the interest of the child rather than on an arbitrary curriculum.

AERO, which produces this magazine quarterly, is firmly established as a leader in the field of educational alternatives. Founded in 1989 in an effort to promote learner-centered education and influence change in the education system, AERO is an arm of the School of Living, a non-profit organization. AERO provides information, resources and guidance to students, parents, schools and organizations regarding their educational choices.

Education Revolution

The Magazine of Alternative Education

417 Roslyn Road, Roslyn Heights, NY 11577

ISSN#: 110679219

Phone: 516-621-2195 / 800-769-4171

Fax: 516-625-3257

Email: info@educationrevolution.org

Web Site: <http://www.educationrevolution.org>

Executive Director: Jerry Mintz

Director of Research and Development: Dana Bennis

Education Revolution Editor: Albert Lamb

Mail and Communications Editor: Carol Morley

Printer: Brenneman Printing Inc., Lancaster, PA

AERO Advisory Board

Alexander Adamsky, Mary Addams, Chris Balch, Fred Bay, Patrice Creve, Anne Evans, Patrick Farenga, Phil Gang, John Gatto, Herb Goldstein, Dan Greenberg, Jeffrey Kane, Dave Lehman, Mary Leue, Ron Miller, Ann Peery, John Potter, Mary Anne Raywid, John Scott, Tim Seldin, Elina Sheppel, Andy Smallman, Nick Stanton, Corinne Steele, Tom Williams

The Word from Jerry

On the afternoon of Friday, February 23rd I got a phone call, out of the blue, asking me if I would be able to come on the Hannity and Colmes Show on the Fox News Network to talk about a proposal to do away with valedictorians in schools. It seems that they had found my name in an old experts book, and looked at our website. They said they would send a limo to pick me up.

It was only later that I found out that the Fox News Network now has twice the viewership of CNN, and that Hannity and Colmes is one of their top rated shows, with three or four million watching.

I ran out and got a haircut. The woman who cuts my hair two or three times a year laughed that the only time I go there is when I'm going to be on TV.

The limo came, took me to the studio in New York, and they brought me to the Green Room to get ready. I briefly said hello to Hannity and to Colmes as they went through to makeup. Then it was my turn.

This is a "left wing/right wing" show, with Hannity on the right on Colmes on the left. I was warned that Hannity could be pretty rough. I knew I'd only have a few minutes. I hoped to get in as much as I could.

I waited through most of the show in the Green Room.. I was afraid I'd be preempted by Iraq news, or news of the Rhode Island club fire. They put me at the end.

After I was seated between them and the microphone hooked up, before we were on the air, Hannity looked at his notes, looked at me and said, "Oh! A liberal!"

I shot back, "You'll have a lot of trouble figuring out just what I am!"

Then we were on the air. It didn't take me too long to shift from the basic topic to the general concept that education should not be a competition. I pointed out than when someone goes to the library they do not sit them down, test and rank them on the way out. That's not the purpose of the library. It isn't competitive. The same should be true of schools.

"So, you are against all competition. I suppose you don't think they should keep score in soccer games!" they both said.

One the contrary, I replied, "In fact I'm taking a group of students tomorrow to a ping pong tournament!"

At that point, a fellow member of my table tennis club, Dan Green, told me later: "I was watching my favorite TV show, Hannity and Colmes and reading a book. Suddenly someone on the show said "ping pong!" I looked up and it was you!

During the break Hannity said he was just he could beat me in ping pong. Then he asked a bit about my level of competition. "Oh," he said. "Well, maybe not."

After the break I went further into descriptions of democratic education, mentioned the International Democratic Education Conference, and talked about the virtues of homeschooling. Now Hannity was really disarmed and at one point wound up defending me to Colmes!

Welcome to the Education Revolution!

And welcome to our Double Issue for the summer. AERO is joining in with democratic schools around the world to host a special conference in upstate New York this July and you will probably feel our growing excitement as you look within these pages.

I hope we'll see many of you there!

Albert

albertlamb@bigfoot.com

The whole segment was perhaps seven or eight minutes. At the very end they let me get in a mention of our website.

Afterward the producer said she was very happy with the segment and would be happy to have me back some time.

The limo driver was waiting for me outside. He said that he hadn't heard the show, but could see the TV show in the windows from the limo. He said he could tell from the body language that I had done very well. Clearly I had held my own.

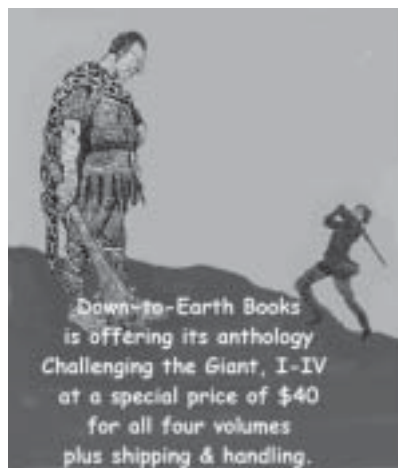
In the next 24 hours we received 3500 hits on our website and a lot of email. Some of the first email was nasty, but most of the emails were from distraught parents who hadn't realized they have educational options.

JerryAERO@aol.com

DOWN-TO-EARTH BOOKS

Publisher of the four-volume anthology
CHALLENGING THE GIANT:
The Best of ΣΚΟΛΕ ("SKOLE"),
The Journal of Alternative Education

Each volume \$14.95 plus \$2 shipping & handling;
or all four \$40 plus \$5 s&h.



Mary Leue,
Down-to-Earth Books
P.O. Box 488
Ashfield, MA 01330
Tel: 413-628-0227
Email: maryskole@aol.com

OR, order from our website,
which offers a wide selection
of hard-to-find books on
educational and lifestyle
alternatives, at:

www.spinninglobe.net

News

IDEC 2003
Troy, New York, USA
July 16 - July 24

The central themes for IDEC 2003 are to challenge the high stakes testing movement, discuss

democratic schooling, and learn about the approaches taken by educational alternatives throughout the United States and the world.

IDEC 2003 unites those from diverse areas of education, such as democratic schools, public alternatives, private alternatives, international schools, charter schools,

homeschooling, holistic approaches to education, and more. What these educators share is a caring approach towards children that respects their interests and opinions.

The IDEC will include students and teachers from both industrialized countries and the third world.

For example, we will have groups from an orphanage in Nepal, from The School of Self-determination in Russia, from democratic schools in Australia and New Zealand, from the Stork Family School in Ukraine, from the Naleb School in Guatemala, from many democratic schools in the United States, from a new school in Finland, from the Rogers School in Hungary, and street kids traveling with an organization in India.

The goal of IDEC 2003, www.IDEC2003.com is to gather a critical mass of people determined to push the momentum of education in a different direction, towards an approach based on respect, equality and democracy.



John Taylor Gatto

The 2003 International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC) will be held at Russell Sage College in Troy, New York from July 16-24. This will be the first IDEC in the United States in the 10-year history of the conference. The conference is being hosted by

The Albany Free School in association with AERO, and the organizers include Free School teachers, students, graduates, parents, and AERO staff.

Although there is much focus on standardization, there is also good reason for hope. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation and the Annenberg Institute, among other foundations, have provided funds for the creation of small, innovative schools. The number of democratic schools in the U.S. and throughout the world is growing each year. Furthermore, research from the U.S., England and Japan shows that students from democratic schools are academically and socially as well off or more so than those from conventional schools. Some of that important investigation, carried out by such researchers as Derry Hannam of England and Yoshi Nagata of Japan, will be available at the 2003 IDEC conference.



Bill Ayers



Monty Neill



Michael Klonsky



Pat Montgomery



Susan Klonsky



David Lehman



Ron Miller

Everyone who attends **IDEC 2003**,

students and adults, can put items on the conference schedule. This open scheduling format has been used at IDECs since the 1997 conference at Sands School in England, which was completely organized by two Sands School students. The goal of this format is to insure that the conference is relevant and interesting to all attendees, and to give each individual a say in what goes on at the conference. This is a similar approach taken by many of the democratic schools throughout the world in their day-to-day practices. There will be a large conference schedule posted prominently, on which attendees can add a workshop, presentation, game, or other activity.

Another characteristic of the IDEC that distinguishes it from other conferences is that it is just as much for students as it is for adults. Just as democratic schools involve both students and staff working together, the IDEC often has as many students in attendance as adults. Present students and graduates of The Free School are involved in the organization of the conference. Isaac Graves, a 15-year old graduate, designed the conference website, www.idec2003.com and coordinated the 2002 and 2003 Free School IDEC Magazines, with help from many present Free School students. The students have brainstormed many ideas of activities that youth in particular may enjoy at the conference, in addition to those activities and workshops in which both students

and adults will be interested. You can see those ideas on the website.

AS of early May, students and/or teachers from 35 democratic or alternative schools are registered for IDEC 2003, including those from 20 countries and 25 U.S. states. Much of our energy in organizing this conference has been fundraising to help those from third world and low income schools get to the conference. We have raised some funds through small foundations and individual donations, but are still hard at work to help as many students and teachers as we can. We are also talking with airlines about possible ticket donations or discounts.

While there will be a great deal of open scheduling throughout the conference, there will also be a handful of pre-set events and speakers. Some speakers include John Taylor Gatto (author of *Dumbing Us Down*), Ron Miller (author of *What Are Schools For?*), Bill Ayers (author of *To Teach*), Zoe Readhead (principal of Summerhill School), Yaacov Hecht (Director of Israel's Institute for Democratic Education), Pat Montgomery (Founder and Director of Clonlara School and Home Education Center), Monty Neill (director of FairTest), Susan Ohanian (author of *One Size Fits Few*), Mikael and Susan Klonsky (director of the Small Schools Workshop), Dave Lehman (principal of Alternative Community School), and Matt Hern (editor of *Deschooling Our Lives*). Panel discussions will include such topics as school decision-making practices, how to challenge the tests, students'

views on education, authentic assessment, teaching and social justice, and creating a democratic school.

Additional highlights of IDEC 2003 include film showings featuring the premier of a documentary about The Albany Free School, a new Summerhill film, a documentary on the New Orleans Free School, and a movie trailer based on John Taylor Gatto's recent book, *Underground History of American Education*.

Another exciting event is the "Innovative College and School Fair." We are gathering alternative and experiential colleges from around the country to display their programs for the students, parents, and teachers of democratic schools. The democratic schools will also set up displays about their programs – a perfect match!

Evenings will involve more social activities such as a talent show, dancing, and musical entertainment. The warm weather should allow us to take advantage of the fields on location at Russell Sage College. Additionally, we are planning excursions to Albany, the Albany Free School, and the beautiful land 30 minutes away in Grafton, NY that is owned by The Albany Free School.

For more conference information, conference flyers (which you can post freely!) and to register, you can go to the conference website at www.idec2003.com, or contact us at info@idec2003.com or by phone at (518) 928-1234 or (800) 769-4171. We hope to see you in July.

Dana Bennis



Susan Ohanian



Rabbi Yehuda Fine



Yaakov Hecht



Zoe Readhead

What's an IDEC?

The IDEC (the International Democratic Education Conference) is an annual gathering of educators and students from across the US and around the world involved with or interested in democratic education. Previous conferences have been hosted in several different countries including Japan, Israel, England, Japan, and New Zealand.

IDEC began in 1993, when teachers and students from democratic schools found themselves at a large conference in Jerusalem, Israel called "Education for Democracy in a Multi-cultural Society." The participants were mostly philosophers, professors and politicians, and the teachers and students hardly had any opportunity to contribute. A small group of teachers and students was invited to the Democratic School of Hadera, a democratic school with 200 students, for two days after the big conference. The discussions were so stimulating that it was agreed to meet annually. For the first four years it was known as the Hadera Conference before being officially dubbed "IDEC" by the student organizers at the 1997 meeting at Sands School.

IDECs reflect the approach chosen by the numerous democratic schools around the world. At these schools, the realization of equal human rights for all members is

their "standard of achievement." Staff work with each student individually, and students and teachers have the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process of the school. Democratic schools are usually no more than 200 students in size to insure that each student's voice is heard.

Although IDEC exists mainly as an annual conference, the attendees have been active in promoting democratic education. AERO, partnering host for IDEC 2003, directs an email listserve for those who have attended or are interested in IDEC. Two hundred teachers and students from around the world are on this list, which helps to network the schools between conferences. To be added to the list, email Jerry Mintz at jerryaero@aol.com. AERO also features an IDEC section on its website, www.educationrevolution.org, including articles on the conference and democratic education, conference videos,

and a listing of democratic schools worldwide.

Attendees have also helped to establish the International Democratic Education Net (IDEN) as a resource for those involved with IDEC. IDEN maintains a members list and puts out an email newsletter. The website for IDEN is <http://www.idenetwork.org>, run by David Gribble from England.

At IDEC 2002 in New Zealand attendees initiated a Student Exchange program. This program is designed so that students from democratic schools can spend time at similar schools around the world. An email listserve for this program is up and running. If you would like to be included on the list, email Isaac Graves at nomoretests@earthlink.

Previous IDECs

- 2002 **Tamariki School**, New Zealand
- 2001 **Institute of Democratic Education**, Israel
- 2000 **Tokyo Shure**, Japan
- 1999 **Summerhill School**, England
- 1998 **Stork Family School**, Ukraine
- 1997 **Sands School**, UK
- 1996 **Democratic School of Hadera**, Israel
- 1995 **The WUK**, Austria
- 1994 **Sands School**, UK
- 1993 **Democratic School of Hadera**, Israel

The countries that have been represented at IDECs include: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Israel, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Philippines, Russia, Thailand, Turkey, UK, Ukraine and US.



A Harsh Agenda

Paul Wellstone

What follows is a short extract from a speech given by the late lamented U.S. Senator Paul D. Wellstone (MN), twenty months before his tragic early death. The speech was delivered on March 31, 2000 to the Teachers College at Columbia University. It reminds us that politicians don't just have to be part of the problem.

Far from improving education, high stakes testing marks a major retreat from fairness, from accuracy, from quality and from equity.

First and foremost, I firmly believe that it is grossly unfair to not graduate, or to hold back a student based on a standardized test if that student has not had the opportunity to learn the material covered on the test. When we impose high stakes tests on an educational system where there are, as Jonathan Kozol says, savage inequalities, and then we do nothing to address the underlying causes of those inequalities, we set up children to fail. Research on high school dropouts indicates that students who do not graduate are more likely to be unemployed or hold positions with little or no career advancement, earn lower wages and be on public assistance.

The effects of high stakes testing go beyond their impact on individual students to greatly impact the educational process in general. They have had a deadening effect on learning. Again, research proves this point. Studies indicate that public testing encourages teachers and administrators to focus instruction on test content, test format and test preparation. Teachers tend to overemphasize the basic skills, and underemphasize problem-solving and complex thinking skills that are not well assessed on standardized tests. Further, they neglect content areas that are not covered such as science, social studies and the arts.

High stakes tests are part of an agenda that has been sweeping the nation. People use words like 'accountability' and 'responsibility' when they talk about high stakes tests, but what they are being is anything but accountable or responsible. They do not see beyond their words to the harsh reality that underlies them and the harsh agenda that they are imposing on teachers, parents and most of all students.

It's Happening All Over the World!

Conventional education
violates children's originality
instead of nurturing it

David Gribble

This article first appeared in the magazine Red Pepper. Our thanks to: www.redpepper.org.uk

A new understanding of education is beginning to emerge from a hundred different sources in dozens of different cultures. I know of schools in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, Holland, Israel and Japan - and that's just the beginning of the alphabet. I have also visited or communicated with free schools in New Zealand, Australia, India, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States, and I have heard of many more in other countries.

It has been good to see Summerhill getting a positive response from the media. Even The Times carried a supportive article by Libby Purves on 13th December. However, it has become plain that many of those who are in sympathy with Summerhillian ideas still believe Summerhill to be unique.

In fact there are scores of schools all over the world with similar ideals, and some of them offer different freedoms to Summerhill, and some of them work in tougher social conditions.

Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts, USA, for instance, with two hundred students between the ages of four and twenty, has no timetable of lessons at all. Children who want to learn to read or to study chemistry do it on their own or with friends, or find a staff member who is willing to help them. More than half of the students who have spent all their school years there have gone on to get university degrees. Many other children, who had suffered humiliation and failure at other schools, have recovered their self-respect at Sudbury and gone on to lead happy and purposeful lives.

At the Fundacion Educativa Pestalozzi in Ecuador, staff have to accept that instructing, pointing out, motivating, persuading and anticipating are not adequate interactions between an adult and a child. Children are allowed absolute freedom of choice within a carefully prepared environment. The school provides no lessons, and if parents are discovered arranging lessons for their children after school they are told to take their children away.

At Bramblewood, a country community in the USA, children live with their families or on their own as they choose, and arrange lessons with adults, singly or in groups when they feel they want to.

I have been to all these places and everywhere I have met relaxed, confident, friendly young people concerned about each other's welfare and the welfare of the world in general. I have also seen some remarkable examples of academic success, but in most places that seems to me to be of secondary importance.

At Sumavanam, though,

in Andhra Pradesh in

southern India, success in examinations is the children's prime objective. The school is in a poor rural area where poverty means a one-room mud house with no furniture and the threat of starvation. Children come to the school when they are able to walk there on their own. Even the very youngest come to school to learn, so that they may pass exams and escape from the poverty that surrounds them. The teachers treat the children with kindness and respect and in break times they play with a radiant freedom, but lesson times are serious.

All the children work independently at their own level, and they help each other as a matter of course.

At Sumavanam the education is free; none of the children's parents have any money. The same is true at Moo Ban Dek, which follows a Summerhillian pattern enhanced by Buddhist principles. Children who have had to beg for food in the city live together in peace and security.

I could write about a dozen more schools, each different in its way but each demonstrating that children's self-respect guides them more effectively than adult authority. Adults can be appallingly unimaginative - how could anyone seriously put forward the idea that every child in this country needs to cover the same curriculum? - and children are innovative and individual. Schoolteachers and governments tend to strive to keep the world the same, and to keep it under control: children want to change the world and make it free.

In the west it is usually only children who have failed in conventional education who are allowed the experience of freedom at school. Parents who have the money can send them to Summerhill or Sudbury Valley, but children whose parents have no money only get the chance if they live in an area where there is a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) like the Oakley Project in Surrey. Liz Noble and Helen Nelson who run it, work on the

principle that "if the self-esteem of the individual is enhanced then the unwanted behavior pattern will cease" The system works, but the authorities cannot believe it; they insist on sending the staff on courses in physical restraint.

Physical restraint is of course inevitable in the end if you want to run your school like a dictatorship. Those with ideas of their own have to be controlled by force.

Conventional education violates children's originality instead of nurturing

it. It is only when they behave badly enough to be sent to a PRU like Oakley that at last they are respected for their ability to think for themselves.

Summerhill shows that children develop when they are not forced to conform; Sudbury Valley shows that children learn when they are not taught; Sumavanam shows that children may strive for conventional objectives when they see a purpose behind them; Oakley shows that children can redeem themselves when they are given the chance. I worked

for five years at Sands School in Ashburton, Devon, which also demonstrated these truths. I used to think that it was the only school in the world, apart from Summerhill, that was taking children seriously. Since retiring five years ago I have been around the world and seen how wrong I was.

There are state schools, private schools and schools dependent on charity; there are boarding schools and day schools, schools for rejects and schools which select their pupils with care, schools with rules and without rules, with punishments and without punishments, with lessons and without lessons, each schools with an individual way of sharing the responsibility for its affairs. What unites them is the understanding that children need freedom to think for themselves if they are not to lose their natural eagerness, sociability, curiosity and self-respect. It happened early this century with Ferrer in Spain, it happened in the early '30s with Summerhill and Dartington Hall in Britain, and it is happening now all over the world. Surely this time the message must get through.



Being There

with Jerry Mintz

On The Bounce

We're now in the third year of our experiment with setting up a democratically run table tennis club within a local Boys and Girl's club.

I should make it clear that this was not originally done as an experiment or demonstration of anything. I was a



Jerry with students who won the NY State Championship

volunteer table tennis teacher at the Club because I love the game and love to teach it. When I was overwhelmed by interest from younger players, I instinctively went to the democratic process as an organizational tool.

There are two elements which this process tests and demonstrates: The first deals with the question of whether a mixture of public school students aged 7-12 could learn to effectively use the democratic process in a very limited situation, although they continue to be public school students.

The second element deals with something I have often asserted about unschooling and democratic schools—that if students follow their interest and study anything passionately and in depth, it ultimately broadens out to connect to a spectrum of learning, because all information ultimately connects. So in this case the question was, how far could a ping pong program

at a Boys and Girls Club go educationally?

One first question to answer is just how motivated were these students, and why? I think that part of the motivation was that each student received individual attention. Each was treated with respect and got to choose what aspect of the game they wanted to work on. This may have been something that did not happen elsewhere in their lives.

How motivated were they? One day when I came in on a different day from my usual volunteer time, I walked down the sidewalk, past a baseball game, toward the Club. As I got out of view I heard someone yell my name. By the time I got inside the door to the Club, the baseball game had emptied out and the students were lined up to sign up for table tennis lessons. When I asked former US Association of Table Tennis President Ben Nisbet where else this phenomenon might happen he said, "China?"

Another key was the democratic process. When I first started the democratic meetings, the kids acted as



Angelo in action

if it was something like a public school class: talking, not paying attention, and so on. Eventually, as they began to realize that every decision they made was implemented as the decision for the club, they got more and more serious about the meetings and wanted to make sure that they were in them and that their votes counted.

One event involved their questioning the work ethic of two of their elected supervisors. This led to them electing, for one week, temporary assistant supervisors who would take their places. The supervisor's job is to take responsibility for the Challenge Ladder and make the changes that need to be made, resolve any disputes and referee any matches where people seemed to have some problem, and basically keep the program going smoothly. The idea was that the temporary supervisors might



Chris and Nick, winners of NYS under 12 and under 10 Championships

become permanent, and the others might be removed, depending upon how it went. It was to be decided at the next meeting.

The kids felt that two of the more recently elected supervisors were doing a good job but two of the ones that had been in longer weren't doing as good a job. In fact, there was one issue, to do with one of them, that had come up in which the number one player was saying that he would accept a challenge if people would basically give him a bribe, in other words give him some food or money. That was brought up in a meeting and it was voted that this was not allowed; they didn't make it retroactive because it hadn't been a rule before.

At one of the meetings there was a discussion about a new rule we made that you had to accept two challenges a day, which was raised from one. The question was whom you'd have to accept as challengers.

They were trying to put in a rule that you could choose whom you wanted to accept - because any of the people six places away from you could challenge you. That was voted on and passed. There were two dissenters: one student who was afraid that his challenges wouldn't be accepted, and myself.

According to our democratic system we asked the minority to say, if they wanted to, why they voted against the proposal. I said I felt this would possibly create a situation in which certain kids could be effectively excluded from being able to make challenges because as soon as they challenged somebody, that person could try to get someone else to challenge them and then play that match. Then we had a re-vote and they unanimously changed it, deciding that you have to accept the first challenge and other challenges in the order that they are made.

An 8-year-old student, who was elected as an Assistant Supervisor, was recently given a warning by the meeting for “abuse of power” when he threatened to put someone at the bottom of the ladder if he didn’t accept his challenge. I wish some of our elected officials could have such an experience.

One day I got a call from one of the students who thought that I should be informed about an incident that happened that day. It really felt just like



Robbie, winner of recent under 12 and under 10 Championships

the kind of call that I would get from another staff member when I was running my school. He told me that one of the supervisors had made an error in judgment in which there was a conflicting challenge going on between an 8-year-old and a 9-year-old. The 9-year-old was calling the 8-year-old names and this supervisor, instead of just correcting him on that, took the side of the other boy, the eight-year-old, and was rooting for him during the match. It eventually reduced the 9-year-old to tears and he wasn’t even able to continue. The feeling was that that was the wrong approach. So this other more newly elected supervisor, a 12-year old, was calling me to let me know what had happened.

When I came in we had a special “staff meeting.” We had never before had a meeting of the supervisors – the four kids and the three temporary assistants. We discussed the best way to handle that kind of situation and everyone agreed that the supervisor should never take sides, that they should always be fair in handling these things.



Frank (10) runner up in NYS under 12

For a long time I had to chair the meetings myself, and they were relatively infrequent, perhaps one or two a month. But the students began to put more items on the agenda, and even bring each other up. This was significant, because it can be a turning point when students are not afraid to confront a peer in a meeting.

A short time into the third year, the students began to chair the meetings, and they did a more and more effective job. They learned how to keep order, stay on the subject, and not be overly aggressive about sending disruptive members out of the meeting for a few minutes after two warnings. But I wondered how much the meeting process still revolved around me, and whether they really believed in it.

Then one day that question was answered. Some of the students had started to send me email. One 10 year-old-boy, of Arab background, emailed me that the students had organized a meeting that Saturday because “everyone was yelling and arguing.” He helped organize the meeting. A chairperson was selected. The issue was that a new student had improperly changed the challenge ladder. They would let the students meet without an adult in the room where we usually met, so they organized the chairs near the office. They voted to teach the new student all of the rules they had passed, and resolved the problem. A rule was

passed that all meetings must be recorded in a logbook. This was the first time there had been a democratic meeting with no adult. There have been many since then.

Meanwhile, the students were winning many trophies at the tournaments in which we participated. The biggest day was when we went to the New York State Championships in New Rochelle. The Club provided a van and brought 11 students. We won the New York State Boys and Girls Club Championship, as well as the individual under 12-years-old and under 10-years-old championships. Since then our students have also won the under 13, under 14 and under 16 year old events at area sanctioned national tournaments.

We’ve been able to get some lessons for our students with a former Chinese men’s champion, Coach Li, and the number 1 and 4 women in the USA, Wang Chen and Lily Yip.

And now to the other element I mentioned at the beginning, the question: To what extent does this interest reach out and connect to a spectrum of learning? The results are becoming clear. The students are becoming more



Rigo and Billy, winning NYS

and more articulate, with better vocabularies in the meetings. They voted to have a fundraising auction, and I taught them how to go into a store and ask for a donation for the auction. Since then shopkeepers have stopped me on the street to tell me how well spoken and polite the students were. Now they are concentrating on publicity and PR, taking responsibility for putting out signs, and press releases, etc. One just emailed me with an idea to put a notice in the bulletin of a nearby church. They have also been working with the Club

art teacher to make posters and a big sign to hang outside of the Club.

I had an interesting discussion on-line with two of the students. They started talking about problems in their schools. One goes to a public school and



Group at ladder

the other to a Catholic school. One student said, "I think the teachers should hear what the kids have to say more often, instead of not listening." They suggested we discuss the problems in schools at a table tennis meeting, and they subsequently did organize that discussion. They also were trying to figure out a way that I could speak in their schools.

Ben Nisbet was so impressed with the students in our program that he came down to the Club and tested five of the students who successfully passed and became the youngest certified table tennis coaches in the country.

It is clear to me now that students who get a glimpse of respect and empowerment will effectively extrapolate something from that experience and use it to "connect to a spectrum of learning." It will be interesting to see what the next stages of development might bring.

Street Kids

My time in India, late last November, was something like being in a dream. It was such a different reality. I was only there a week and was almost never on my own. My hosts at the conference always provided a driver and guide for me, put me in hotels, took care of all of my meals.

On the trip from the airport through Bombay, when we drove by the slums, I saw kids run up to the car. They pointed to their mouths. They wanted food and money. People had warned me not to respond to them but I looked at them, looked into their eyes, and saw that they did not look beaten down or blank, but on the contrary, their eyes looked alive. They looked confident, even proud of themselves. And where there was a group of kids, they seemed to help and support each other, not fight.

My hosts were the DAV Organization. The DAV (Dayanand Anglo Vedic) is one of the oldest and most influential educational groups in India. It is a private organization but it played a very vital role in the social transformation of India during British time and the post independence era.

We had supper at Le Meridian Hotel. The whole leadership of the DAV organization was there and I had a lot of very interesting conversations with people who are publishing major national magazines, one on alternatives in general, one on education. I was given the statistic that there is something like 50 million street kids, working children, who don't go to school.



Jerry with DAV students at conference

I met Prof. Sharma Kuchal. Chopra, the founder of DAV and a doctor of alternative medicine, also Dr. K.B. Kushal, who has done some amazing things in the years that he's been here, organizing the western branch of DAV. He apparently has a fairly radical and visionary orientation.

The highlight of the alternative education conference in Pune, for me,

was on the first morning. Usha Nayar, who has an organization that works with street kids and AIDS, gave an interesting speech. Her office is right in Bombay. She works with two NGOs, one called TATA, and another called TASH (Technology And Social Health Foundation), which works with people in slums, and handicapped people.

On the last day, after the conference, they said I could go where I wished. They would provide a car and driver. First they brought me to another DAV school in New Bombay. I got there for the afternoon session, when there were mostly younger students. Although it was another big school, with over 2000 students, the children seemed quite



DIEMR founder-president, Mr. Chopra

happy and interested, and the teachers were engaging.

They brought lunch, which I had with the principal and some teachers. Then they provided me with a guide, a Miss Ranjeet, who was a bright young woman who did the administration for the school. I asked them to take me to see Usha Nayar.

We drove to her office, located in a nice wooded complex in Bombay itself. We talked to Usha, who was going to have some social workers bring me to a slum, but I had another idea.

Ever since I met Rita Paniker of the Delhi based Butterflies organization, at the Japan IDEC, I have wanted to understand more about the street children of India. Butterflies has a democratic program through which street children and working children can get schooling. At that IDEC, Rita had brought with her a 15-year old-boy named Amin, who still lived at the Delhi train station. He was a speaker at the IDEC, and talked about how he had organized a union of working children

and was fighting to get recognition from the Indian government as a union. The government said they were too young, to which he countered that they were not too young to work. I taught Amin how to play table tennis in Japan. Later he sent me an email from the Butterfly office, expressing wonder that he, a street kid in India, and I, from New York, had become friends in Japan. Still later he e mailed me that he had passed a test and was going on to higher education, and that he had connected with his parents for the first time since leaving them at 11 years old.

Coincidentally, it turns out that Usha Nayar trained Rita Paniker. I asked Usha if it would be possible to meet some



Ceremony at founding of new DAV school in Pune

working and street children. She didn't know if it could be set up so quickly, but she called two of her social workers, women who usually worked with handicapped people in the slums, and we arranged to pick them up and go to the Bombay train station,

We drove over to the station, which was a beehive of activity. Usha had warned us that it was not likely we would meet any street kids, as they wanted to be invisible. When we first arrived, it certainly seemed to be a hopeless task. But the social workers knew where to go. They bought us platform tickets so we would not get into trouble with the officials there. We went up one big set of stairs and down another. Then from the platform, the social workers motioned to a group of kids who were hanging out between the tracks. Some of them came over to us. They only spoke Hindi, so the social workers translated our communications. I shook hands with them and noticed a white powder on my hands. It was an opiate that many of the street children inhaled.

The platform we were on was very crowded, so the workers decided that we should cross the tracks to the quieter side. It must have looked strange: The administrator, the young woman from the DAV school, and the two social workers, in their beautiful saris, myself, and a half dozen street kids, all crossing the tracks. I'm sure the young DAV woman must have been wondering what she had got herself into, but she was a very good sport about it.

We talked on the quiet platform for almost an hour. Many other homeless people of all ages joined the circle. Eventually there were about 20 or 30 people surrounding us. As previously instructed, I kept my hand firmly in the pocket which had my wallet, as pickpocketing is a common occurrence here.

A woman came over who was living in the station with her four children. She said she couldn't even live in a slum, as the slum-dwellers actually paid rent, and some of those cardboard and metal shacks even had electricity! So they were homeless at the train station. Nevertheless she sent three of her children off to school every day! One of the most startling sights was when her daughter came back from school, wearing her neat and clean school uniform, her big book bag on her back,



Orphans at shelter in New Mumbai

only to sleep on the ground at the train station!

We met some brothers who had run away from a home which could not afford to have them live there. One brother, 15, bought combs and sold them to people at the station, making about 200 rupees a day, about \$5. But half of that went to buy the opiate. And some he sent home to his parents! He said he wanted to get off the drugs.

The people who lived there used all kinds of innovative ways to survive, sometimes riding a train to the next station and another one back, just to be able to wash up, or to sell things on the train. Many of them picked rags and plastic to sell for recycling. The people I met were not emaciated, and did not seem downtrodden. The kids played and



Dr. Usha Nayar, Chairman, Technology and Health Foundation, Mumbai

danced but did not fight with each other. Two girls hit a shuttlecock back and forth with two racquets. Another girl, who looked like a young teenager, took care of her baby.

I found out that the homeless people at the train station tended to form themselves into large family-type groups, and this was one of them.

The mother said she sometimes worked cleaning houses. She said that if someone needed medical help they would pool their money and bring them to a doctor.

I asked if people did anything to discourage young children from using the opiate. They laughed. The answer was no. But a 12-year-old boy who lived there said he refused to use drugs. He seemed very bright. He also went to school every day and came back to stay at the train station.

I quietly arranged for one of the social workers to get some food for the group. She was accompanied by the 15 year old. They went over to a far end of the station to buy something. I was told to be careful not to take out any money myself, but was to pay her back after we left.

We continued talking on the platform until it began to get dark. I then noticed small swarms of mosquitoes buzzing over everyone's head, and I suddenly realized that I had come unprotected to the station, with short-sleeved shirt and no insect repellant. Since I didn't want

to get malaria, I decided that we had better leave, and we said our good byes just as the food arrived for the group,



Jerry at the Mumbai station with homeless children

with a flurry of excitement. They yelled a farewell and thanks again as we left, and we waved back.

One of the social workers, Chitra, said she would follow up with some of the kids we had met. I gave her some extra money for that purpose. She said she would try to get the boy who wanted to quit drugs some help in a program to do that. And she said she'd try to find resources for the other kids.

In an email she sent me two weeks later she said, "The boy who is going to school and not on drugs is Vikram Mandavkar. We saw his school books and note books. Writes very neatly but is not able to say what he wants to do - sports, read books etc." She said she will try to get him a library card at the local library and see if she can get him into a sport program.

She continued: "The other boy, Umesh, who is around 15 and sells combs in the local trains appears to be a nice boy. We are working out an arrangement with Kripa Foundation an organization which works for de-addiction and I will find out the program schedule from them."

I also had an email chat with Usha, who intends to come to the IDEC. I asked her if it was possible to set up a program in Bombay (Mumbai) similar to Butterflies.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

One thing that all kids going to alternative schools have to deal with is being seen as somehow special or different. Sometimes this can seem like a good thing but at other times it is difficult for all concerned. This picture was taken at Summerhill in the mid-60's when the Canadian Film Board was making a film about the school.

The Planned Environment Therapy Trust Archive and Study Centre (the PETT), in England, holds an interesting collection of material related to alternative schools.

Their website:
www.pettarchive.uk.co



AERO

Books and Videos

Order by credit card

(call: 800-760-4171)

or pay by check

(using the form on the inside back page)

Or order from the AERO Website:

www.educationrevolution.org

THE ALMANAC OF EDUCATION CHOICES, 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. **\$20.00**

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 triumphs and tragedies in her life. www.myfriendlenny.com \$19.95 including postage!

The Underground History of American Education (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. \$30.

Creating Learning Communities 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.**



“Try to get higher up in the pecking order.”

A Free Range Childhood: Self-regulation at Summerhill School
By Matthew Appleton -An updated, insightful account of everyday life at **Summerhill**. \$19.95

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**

GREEN REVOLUTION, the newsletter of the **School of Living** - a 60-year-old organization that pioneered the environmental protection movement, consumer protection, and is involved with land trust and communities movements (AEROs sponsor). **\$10 (half price)**

Campus-Free College Degrees, Thorson's Guide to Accredited College Degrees through Distance Learning, by Marcie Kisner Thorson. **\$24.95**

What are Schools For, by Ron Miller **\$20** *The Homeschool Book of Answers*, Linda Dobson, **\$24.95** *Making It Up as We Go Along*, Chris Mercogliano's book about the history of Albany's **Free School**. **\$15.**

AUDIOCASSETTES:

AERO has an expanded list of over 100 tapes from our show, The Education Revolution on the TalkAmerica Network and Cable Radio Network. 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 **\$10 apiece**

VIDEOS

DEMOCRATIC MEETINGS. A two-hour tape of demonstrations of various democratic meetings. **\$25**

HOMESCHOOL RESOURCE CENTERS. A video of three homeschool resource centers featuring the Snakefoot Education Center, at Common Ground Community, Puget Sound Community School and Clearwater School, in Seattle. **\$25**

SUMMERHILL VIDEO. Two videos in one: a 1990 conference at Summerhill, with interviews of Summerhill students and alumni as well as vivid footage of the Summerhill end-of-term celebration and Summerhill's 70th anniversary celebration in August, 1991. We also have a 1995 tape of Sands School and Summerhill. **\$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 in 1893, she started anarchist schools in England back in 1908, went to the US in 1917 and taught at and ran Modern Schools until 1958. **\$25** Transcript of Nellie Dick and the Modern School! **\$5**

CODE CRASH—For quickly learning the Morse Code. People interested in getting their amateur radio license will be amazed. It works. **\$20**

Mail & Communications

Edited by Carol Morley

The New Federal Education Law “Stinks”: There is no question where the Maine Education Association (MEA) stands when it comes to the new federal education law. “The new federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act stinks,” says MEA President Rob Walker. He believes the mislabeled ‘Leave No Child Behind Act of 2001’ promoted by President Bush transforms ESEA into a political instrument. “It is designed to make public schools fail,” he says. “This clearly is an attempt to set up so many unrealistic standards for student performance that we cannot meet them,” observes Walker. And, once a school fails it is subject to sanctions that divert funding and control from the public to the private sector “MEA believes that at the heart of the new law is an anti-public school bias,” Walker warns. “In return for minor funding, less than 9 percent of Maine’s total costs, the federal government imposes new standards for the profession, an elaborate curriculum, and an unrealistic accountability system.” www.maine.nea.org/dir2/esea_stinks.htm



From the **Unkindest tax cut is bound to fail**, by Julian Borger in the Guardian Weekly, 22-05-03: Bush cemented his image as a moderate by pushing through a bipartisan education reform bill entitled ‘No Child Left Behind’. The idea was to spend more on schools but to submit their pupils to more tests to ensure the money was not going to waste. The bill scored headlines and warm words from the icon of the Democrats, Senator Edward Kennedy.

Two years on, the plug is being pulled on the law’s ambitions. The funding proposed for the 2003 budget is \$47bn below the scheme’s requirements. Kennedy derided the plan as a “tin cup budget” that “may provide the resources to test our children, but not enough to teach them.”

Consequently up to 85% of state schools may be classified as “failing” under the new law. As such, they face sanctions including “reconstitution” – the dismissal of a school’s entire staff. Even special school subsidies for soldiers’ children are being cut, an act of extraordinary hypocrisy for a president who lionizes the military.

Education reforms and standardized testing - from The Alternative to Testing Monomania in Schools, by John Katzman and Steven Hodas: Recent attention paid to a study from researchers at Arizona State University has highlighted some troubling fallout from the seemingly unstoppable movement for annual high-stakes testing of public school students. On the one hand, the authors found that the sudden and intense focus

of teachers and administrators on these tests has failed to translate into gains on other standardized assessments such as college entrance exams or the National Assessment of Educational Progress. At the same time, the researchers documented instances of administrators failing to promote ‘problem’ students to grades in which they would be tested, encouraging students to drop out rather than sit for graduation exams, or simply expelling them prior to an important test. As experts in standardized tests we’d be the first to agree that testing as currently practiced is often incoherent and deeply flawed. In a high-stakes world you get what you measure. If the only thing that truly matters is performance on a single test, then educators will naturally focus on that test to the exclusion of all else. If on the other hand, schools are also held accountable for outcomes other than test scores, you can mitigate the testing monomania while deepening the theory and practice of accountability. Neither good nor bad accountability systems are foregone conclusions, and work done today by educators, researchers, policy-makers and parents will determine which we get. In the world of high-stakes testing, the highest stakes are on the creation of accountability systems that measure the right things and use those measurements in ways that support better teaching and learning.

Contrary to Orwell, Democracy Rules on the Big Animal Farm, by James Gorman, 1/14/03: When red deer stand up and honeybees dance, they are not simply stretching their legs or indicating where the nectar is, according to a new study. As bizarre as it may seem, they are voting on whether to move to greener pastures or richer flowers. The process is unconscious, the researchers say. No deer counts votes or checks ballots; bees do not know the difference between a dimple and a chad. But no one deer or bee or buffalo decides when the group moves. If democracy means that actions are taken based not on a ruler’s preference, but the preferences of a



majority, then animals have democracy. Not surprisingly, decisions based on majority preferences tend to fit in with what most individuals in the group want. But, the researchers say, this is not a mere tautology. An analysis based on some hefty mathematical models that they developed shows that democracy in groups of animals can have a tangible survival edge over despotism. Dr. Tim Roper, of the University of Sussex in Brighton, England, who did the research with Dr. Larissa Conradt and reported it in the current issue of Nature, said that presumably the deer and swans don’t whine as much as people

do, or threaten to find a new flock if everyone keeps going to the same place with the soggy French fries. But the question - how the decision gets made - is the same. When majorities decide, more individuals get what they want, and that should translate into better survival. There could, of course, be situations with incredibly smart or sensitive despots that maximize the benefit to the group, but Dr. Conradt and Dr. Roper did not come up with them. Dr. Roper said the research was meant to suggest a new way of looking at decision making and a new area for research. The models apply only to animals that make group decisions. It may be that some animals, like domestic cats, for instance, do not vote, do not care to vote, and have no interest in any sort of group activity. They were not, however, a subject of the paper.



Gates Gives \$31 Million for Schools:

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has announced \$31 million in grants for what has become the singular focus of its education efforts: small high schools. This time, the world's largest philanthropy gave grants to nine

organizations to help them create a new breed of alternative high schools, the places students often go when they've left 'regular' schools. The idea is to create a network of 168 schools, possibly including private schools, which would combine the supportive environment of many alternative schools with high expectations. "For 20 years, many alternative schools have done a good job of providing a nurturing place for students, but they haven't always had a strong academic component," said Tom Vander Ark, the foundation's executive director for education. The foundation spent the past year and a half searching the country for schools that provide good support and strong academics. They found several, and this grant is meant to create others that, like them, take kids on the verge of dropping out and turn them into college material. Some of the schools will be created from scratch; others will be revisions of existing programs. Public, private and charter schools will be included. The foundation estimates the schools will have about 33,000 students. seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/education/134641616_gates26m.html

From St. Paul Schools Reject Grant Money from Gates

Because of Restrictions, by John Welbes: As a substantial chunk of Bill Gates' grant money sat within their schools' reach, some teachers in St. Paul decided the cash came with too many strings attached. Staff at Central and Como Park high schools this fall decided not to seek the high-profile grants that would have helped set up small learning communities in their schools. It's rare for anyone to turn down the Microsoft billionaire's money, but some teachers say signing on with Gates would have buried them under larger workloads and done nothing to fix their most pressing problem: big classes. Mike Humphrey, a math teacher at Central, said that referring to "small" learning communities doesn't seem appropriate when many teachers are seeing 180 students move through their classrooms each day. More than \$2.3 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation already is being used by three St. Paul high schools to implement small learning communities. All seven of St. Paul's public high schools received planning money from the Gates

Foundation to help them study the concept. The move toward small learning communities is a key part of the district's plan to redesign its large high schools. Students pick a subject area, such as technology or global studies, and become part of a smaller group of students and faculty within the school. Both Central and Como still are moving toward some form of small learning communities, but they'll have to look to federal grants or other funding sources to make it happen.

Schools that Do Too Much; Wasting Time and Money in

Schools: In her new book, Etta Kralovec insists that schools scale back or even eliminate activities that aren't central to their educational mission. She cites a long list of such activities; from drug-awareness programs to student fund-raising events that she believes distract teachers and students from learning. But competitive sports get most of her attention. While Kralovec acknowledges that athletics have value - indeed, she asserts that they're "vitally important to adolescent development" - she also feels that they drain resources from classrooms and disrupt the education process. She suggests instead that community organizations take over the operation of sports teams. In this interview, Kralovec discusses the hidden costs of sports and extracurricular activities. www.teachermagazine.com/

From **Perverting the SAT**, by Julie M. Quist: The SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) has been used by colleges for many years to predict the success of students in college. Colleges have found SATs to be an effective tool in measuring college aptitude, that is, the ability to do college work. Recently the Trustees of the College Board for the SAT voted to change the SAT from an aptitude test to an achievement test. With these changes, the SAT will be redefined as something entirely different from what it has been; it will now measure how well the student has absorbed the curriculum the school system has provided, which must match the new federal curriculum. The new federal K-12 curriculum requires little more than minimum competencies in knowledge-based learning. Attitudes and beliefs are the core curriculum of the new standards. The federal



curriculum is based on creating a new global citizen, not educating children with broad-based knowledge. As a consequence, the SAT realignment will recommend for advancement to post-secondary education those students who most thoroughly parrot the worldview of the now required federal curriculum. Unless nonpublic entities teach that curriculum, their students will have a harder time being accepted into colleges (or qualifying for scholarships, advanced

placement and the like). The new SAT will marginalize nonpublic students who do not comply with the federal curriculum. Since the federal Goals 2000/School-to-Work laws were passed in 1994, restructuring education for ALL students in our country, the bringing of nonpublic students under its all-encompassing umbrella has been a top concern. This SAT realignment is one significant way by which the agents of change in this country will accomplish that goal. Julie M. Quist, Maple River Education Coalition (MREdCo) Vice President, 1402 Concordia Ave, St. Paul, MN 55104. Web: <http://www.EdWatch.org>.

From **The Origins of Peace and Violence**: It is generally known that deprivation of sensory stimuli like voice and vision in the early phases of human life will cause irreversible mental retardation in the child. Also the prevention of child play will cause intellectual deficits in the adult. Additionally there are the two body sensor systems, the 'somatosensors'. One is the vestibular sensor for maintaining orientation and upright walk. The other one is the skin, for sensing touch. Through the work of James W. Prescott, Ph.D. and various others it was established that these previously neglected senses are of overwhelming importance for the development of social abilities for adult life. Their deprivation in childhood is a major cause for adult violence. Web: www.violence.de/

Fertile Turtle: Liberty School's new on-line zine is something worth checking out. It was created by my journalism class and will now be an ongoing publication. The students have worked hard on the site and are covering stories about the school, as well as national and international issues. We even have a story from our foreign correspondent in Australia. We are open to stories from anyone – teachers, students, and parents. Just send to submissions@fertileturtle.org. To read the zine go to www.fertileturtle.org.



We're a cooperative in Vermont that is starting a school this fall and recently started a quarterly fiction magazine for 9- to 14-year-olds. The magazine offers some opportunities for its readers to both contribute material to be published and to participate in the editorial process. In future we have plans to develop resources and discussion groups for student writers/poets/artists and some interested adults on our Web site. We make a specific effort to connect with our readers in a supportive and respectful way, supporting the tenets of egalitarianism and democratic education. We eschew gratuitous violence in the magazine's contents and especially value pieces that tell a good story while helping bring out important issues. The magazine is called **Just Weird Enough: Science fiction, fantasy & fable**, and our Web site is www.justweirdenough.com. You can get a free copy through e-mail by sending a request to subscriptions@justweirdenough.com or by sending a letter to PO Box 247, Plainfield, VT 05667

The executive editor of **Skipping Stones** magazine, Arun N. Toke, has received the 2002 Writer Award from **The Writer** magazine. The Writer Awards celebrate and recognize writers who, through their work, contribute to the community of writers, bring about changes in the publishing field, or use their writing to make a difference by informing, inspiring and motivating others. Skipping Stones has also announced The 2003 Youth Honor Awards. This year's theme is "Connecting with Nature." Original writings and art from youth ages 7 to 17 may be entered by June 20, 2003. For more information, contact PO Box 3939, Eugene, OR 97403. Tel: (541) 342-4956. Web: www.skippingstones.org.

What Research Says About Montessori's Effectiveness, by Tim Seldin, President of the Montessori Foundation: "More than 200 studies have been done about the long-term effects on

children who have attended Montessori schools in the US. However, the research that has been done to date is far more limited than it should have been after its more than 90-year history in this country." The author goes on to site the reasons for this lack of studies and goes on to highlight some of the most important studies that have been done to date. The article appeared in the Winter 2002 issue of *Tomorrow's Child*, 1001 Bern Creek Loop, Sarasota FL 34240. Web: www.montessori.org.

Is This School a Learning Organization? Ten Ways to Tell: A school culture that invites deep and sustained professional learning will have a powerful impact on student achievement. Leaders of schools, like leaders of businesses and hospitals, want their organizations to be flexible and responsive, able to change in accord with changing circumstances. Individuals learn best when the content is meaningful to them and they have opportunities for social interaction and the environment supports the learning. That idea applies to organizations as well. In this excerpt, Ron Brandt describes 10 ways to tell whether your school is a true learning organization. <http://www.nsdc.org/library/jsd/brandt241.html>

SEAL is an international networking organization for people who are passionate about learning. We are interested in all approaches to learning which draw on the full capacity of the individual - body, emotions, mind and spirit. Typical areas of interest are Multiple Intelligences, Learning Styles, and Neuro-Linguistic Programming. We organize groundbreaking conferences open to all, and provide networking opportunities for over 600 members in over 40 countries. Visit our website: www.seal.org.uk. 37 Park Hall Road, East Finchley, London N2 9PT.

The **Alternative Schools Research Project** web site has been developed and is now available on the Web. Be sure to bookmark the site and refer to it again in the future. We will be adding more information (e.g. presentations, publications, reports) as it becomes available. Web: ici.umn.edu/alternativeschools/

The **Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT)** project is based on the idea that democratic practices in schools play an important role in the transition toward more open societies. Active in 29 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and more recently Latin America and South East Asia, RWCT introduces research-based instructional methods to teachers and teacher educators. These methods are designed to help students think reflectively, take ownership for their personal learning, understand the logic of arguments, listen attentively, debate confidently, and become independent lifelong learners. The program can be used in all grades and subjects with existing curricula. <http://www.rwct.org/>

Virtual UK Education with Real Degree, by Rashmee Z. Ahmed: A British government-backed initiative offers students around the world a virtual UK education ending in a real degree from Cambridge, York or Sheffield universities. UK e-Universities Worldwide (UkeU), which has just opened its online doors for the spring courses, is specifically aimed at "students who recognize the quality of a UK education but cannot access

it,” according to chief executive John Beaumont. It comes just four months after MIT kick started what it hoped would be a global revolution in education by putting its courses online for free. But unlike MIT’s attempt to stop the commercialization of online education, UKeU says it is setting out to enhance its quality by offering what it trendily terms “best of breed courses from some of the UK’s best-known universities.” Unlike the MIT’s no-degree online initiative, the students end up with real degrees at the end of the elearning period. UKeU claims a first in that “degrees are awarded by the university offering the course.” It says this makes it “significantly different from other Internet-taught degrees where degrees are awarded by an Internet university.” In effect, goes the marketing buzz, it offers everyone, everywhere, the possibility of becoming a Cambridge graduate without leaving the confines of, say, Coimbatore or Canberra. But realists point out that UKeU courses are unlike the MIT philanthropic project in another key way as well: they will cost the same as conventional university degrees. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>



The Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) at Arizona State University offers high quality analyses of national education policy issues and provides an analytical resource for educators, journalists, and citizens. It includes the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU), the Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA), the Education Policy Reports Project (EPRP), the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU), and the Language Policy Research Unit (LPRU). The EPSL is directed by ASU Professor Alex Molnar. Visit the EPSL website at <http://edpolicylab.org/>

The Braitmayer Foundation supports organizations and programs from across the U.S. that enhance the education of K-12 children. The Foundation is particularly interested in curricular and school reform initiatives, professional development opportunities for teachers, and local community efforts that increase educational opportunities for students. Web: www.braitmayerfoundation.org/guid.htm

Building-Bridges Conference, by Peter Staffa: Seven teachers from the Friedrichsgymnasium returned from a one-week visit to their Israeli and Palestinian friends in Israel. In a workshop we became mediators between Jewish and Arabic Israelis who met there for the first time. We had to convince our Israeli friends that we also wanted to visit the old city of Jerusalem and our friends in Bethlehem. They accompanied us to Jerusalem. The Old City was almost empty; there were hardly any visitors. We went to see the Grave Church and the Wailing Wall. On Monday we went to the checkpoint to Bethlehem. We walked across the border, this time accompanied by barbed wire, army vehicles and machine guns. The street, which had been crowded with people offering their goods in 1999, was completely empty and quiet. Then we made our way to the Hope Flowers School. Ibrahim, our Palestinian friend, picked us and took us to the roadblocks near the school. All the roads to the school are blocked though this is an autonomous Palestinian area with

children living there. We also saw the three watchtowers with soldiers armed with machine guns and ready to open fire. Despite all the difficulties the school has changed since my visits in 1999 and 2000: they continued the school building, finished a sports field, work on a garden now, and completed a water treatment plant. We want to work with these special people and offer a piece of future.

Founded on 1/1/2001, **The National At-Risk Education Network (NAREN)** is a 501(c)(3) non-sectarian educational grassroots membership organization dedicated to both promoting the success of at-risk youth in school and life, and supporting the educators who work on their behalf. NAREN is a vehicle of information, support, networking and educational reform for people interested in the field of at-risk education. The NAREN website is free, except for the database of effective hands-on and action-research oriented programs and practices. Membership may be gained online at <http://www.atriskeducation.net>. Email: info@naren.info.



Harvey B. Scribner, a no-nonsense former teacher from Maine who went on to become the chancellor of New York City’s school system as it underwent a turbulent shift toward local control in the early 1970’s, died December 23, 2002 in Waterville, Me. He was 88. Dr. Scribner arrived in New York after two decades as a teacher and administrator in Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont and New Jersey, compiling a record of innovation and gentlemanly leadership. After leaving the New York school system, Dr. Scribner became a professor at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, where he researched educational leadership and school administration. At the university, he wrote an acclaimed book based on his experiences: ‘Make Your Schools Work: Practical, Imaginative and Cost-Free Plans to Turn Public Education Around’ (Simon & Schuster, 1975). Dr. Scribner also helped develop alternative schools in Boston for underprivileged children and a master’s degree program for teachers in Washington.

From **Survey: Students Give Schools Middling Marks**, by Erik W. Robelen: Most high school students do not believe their public schools are preparing them “extremely well” to know how to learn, get a good job, or go to college, according to an annual survey of teachers and students released last week. Teacher confidence was not much higher. Fewer than one-fifth of the teachers surveyed gave the top rating to their schools in preparing students to learn. The findings are part of the 19th annual survey of teachers and students conducted by Harris Interactive for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., a New York City-based insurance company. They were based on interviews earlier this year with a nationally representative sample of 2,049 public school 7th to 12th graders, 1,273 public school teachers of kindergarten through 12th grade, and 1,004 K-12 principals.



Children’s Bill of Rights, Lawrence de Bivort: The Children’s Bill of Rights project involved over 650 children from three continents, and resulted in the first Bill (or Declaration) of Rights drafted, in part, by children. Summary: (1) Children’s

universal rights. As compared to adults, children until the age of 18 have the right to receive special care and protection. (2.) Right to inherit a better world. (3) Right to influence the future. (4) Right to freedom of thought, opinion, expression, conscience and religion. (5) Right to media access. (6) Right to participate in decisions affecting children. (7) Right to privacy. (8) Right to respect and courtesy. (9) Right to an identity. (10) Right to freedom of association. (11) Right to care and nurturing. (12) Right to leisure and play. (13) Right to safe work. (14) Right to an adequate standard of living. (15) Right to life, physical integrity and protection from maltreatment. (16) Right to a diverse environment and creativity. (17) Right to education. (18) Right to access appropriate information and to a balanced depiction of reality. (19) Right not to be exposed to prejudice. (20) The right to a clean environment. (21) Right to a small national debt. (22) Right to vote over 14. (23) Right to medical care. (24) Legal rights. (25) Right not to participate in war. The Children's Bill of Rights secretariat is at ESI, 5504 Scioto Rd., Bethesda, MD 20816. It may also be reached via e-mail to debivort@umd5.umd.edu and lenar@tenet.edu.

The goal of the **Soros foundations network** throughout the world is to transform closed societies into open ones and to protect and expand the values of existing open societies. In practice, an open society is characterized by the rule of law; respect for human rights, minorities, and minority opinions; democratically elected governments; a market economy in which business and government are separate; and a thriving civil society. Web: <http://www.soros.org/>

Global Education Gulf Increasing: The learning gulf across the globe is deepening, with schooling systems in some countries actually regressing, according to the United Nations. Eighty-three countries were on track to deliver by 2015 an 'Education For All' (EFA) target, set by the World Education Forum in Dakar two and a half years ago. But at the same time, 70 other countries would fail to meet the target and some were actually going backwards. The problem is being made worse by a shortage of teachers – some 35 million more are needed throughout the world. The findings appear in the 'Education For All Global Monitoring Report: Is The World On Track?' published by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 11/13/02.

Test Scores Lag as School Spending

Soars: Spending more money on education won't improve test scores, says a new report on academic achievement. The American Legislative Exchange Council, a conservative think tank, studied two generations of students, 1976-2001, and graded each state using over a hundred measures of educational resources and achievement. A key finding of the report shows there is no immediate evident correlation between conventional measures of education inputs, such as expenditures per pupil and teacher salaries, and educational outputs, such as average scores on standardized tests. Web: www.alec.org/viewpage.cfm?pname=3.1085



U.S. Youth Can't Find Iraq,

(AP), 11/20/02: Young Americans may soon have to fight a war in Iraq, but most of them can't even find that country on a map, the National Geographic Society said. The society survey found that only about one in seven – 13 percent – of Americans between the age of 18 and 24, the prime age for military warriors, could find Iraq. The score was the same for Iran, an Iraqi neighbor. Although the majority, 58 percent, of the young Americans surveyed knew that the Taliban and al Qaeda were based in Afghanistan, only 17 percent could find that country on a world map. The survey asked 56 geographic and current events questions of young people in nine countries and scored the results with traditional grades. The surveyed Americans got a 'D,' with an average of 23 correct answers. Mexico ranked last with an average score of 21, just three points from a failing grade. Topping the scoring was Sweden, with an average of 40, followed by Germany and Italy, each with 38. None of the countries got an 'A,' which required average scores of 42 correct answers or better on the 56 questions.



The **BioCultura Conference** is Spain's largest gathering for complimentary and natural approaches to conventional living. For the second year in a row, Dr. Pat Montgomery, Founder and Director of Clonlara School, has been invited to speak at the conference to take place in Madrid in November. Pat was invited to speak about Clonlara School and its home-based education program. For more information about Clonlara, contact Terri Wheeler at 1289 Jewett Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Tel: (734) 769-4511. Web: www.clonlara.org.

News of Schools

Endicott College and The Institute for Educational Studies New Masters of Education In Montessori Integrative Learning:

Beginning July 2003 we will offer the new Masters of Education concentration in Montessori Integrative Learning. The three-semester course of study includes elementary (six -12 years) teacher preparation. The on-line seminars and course work are divided into three sections: 1. The Context; 2. Montessori Theory; 3. Presentations and Practicum. Since much of the experience of learning how to teach in a Montessori environment is based on the presentations of didactic materials this course of study utilizes recent technological advances. We are now developing an interactive CD that will enable students at a distance to have the same experiences groups have "face to face." For further information see <http://www.ties-edu.org> or write Cate Turner-Jamison at ties@endicott.edu.



Puget Sound Community School: Originally, PSCS was a home school co-op with no permanent classroom, but they recently acquired a space, which finally qualified them to become an official private school. Early on, PSCS hooked up with Speakeasy to provide web hosting, Internet access and e-mail accounts. One of the earliest series of field trips they had was to the Speakeasy Cafe where students would teach a group of senior citizens how to work computers. Eventually, they started holding monthly overnight trips to the cafe where students would teach each other computer skills, bring their own computers in to form Local Access Networks, and hold talent shows or all night poetry readings. Before long, several of the young prodigies had jobs here. www.speakeasy.net/main.php?page=community&profile=pscs

The Institute for Social Ecology was established in 1974 as an independent institution for the purposes of education, research, and outreach in the field of social ecology. For over a quarter of a century, ISE has inspired individuals involved in numerous social change movements to work toward a directly democratic, liberatory, and ecological society. The educational programs of the Institute for Social Ecology have served more than 2,000 students around the world. For further information on our programs, contact the ISE by email at info@social-ecology.org, telephone 1 (802) 454-8493, or visit our website at <http://www.social-ecology.org/>.

The Living School is a democratic educational environment that is community-based, self-directed and focused on the creativity and intelligence inherent in each person. The school fosters inquiry in each participant by allowing the school itself to be a living experiment in learning. The school provides a safe and supportive learning environment as well as access to a wide variety of mentors, materials, and experiential learning situations. For more information call (303) 449-0866 or email livingschool@aol.com. PO Box 6105, 5001 Pennsylvania Ave., Boulder, CO 80306. Web: www.livingschool.org.

HeartLight Port Elizabeth is Thriving:

Sue Spies, our resident permaculturist, has created a cohesive community of learners of all ages. She has shown her mettle in being the Heartlight role model of learning and living as a conscious, creative, competent individual compassionately and collaboratively fulfilling her role as Director of the first HeartLight Learning Community. The students have chosen to call the 'lead learners/educators' by their first names and collectively they are called 'wrinklies'. Students are seen as an integral part of the decision-making process yet this 'power' has not affected the respectful way in which they interact with the staff and each other. Each group has a mentor (a wrinkly/adult) who tunes into that specific group's needs.



I've been helping to start a new school, on Vashon Island (a 20 minute ferry ride from Seattle) this last year. It's a nonprofit independent school, and trying to be somewhat a blend of Montessori, Waldorf, unschooling, freeschooling, with a touch

of influence from the Reggio Emilia model. I would not call it a democratic school, though many decisions and agreements are made as a group. It's been interesting to develop a curriculum of sorts, in response to what the families asked for, to expose the kids to things in the form of presentations or experiential learning centers. We've been experimenting with various kinds of structure, trying to suit the 10-12 families involved. The name of this project is **Madrona Primary School**, and the website is www.madronaprimary.org. Email: reallifeeducation@consultant.com.

Golden Independent School is a private elementary school opening in Golden CO in the fall of 2003. It will serve grades K-6. Kindergarten will be comprised of 10 students, with readiness, not age, as the entry requirement. The other grades are combined in small, multi-age classrooms. Children spend two years with the same teacher. The school follows the progressive philosophy rooted in the ideas of John Dewey. Instruction is child-centered and teacher-guided. Golden will function as a mini-society, with equal importance placed on the individuals and the group as a whole. For more information, contact Dr. Erika Sueker, PO Box 441, Golden, CO 80402. Tel: (303) 279-3708. Web: www.goldenindependent.org.

Chula Vista Learning Community Charter serves as a multi-generational center, with the intent to build senior housing on the same site as the school. Integrated curriculum incorporates a variety of learning/teaching styles and utilizes community resources. There are small class sizes, cross-age tutoring and cross-generational learning. **Contact:** Jorge Ramirez, 939 4th Ave. Chula Vista, California 91911 email: jramire2@cvesd.k12.ca.us

The Mountain Gardens Learning Center is loosely based on learning systems such as Waldorf, Sudbury, HeartLight, Montessori, and homeschooling. The children choose their own paths of study and discovery. There is no set curriculum, although if the Learner asks for guidance, a loose curriculum created by the Learning Center (called 'New Day Learning Way') will be available. The lack of curriculum encourages learners to explore interesting subjects without feeling that they are neglecting something. When we've raised the needed funds, we'll open the permanent facility on several-acres in Northwest Denver for up to 50 children, both day and boarding. For more information or an application, please e-mail Vikki Lawrence at MGCLC2002@hotmail.com. P O Box 1283, Wheat Ridge, CO 80034-1283. Tel: (720) 940-7910. Web: www.earth2spirit.org/mountaingardens.



Kfar Saba Democratic School's design has won a citation award by DesignShare, an online journal, forum, and library of school designs. The site fosters best practices and innovation in schools from early childhood through the university level. More than 20,000 architects, planners, educators, and facility decision makers visit the site each month. From the award report: "The Democrat School is a twelve year grade school, starting at the age of six years old up to eighteen years old and includes matriculation exams. The school is located in the heart of an orchard, as part of an agriculture

farm in the eastern side of the city. Democracy is everywhere. Each individual student gets special attention and an emphasis is put on Personality rather than Technologies. There is a Parliament – the heart of the school. Decisions are made by students and staff who have equal votes. The openness of ideas is reflected in the openness of the design. The school is environmentally friendly, with wooden roof construction and natural materials.” www.designshare.com/awards/review.asp?project_id=154

Schumacher College, in the UK, is pleased to announce a generous grant of \$60,000 from the Educational Foundation of America (EFA), which will make it possible for the College to offer a new scholarship program to suitable US citizens. Sophie Style, Schumacher College. Email: schumss@gn.apc.org.

Maine’s New Visionaries, by Jen Fish, Portland Press Herald, 12/31/02:

In her three decades in education, Marylyn Wentworth, a former art teacher at Kennebunk High School, doesn’t know how many classrooms she’s seen. But she does know public schools do not provide the best education for all students. This is not to say she thinks public schools are wrong - Wentworth says she thrived in that environment. But, she said, there are many students who, for a variety of reasons, need a more personal and holistic touch to learn well. With this in mind, Wentworth worked with a group of families in 1970 to establish The School Around Us, a K-8 school in Arundel that still exists. In 2001, Wentworth, a state-certified principal, established The New School, an extension of The School Around Us for high schoolers in Kennebunk. The school is run cooperatively by parents, community members and students. Students are involved in every aspect of the school - from hiring of teachers to disciplining their classmates. The school is also closely intertwined with the community. Students have an open campus, and the school has dozens of community teachers who come in to talk about subjects ranging from poetry to solar engineering.

High Stakes Testing

Student Rebels at Taking Standardized Test, by Mc Nelly Torres, San Antonio Express-News, 2/1/03: Kimberly Marciniak is boycotting the standardized testing this spring with the support of her parents. The 15-year-old freshman at the North East School of Arts at Lee High School hopes her actions will send a message to her school district: High-stakes testing has stolen her thirst for knowledge and tarnished what she treasures about school — learning. “I don’t want to be a statistic and I don’t want to be a human guinea pig for the district,” Marciniak wrote. Marciniak’s decision to put her pencil down reflects a growing national anti-testing trend. In Massachusetts, New York, Washington and California, students and parents have boycotted state tests in recent years. The test she plans not to take, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, will make its debut



this spring. After attending private schools in Boston, she moved with her parents and young brother to San Antonio in 2001, when she enrolled in Eisenhower Middle School. The freshman student saw how her favorite class — history — became a grind because of preparation for the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, or TAAS. Marciniak wrote an essay depicting the transformation of a once-fun class into a test academy. The essay, in which she presents her opposition to high-stakes testing, was given an award as the most persuasive work in the class.

Survey: Testing Leads to Unsound Teaching, by Kevin Rothstein: A majority of teachers believe state testing programs lead them to use unsound teaching practices, according to a nationwide survey of educators released by Boston College’s Lynch School of Education. The report, billed as the broadest of its kind, also revealed that nearly half of all teachers thought test scores could be raised without really improving learning. The report, prepared after surveying 12,000 teachers in 47 states, found that educators did not object to standards but did not like being held to a single test. In a related study, researchers compared high-stakes Massachusetts with no-stakes Kansas and medium-stakes Michigan. They found that the higher the stakes, the greater the impact on classroom teaching. Boston Herald, 3/5/03.

From Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs (MAAP) **Position Paper: High-stakes Testing**, 1/10/03: We oppose high-stakes testing required by the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) statute for reasons widely shared among scholars, researchers and psychometricians. We do not believe that high-stakes testing leads to achievement of broad educational goals and the efficient learning of basic skills. We believe high-stakes testing produces unintended consequences damaging to schools and students. We measure student progress not through testing alone but through a variety of measures that take into account students’ present state and their living environment. The heavy emphasis on raising test scores is having unintended consequences: teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum, losing creative teachers, increasing dropout rates, and as we have seen in various places, cheating. The single-minded focus on tests may raise scores but it does not result in long-term, deep learning. The dropout rate is rising in many school districts desperate to raise test scores. Pushing students out of school because they may have a deleterious effect on a school’s test scores is appalling and unethical. A new study examined student data from 28 states and found that high-stakes tests may ultimately hinder student achievement rather than improve it. Higher test scores do not prove whether schools are good or bad without measures of complex thinking skills, citizenship outcomes, ethics or other broad goals of a comprehensive education. A heavy emphasis on tests can be damaging to vulnerable students’ mental health and self-esteem according to researchers at the University of California at Los Angeles, Center for Mental Health in Schools. There will be students who do poorly on tests but become fine citizens and workers. We don’t relegate students to a scrap heap because of test scores. There are many



ways of determining if programs are succeeding using such measures as: graduation rates, accreditation, awards, dropout rates, attendance rates, staff morale, student and parent satisfaction, comments by visitors to the program, and narrative descriptions of challenging student projects. Heavy-handed, inflexible regulations from Washington violate state and local control of education. This intrusion comes with cumbersome and bureaucratic rules that strangle initiative and innovation. Some think it is an attempt to castigate public education and open doors to vouchers and privatization.

American dropout rates have jumped, according to Richard Rothstein, columnist for the New York Times. Though dropout rates are difficult to calculate, he says, it looks as though the rate rose from 26% in 1990 to 30% in 2000. One possible explanation for the jump, Rothstein says, is new state examinations now required in order to be promoted to the next grade, leading to more students being held back. He warns that new exit exams could produce even more failure. "Without academic policies that are more realistically calibrated, both to students' abilities and to their opportunities, the dropout rate could continue its climb." From the *Alternative Network Journal*, PO Box 461, Ithaca, NY 14851-0461.

Why 'No Child Left Behind' will Fail Our Children: A new position statement from the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) claims that the No Child Left Behind Act will exacerbate, not solve, the real problems that cause many children to be left behind. FairTest cites unrealistic demands, punitive sanctions, inadequate funding, and an over reliance on standardized tests. FairTest calls for a reduction in the amount of required testing and the removal of "draconian penalties." FairTest also suggests the implementation of accountability systems that emphasize local, classroom-based student assessment information combined with limited standardized testing and a greater emphasis on building stronger relationships between schools and the communities they serve. Web: www.fairtest.org/nattest/NCLB_Position_Statement.html

From Teacher Survey Summary; How Teachers Really Feel About Educational Reforms:

Some teachers in Arkansas, who sincerely believe that the educational reforms are and were destructive to education and to children, did a survey in an effort to show legislators and the public what teachers really believe and feel about these reforms. The State Department of Education asserts that teachers were included in the development of these reforms and supports them. These teachers' responses prove otherwise. The survey was given to 390 teachers at four schools in 2000. At least 90% or more were negative about the reforms. 80% of all the 20 questions on the survey were answered with a negative view toward educational reforms.

94% said the new educational reforms have been a top down approach with educational bureaucrats and/or legislators making most or all of the significant decisions (as opposed to teacher input). 90% said the State Department of Education is



placing too much emphasis on test scores and coercing teachers to teach to the test. 86% said the recent educational reforms have contributed to more job dissatisfaction or "caused me to look for other employment." 83% said that aligning school curriculum with state tests may make test scores look better but actually provide less education. 78% said that teacher-prepared curricula are superior to state standards and frameworks. 69% said that in recent years the quality of education has steadily or rapidly declined. The complete survey results are at www.afaar.orgTeacherSurveySummary. If anyone would like to use this survey for your school or for some other purpose e-mail: blhester@futureline.com.

Testing Trap; The single largest — and possibly most destructive — federal intrusion into America's public schools, by Richard F. Elmore: In the history of federal education policy, the disconnect between policy and practice has never been so evident, nor so dangerous. Ironically, the conservative Republicans who control the White House and the House of Representatives are sponsoring the single largest—and the single most damaging—expansion of federal power over the nation's education system. Under the new law, the federal government mandates a single test-based accountability system for all states. The federal government further mandates a single definition of adequate yearly progress, the amount by which schools must increase their test scores in order to avoid some sort of sanction—an issue that in the past has been decided jointly by states and Washington. Web: www.harvard-magazine.com/on-line/0902140.html



Massachusetts Accused of Inflating Exam

Pass Rate: Boston College researchers accused state education officials of inflating the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) passing rate in the Class of 2003 by 20 percent by not counting students who were formerly enrolled in the class. State officials had jubilantly announced that after four tries, 90 percent of the Class of 2003 had passed both the English and math sections of the 10th

grade MCAS test, a new requirement for graduation. The percentage was based on the number of this year's seniors who had passed the test. But the Boston College researchers said the passing rate should be based instead on the number of students in the Class of 2003 when its members were ninth graders, before some dropped out, transferred out of state, or were held back. Based on that number, the passing rate for the Class of 2003 would be closer to 70 percent, said Anne Wheelock, a frequent MCAS critic and a researcher at Boston College. "If you only care about the results for the kids who make it to the finish line, then you're really admitting that education reform isn't about everybody," Wheelock said. www.boston.com/dailyglobe2/070/metro/MCAS_pass_rate_inflated_trio_says-.shtml

More Schools Rely on Tests, but Study Raises Doubts, By Greg Winter: Rigorous testing that decides whether students graduate, teachers win bonuses and schools are shuttered, an approach already in place in more than half the nation, does little to improve achievement and may actually worsen academic

performance and dropout rates, according to the largest study ever on the issue. The study, performed by researchers at Arizona State University and financed by teachers' unions that have expressed skepticism about such tests, found that while students show consistent improvement on these state exams, the opposite is typically true of their performance on other, independent measures of academic achievement. ('Progress', an exam overseen by the United States Department of Education.) Perhaps most controversial, the study found that once states tie standardized tests to graduation, fewer students tend to get diplomas. After adopting such mandatory exit exams, twice as many states had a graduation rate that fell faster than the national average as those with a rate that fell slower.

In an echo of the findings of other researchers, the authors asserted that administrators, held responsible for raising tests scores at a school or in an entire district, occasionally pressure failing students to drop out. *New York Times*, 12/28/02. The study can be found ww.asu.edu/educ/eps1/EPRU/epru_2002_Research_Writing.htm

From **Standardization and Its Unseen Ironies** By Peter W. Cookson Jr., *Education Week*, 1/22/03: How does one measure the growth of intellect, imagination, and aspiration? How does one measure curiosity, self-confidence, and hope? Why would we believe that educational potential could be captured by a standardized test? Isn't it ironic that the legislators, policy wonks, and ideologues who are so disturbed about the dumbing down of America are the very same people who think that testing will smarten up America? These same people, who have made careers out of decrying the inadequacies of public education, are the very folks who want to standardize education into a commercial product consisting primarily of packaged, teacher-proof, off-the-shelf curricula. Is it credible to believe that we can prepare children for the 21st century by having them spend endless hours completing standardized tests? On the face of it, it seems preposterous. But, of course, that's just it. You cannot take the standardization and testing movement at face value. Testing isn't really about student achievement; it's about something else.

In their 1996 book **The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools**, David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle make a convincing case that the attack on public education is politically motivated and is aimed directly at the American dream. An educated person (as opposed to a tested person) is able to think for him or herself, is able to ask difficult questions, and is able to use facts and theory to create imaginative alternatives to the status quo. Original thought is the enemy of conventional thinking; history is littered with the tragic stories of original thinkers who challenged authority and were punished because of their differences or because they were ahead of their time. Far better to have people not question authority and rely on conventional thinking to do their thinking for them.



International News and Communication

AUSTRALIA

Booroobin is only one of about three democratic Sudbury model Schools in the world, which is either partially or fully government funded. We are being subjected to yet another 'assessment'. This follows inspections and assessments in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2001. There were two visits in each of those years. The process last time was so inept and drawn out, that it cost us well over \$100,000 (AUD) directly in fees, charges and legal costs and further tens of thousands of dollars through write offs, through the forced sale of the School campus. For a School that commenced in 1996, we had worked hard, most of us sacrificing wages for years, to build up our beautiful campus, resources and staffing to satisfy Students' needs. It is our intention to claw our way back to ownership of our campus, over the next two to three years.

This assessment is being undertaken by the relatively new Non-State Schools Accreditation Board. The Assessors attended the School last Wednesday, April 30. They were polite, and asked all the same questions that had been asked previously. At their request, we gave them many of the same documents as previously, including those available to the anyone to see and print that are available on our comprehensive web site, along with new documents developed in line with our democratic, ever improving, changing and evolving nature. We spoke with the benefit of more experience. Usually there has been mixed impacts on Students. Not so this time. Those Students who know and understand the issue, are brilliantly supportive, working alongside Staff as equals - something that the assessors and most Schools are unused to.

We can't afford another impact like the last. We considered refusing the Notice of Entry, but decided to allow entry, and give the new Board the benefit of the doubt. We realize and are critical that no reasonable grounds have been given for what is essentially a fishing expedition. But we had no money for a legal defense, and didn't want to invest energy in that direction. We may need at least moral, and perhaps written support. *Derek Sheppard* The Booroobin Sudbury School - a center of learning www.booroobinschool.com.au Ph +61 07 5499 9944 Fax +61 07 3251 0470 Web: www.booroobinschool.com.au.

BRAZIL

I am part of a group of people who work for the **SEMCO** Foundation. Our main objective is to provide the opportunity of quality education to children who could participate actively in formulating their education in a democratic environment. We believe in the principles held by democratic schools and are working to extend those principles to the community of Sao Paulo. We believe that children, in addition to parents and educators, should have an active decision making role in their education. We also believe that our teachers and educators have the responsibility not just of transmitting knowledge but also of stimulating the curiosity of the students. We believe that children of different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds

should be together to overcome historic trends of discrimination, and we also believe in providing an environment in which children can become well versed in the use of modern technologies. Following the success of existing democratic schools, we believe that if students are motivated and allowed active participation, and if teachers are knowledgeable and passionate, we can provide optimum conditions for learning and development of our children. For more information, contact: Agop Kayayan, Director, SCLN 111, Bloco D, Sala 205 Asa Norte, Brasilia, D.F., Brazil, 70754-540. Email: agop@redessociais.com.br.



CANADA

Located in a pastoral setting just a stone's throw away from beautiful Lac Brome, **La Petite École Alternative des Cantons de l'Est** (PEACE) is an alternative preschool and elementary school offering a progressive French education with English immersion to children from five to twelve years of age. The school seeks to offer, in collaboration with the family and at an affordable cost, an educational setting in which children can develop and share their full potential emotionally, physically, intellectually, socially and spiritually. We offer low student-teacher ratios, project-based learning, active parental involvement, and school governance by all. Contact Mélanie Whitham, 57 Papineau Road, Town of Brome Lake (Bondville), Quebec J0E 1S0. Tel: (450) 243-1182. Email: ecolepeace@sympatico.ca.

CHINA

From Roll over, Confucius, The Economist: Throughout the millennia, students of all ages in China have had to endure the miseries of learning by rote. But for the past year, the government has been experimenting with what could amount to revolutionary changes in China's classrooms. The aim is to make education more pleasant, more useful and, above all, to challenge students to think for themselves. What has prompted the reforms is a belated recognition that China's education system is failing to produce enough innovative thinkers. China's traditional education methods are ideally suited to a political culture that requires citizens to submit blindly to authority. By encouraging students to question their teachers and regard them as equals, China could be ushering in a new kind of relationship between the rulers and the ruled. The problem is making it work. The government has set ambitious targets with few resources to ensure that the country's more than 10 million primary- and secondary-school teachers acquire the skills and determination to change the habits of a lifetime. On top of this is the problem of convincing parents that new-fangled education methods are going to benefit their children. As long as the entrance requirements for universities and senior secondary schools remain based on the results of national exams, parents will pile on the same pressures. Some have been withdrawing their children from schools where reforms are being carried out. The Education Ministry's Liu Jian says the long-term plan is to change the university entrance procedures to place more emphasis on students' performance at school rather than simply on the national entrance exam. 1/23/03.

JAPAN

Free schools in Japan range broadly in quality and mission, from helping children who have difficulty adjusting to regular schools to offering nontraditional approaches to education. Strictly speaking, free school attendance is illegal. Nonetheless, 300 to 500 such schools have opened over the last 10 years, fueled by a phenomenon known as *toko kyohi*, or refusal to go to school. Nearly 140,000 children refuse to attend. Critics say that the problem of bullying in the regular schools is too entrenched, and that the emphasis on regulation breeds school phobia and makes misfits of children who are just a little different – say, with a peculiar mannerism or even curly hair. The growth of free schools, they say, has been a reaction to the



failure of conventional schools to change with the times, with a society that now demands individual leadership, creative thinking and entrepreneurship. In an attempt to inspire more creative thinking, the Ministry of Education introduced several radical changes this school year. Japan's scrupulously standardized approach to education took shape in the late

19th century, when the nation ended its isolationist policy and began importing products and ways of life. The need to rapidly educate the public led to standardized methods and reliance on tests. This style of education was strengthened after World War II, when economic growth was the country's new objective. Well-educated masses equipped with uniform skills proved powerful in producing globally competitive products like cars and home electronics. "In an industrial economy, what you need is people who can read the manuals, press the buttons and operate a machine in a plant and so forth," says Takashi Sakata, associate professor of law and education at the Japan Women's University in Tokyo. Today, however, the economy is loaded with slumbering corporate giants with little growth potential. "In an information-oriented society, what you need is people with creativity and spontaneous energy," he says.

Dropout recalls struggle with unpalatable system:

Kenichi Tanaka stopped going to school when he was 11. After 2 1/2 years of shutting himself up at home, he entered Tokyo Shure, one of Japan's first 'free schools', which opened in 1985. Now 21, he works as secretary general of the Free School Network, a body loosely uniting about 200 facilities nationwide. Tanaka says he has now come to ponder why he had to go to school. Tanaka says he thinks that Japanese society places too much emphasis on schools. "If you want to study, there are cram schools. If you want to exercise, there are sports clubs. If you want to run track, you can gather people interested in track," he says. "It's about time we consider other frameworks than schools." (N.S.) The Japan Times, 12/26/02.

Free schools' filling ever-expanding void; Many truants return to education system after stint in halfway facilities,

by Nao Shimoyachi: The room is full of sound and vitality, but appears to lack structure. Youths who have dropped out of conventional schools do what they feel like doing at Tamariba, a 'free school' in Kawasaki designed for such children. About 30 people, mainly teenagers, spend their weekdays doing what they want in this 85-sq.-meter space called Tamariba, located in Kawasaki. "I can never know the true reasons why they come

here,” says Hiroyuki Nishino, 42, who opened Tamariba in 1991. “The thing is, these are people who don’t fit into the atmosphere of the regular school system, a system in which everyone looks in the same direction and learns and eats the same things at the same time,” he says. Despite all the talk of educational reform in recent years, both within and outside the education ministry, the number of truants has steadily risen since 1975. In line with the rise in truancy and dropouts, private ‘free schools’ like Tamariba that provide alternatives to conventional schooling have grown both in number and nature. It is estimated there are now almost 1,000 of these establishments, although their style varies greatly. “Since around the mid-1990s, various types of (free) schools have emerged, and now there is confusion over what the concept means,” explains Keiko Okuchi, founder of Tokyo Shure, which opened in 1985 as one of the first free schools. It currently has 200 attendees ranging in age from 6 to 20. According to Okuchi, a free school originally meant a private place of learning where children took the initiative. She says, however, that the term is now used by a variety of facilities, including cram schools hoping to survive by luring truants at a time when the nation’s declining birthrate has hit enrollment figures, public facilities aiming to woo students back to school, mental health clinics for children and correctional facilities trying to instill discipline in their charges. This increase and diversification may be due in part to the education ministry’s policy shift in 1994 that allows public schools to count attendance at free schools as proper school attendance. The Japan Times, 12/26/02.

MEXICO

Email from **Jill Freidberg**: I recently returned from Mexico, where I was working on the initial stages of my documentary film about the Mexican teachers’ movement. It was an extremely productive, and also very inspiring, trip. Most inspiring were my conversations with the public school teachers I was visiting and filming. They have a saying, “El maestro luchando, también esta enseñando,” which roughly translates as, “The teacher in struggle is also teaching.” In other words, a teacher who stands up for what she believes in is modeling the very kind of critical thinking and democratic process she encourages in her students. This sentiment has, for over 20 years, inspired Mexican teachers in their struggle. Faced with the increasing destabilization and privatization of the Mexican education system, teachers have organized themselves into a powerful social movement fighting to defend and democratize public education. If you want more info about the project email me at freij@speakeasy.net, or call me at 206-851-6785.

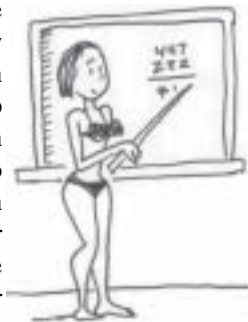
NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand’s school curriculum is obsolete and inherently flawed and should be subjected to international benchmarking, according to a report by Melbourne-based education consultant Dr Kevin Donnelly, published by the Education Forum. The paper, **A Review of New Zealand’s School Curriculum: An International Perspective**, compares New Zealand’s curriculum against international ‘best practice’. Dr. Donnelly argues that the New Zealand curriculum and associated national curriculum statements have failed to achieve the Ministry’s stated goal of raising the achievement levels of all students and ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning in New

Zealand schools is of the highest international standard. “The New Zealand model embodies a ‘student-centered’, ‘outcomes-based’ approach which has since been largely abandoned by equivalent education systems, such as those in Australia and the United States, in favor of a ‘standards approach’.” he said. Web: www.educationforum.org.nz.

SOUTH AFRICA

Foreign investors to set up visionary school; Ecology college a first for Eastern Cape, by Gavin de Villiers, Daily Dispatch: The headmistress of Nahoon Montessori school, Sharon Caldwell, has secured a lucrative foreign educational investment from a German-based couple who have been looking around the world for a site to build their visionary college for secondary, tertiary and lifelong learning. Malc Dow, a Zambian-born Scot, and his wife Louise had received offers from various countries to build the college, but none of the countries seemed quite right for a number of reasons. Said Dow: “We were looking for a spot somewhere on the coast with a good climate and a progressive governmental attitude towards education. My wife suggested South Africa. Right from the start it seemed like a good idea,” he said. Dow contacted the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO) based in New York to inquire if they had anyone on their list in South Africa who could help set him up with educational options in which to invest. AERO referred him to Caldwell. Caldwell was overjoyed when she heard about the couple’s ideas for their visionary college, which will be named Blue Crane College for Ecological Studies, and persuaded them to set it up here.



South Africa births HeartLight Learning Community in Port Elizabeth:

HeartLight Learning Community is based on HeartLight principles from Neale Donald Walsch’s books, ‘Conversations with God’ and ‘Communion with God’. The full-time students and part-time adult students will be given the opportunity to explore ways of using their inner potential to live empowered lives. ‘Ready for Business’ is another wonderful Delta Foundation Product which will prepare our students to run their own businesses. The Anti-violence Prevention Program and Conflict Resolution Workshops form an integral part of the ‘Curriculum’. Email: ballan@netactive.co.za

UNITED KINGDOM

The **Connexions** scheme is a registration program for all young people aged 13 to 19 in the UK. It collects data into a massive database available to a wide range of government and possibly commercial organizations. The data is highly sensitive and intrusive. There is now – finally but possibly too late – a growing concern about the data being collected, how it’s collected, how secure it is and when and if it is destroyed. Its relevance to alternative education is that if you home educate in the UK there is no obligation in law to register yourself with the authorities – this right ensures ones privacy from government interference. The connexions scheme breaks down that right

as a number of essential services are dependent upon a child's registration with the scheme. Web: www.home-education.org.uk/

From **Only Connect?** by Dr. Jan Fortune-Wood: The **Connexions** scheme is meant to ensure that children are tracked in order to give them maximum access to the benefits taxation has to offer. The price tag comes in the form of an electronic card that is programmed with a complete history of the child. It is optional, no one has to join the scheme – it's simply that learning institutions can make it a requirement for registration and it remains to be seen how many other public sector institutions will be joining in the rush for data. This back door identity card is administered by 'personal advisors' (PAs) using the 'Connexions Assessment Tool'. Based on a system used by Social Services, the tool enables PAs to assess eighteen areas of private life and 'score' the answers. Parental stability, difficulties and 'evidence' of substance abuse by parents, all as perceived by the young person, are all recorded. Home-educated young people are amongst the few escaping the routine ravages of this new and invidious scheme, but as they enter colleges later in their education they are being asked for details of their Connexions cards and pressured to join the herd of electronically tagged Blairite citizen fodder. Having libertarian views would no doubt earn them a 5 score for critical and complex attitudes to authority. Living in a household where they are taken seriously as autonomous human beings able to initiate and motivate their own learning would put them well off the scale, a new class of 'potential offenders' in their own right. The Connexions scheme is inimical to liberty and we need to be campaigning against it vociferously before all young people are made the subjects of joined-up government help.



The Ford Foundation has made a grant to **Schumacher College** in order to enable individuals from the South and from Eastern Europe to attend three-week courses at Schumacher College. Also, a generous grant from the Educational Foundation of America has made it possible for Schumacher College to offer scholarships of 80% of course fees to suitable applicants from the US. The College is a residential international center for ecological studies which runs courses focusing on development studies/alternative economics, understandings emerging from new science, ecological design and ways of introducing ecology into our understanding of the world. Schumacher College, The Old Postern, Dartington, Totnes, Devon TQ9 6EA UK. Email: admin@schumachercollege.org.uk. Web: www.schumachercollege.org.uk

From **Teachers Vote to Boycott Tests**, by Justin Parkinson, BBC News: The National Union of Teachers is to ballot its members on action to start this autumn. It has raised concerns over children's well being, the pressure on staff from exam targets and a narrowing of the curriculum. After a lively debate at the NUT annual conference in Harrogate, North Yorkshire, members voted unanimously in favor of a boycott. John Whearty, a secondary school teacher from Liverpool, said the math and English tests, known as Sats, were "dangerous for

our kids." The NUT, which has 250,000 members, will also circulate a national petition, calling on the Education Secretary, Charles Clarke, to end the tests. It is planning to hold public meetings, distribute leaflets and approach other unions to join in the boycott. Last year, the government failed to meet its target that 75% of 11 year olds should have reached the required standard in math and 80% in English. The NUT claims the pressure to perform in Sats is damaging some children's mental health.

Scottish Executive Reneges on Home Education Promises: Schoolhouse Home Education Association, the national organization which supports home educating families in Scotland, has strongly criticized the Scottish Executive for arranging "a closed consultation with an unrepresentative group" to further discuss their proposed draft guidance on home education. Home educating families have already reacted angrily to the restricted nature of the "consultation" which excludes the participation of other representative groups such as the children's rights organization ARCH and the Freedom in Education coalition. Schoolhouse spokesperson Alison Preuss said, "We are very disappointed that, yet again, they are seeking to marginalize the views of the vast majority of home educators in Scotland and that the original purpose of the guidance is being subverted. Schoolhouse has therefore contacted the Scottish Executive seeking urgent clarification of a number of worrying points in advance of the proposed meetings." Alison Preuss. Tel: 0870 745 0968. Email: alisonpreuss@blueyonder.co.uk

From **Parents Favor Home Tuition Over School System** – survey by Ananova: A nationwide survey has found that parents want to teach their children at home instead of school. The poll of 1,200 adults, either expecting children this year or with children under five, found 61% do not trust Britain's education system. The research, commissioned by Vauxhall Motors to mark its centenary year in 2003, found 34% worry about drugs, 26% about increased crime, 17% the cost of living and 12% poor education. Ananova.

Public Alternatives

From **The Challenge of Charter Schools** by Chester E. Finn Jr.: *How to jump-start the charter school movement.* Charter schools are now 10 years old, and the movement is still spreading. About 2,400 charter schools were in operation during the last school year. A handful of cities now find 15–20 percent of their kids enrolled in charters. Yet some of the wind is going out of the charter sails. Six challenges are paramount. *First*, we see too little leadership in the charter movement. *Second*, although not large, the bad-apple problem is easily exploited by critics. *Third*, even without added rules and regulations, it is hard to start a charter school. *Fourth*, charter enemies are relentless. *Fifth*, charter advocates have not been smart enough about accountability, probably because they're split on the subject. Finally, the charter movement itself cannot decide whether it is a trade association obliged to defend every school

that wears the charter label or an education reform movement responsible for ensuring that only good schools are so labeled. *Hoover Institution weekly essay*, June 17, 2002.

Minnesotans Back Public School Choice, by Paul Tosto, Pioneer Press: Minnesotans believe strongly in public school choice, and nearly six of 10 support the state's open enrollment laws, a new survey released Wednesday shows. Families should have the right to choose among various public schools, said 75 percent of those responding to the poll done for the University of Minnesota's Center for School Change. Fifty-six percent back Minnesota's open enrollment law that lets students attend school outside their home districts, while nearly that percentage support the state law that lets parents, teachers and others start publicly funded, independent charter schools. "There's been an enormous shift of public opinion" on choice, said Joe Nathan, director of the Center for School Change, part of the Humphrey Institute at the U. Nathan, a long-time supporter of the charter school movement and public school choice, said the response of the 625 registered Minnesota voters polled last month shows people's attitudes about public school choice have changed over the years. "It says we ought to try things even if they're controversial," he said.

My daughter and son-in-law learned about the **Challenge Program** and particularly the one in Virginia named Commonwealth Challenge when seeking an alternative for their 18-year old son who had dropped out of high school in his senior year. This is a voluntary program for high school dropouts and is run under the Virginia National Guard, using retired military personnel. The cadets remain in this camp for nearly 5 months. They have to earn privileges, including telephone calls. Completion of this program results in a GED, acceptable for entrance into the military. The components of the program include 2 weeks of boot camp, classroom instruction in all subjects, community service, and follow-up via mentors. My grandson graduated on Dec. 21 and had a job lined up for Dec. He also has been accepted as a freshman in Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. *Betty A. Jaffee*.



From **The No Child Left Behind Act and the Charter School Movement**, by Lisa Snell: The consequences of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act are likely to lead to more charter schools, school choice programs, and schools managed by for-profit education management organizations. There are more than 6,000 failing schools currently listed by the federal Department of Education, and education analysts predict that this number will continue to grow as schools face tougher accountability requirements. One competitive approach would be to mandate that every state reconstitute failing schools as charter schools. *Privatization Watch*, Reason Public Policy Institute, 3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd, Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90034. Web: www.privatization.org.

From **Go Into the Woods, Young Man**: A Vermont alternative school taps into native American survival skills to help boys

focus and gain confidence. Basic life skills — patience, communication, managing anger, and problem solving — are central to Kindle Farm's mission. The academics required by the state are covered as well, but one day a week, students trek to the woods just up the hill from one of the school buildings for a wilderness program. Engaging their senses in this natural setting, teachers say, sparks an interest in learning and builds confidence among young people who haven't had much of either. The other four days of the week include morning classes and afternoon activities ranging from bike repair to snowboarding. Founder Bob Bursky started the alternative school seven years ago with just three students, and he added the wilderness lessons on the suggestion of a teacher. The all-boys school has since grown to 80 students in Grades 3-12. About 95 percent of the students here fall under the label of 'special education'. The students' school districts pay their tuition. www.csmonitor.com, 11/19/02.



From **Senate Backs Charter Schools**, by Sarah Lorenzini: Charter schools could soon be allowed in Washington after years of being stopped by voters and a powerful lawmaker. The state Senate passed a charter-schools bill for the first time yesterday — an important hurdle that could clear the way for Washington to become the 40th state to allow the independent public schools. *Seattle Times*, 03/14/03.

Annual Report Finds Large Firms Becoming Dominant Force in For-Profit Education: The 2002-2003 Profiles of For-Profit Education Management Companies released by Arizona State University's Education Policy Studies Laboratory finds that large education management organizations (EMOs) dominate the industry. The report also documents a strong shift toward the for-profit management of charter schools. Of 417 for-profit schools listed in the directory, 320 (77 percent) were identified as charter schools. States such as Arizona and Michigan with the most-permissive charter school laws tend to have the most schools managed by for-profit companies. The authors found Arizona and Michigan account for nearly half of all schools managed or operated by EMOs. Visit the CERU website at <http://schoolcommercialism.org/>

Why Edison Doesn't Work, by Brian O'Reilly: After all, few things in this country need improvement more than our public schools. But Edison Schools has been in business for seven years now, and the verdict is clear: It doesn't work. Many folks would be willing to overlook Edison's financial mess if its educational results were outstanding. Perhaps the simplest reason Edison doesn't work, though, is that for-profit education just isn't a very good business. Web: <http://www.fortune.com/fortune/articles/01511439520800.html>



Home Education News

The Center for Personalized Education Trust is appealing for funds for a home education research project. The research focuses on your understandings of success, support needs and the major issues facing home educators, such as welfare, socialization, resources etc. The research aims to provide information for home educators and to raise the profile of home education whilst dispelling myths. The research will enhance support by making home education more widely accessible and providing a high quality website. The research will establish a body of evidence of use not only to academics and educational policy makers, but also to home educators facing difficulties or needing to provide expert substantiation of the effectiveness and credibility of home education provision. To look at the findings of the feasibility study and find out more detail about the project take a look at <http://www.homeeducationresearch.org>

Should Private, Homeschool Students be Tested, Too?

Hundreds of citizens came out to oppose a bill to require Montana's home school and private school children to take state standardized tests that are currently required in public schools. People from all across the state and country spent hours telling lawmakers that home-schooled children perform well above the national average. They went on to say they would resent the unconstitutional governmental intrusion in the education of their children. Critics of testing home-schoolers see testing as a limit upon their educational freedom. Proponents

of testing believe that all students, regardless of the method of their instruction, need to demonstrate adequate yearly progress on standardized tests. Reported by: The Advocate, A weekly electronic newsletter from Charlotte Advocates for Education



Home School to Teach Franklin's

Virtues, by Bond Brungard for the Poughkeepsie Journal: Home schooling is coming but classes won't necessarily be taught around a kitchen table. The Benjamin Franklin Home School is expected to open for fall classes in a facility on South Street, off Route 299. The curriculum is expected to revolve around the virtues extolled by Franklin, one of the country's founding fathers. Those virtues include silence, order, resolution, frugality, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility and humility. The school is being developed by Stacey Brooks and her husband, Len Chodosh, retired New York City school teachers, who will serve as the faculty members. The school will serve grades K-6 and promises to promote independent thinking.

The home school will feature a much more open atmosphere than the structured environment of the public school system, Brooks said.



From **Home Cyber Schools, and Critics, Growing**, by Claire Luna, LA Times Staff Writer, 1/6/03: A growing number of children are enrolled in cyber charter schools, which blend the flexible rules of publicly funded charter schools with home-schooling methods – to the consternation of some home-instruction advocates. National education groups, meanwhile, object to public funding of cyber charters, saying they operate for a fraction of the cost of brick-and-mortar schools and are essentially home schools with only nominal professional oversight. The nation's roughly 30 cyber charter schools serve an increasing number of parents who want to teach their children at home but lack the know-how or money for materials and don't mind the regulations. Homeschooling, by contrast, isn't publicly funded. But neither is it subject to standardized testing, teacher requirements and achievement goals, as are charter schools. Nationally, an estimated 16,000 students are enrolled in charter schools with some element of online study. Litigation is pending in Wisconsin, Ohio and Pennsylvania, where more than 100 school districts have sued to halt cyber charters, arguing that they drain money from regular public schools. Public-education advocates say such schools should be subject to the same oversight as any others that receive public funds. The NEA last year formally objected to charters providing home schooling, including online charter schools that seek to provide such home instruction over the Internet. The organization recommended that public funding for such schools should be cut.

From **Home Schooling: Why We Should Care**, by Jean C. Halle, Education Week, 11/13/02: The home school movement is gaining momentum because of increased community support, program flexibility, and challenging, accessible curricula. Home-schooled students, because of the individualized instruction, often move more quickly through rigorous course materials than public school students do. With the influence of home schooling, the focus of education is finally – and rightfully – shifting from what is right politically and financially to what is right for the children. And that is great news, worthy of far more attention. *Jean C. Halle* – the president and CEO of Calvert School Education Services, Jean can be reached at president@calvertservices.org.

More African-Americans Home Schooling, by Nicole Johnson, Richmond Times-Dispatch, 11/15/02.: More African-American families are taking on the responsibility of teaching their children at home. Their reasons include religious beliefs and what they see as a failure of public schools to diversify curriculum, keep their children safe and hire teachers who can address the needs of children from all backgrounds. According to a 1999 study by the Center for Education Statistics, 850,000 American families home-schooled and African-American families accounted for one percent of the total – about 8,500. According to estimates by Brian Ray, president of The National



Home Educators Research Institute, in the three years since that study, the number of home-schooling families has nearly doubled to 1.6 million, and the percentage of African-American families has increased to five percent. That's about 80,000 African-American families, almost ten times as many as home-schooled in 1999.

Vermont College: Homeschoolers, you can study what you love through mentor guided individualized study and complete a 4 year degree from anywhere in the world. Web: www.tui.edu/vermontcollege.

Alger Learning Center / Independence High School: Nationally accredited and specializing in working with students who want to design their own curriculum. Web: www.independent-learning.com.

Calvert School: Inspire the best in your child with the best in homeschooling. Calvert School offers a complete, fully accredited curriculum for Pre-K through Grade Eight. Web: www.calvertschool.org.

TCR's Real World Curriculum: For over 30 years, NewsBank, Inc., has been a leader in educational technology, helping educators teach reading, writing, research, and critical thinking skills in all subjects. Today, TCR has created a special Homeschool Edition of TCR's Real World Curriculum. Web: www.homeschool.com/TCR/.

Jobs at alternative schools

School Within A School (SWS), a democratic program at Brookline High School in Brookline, MA, is looking for a half time English teacher. Applicants must be certified or certifiable in Massachusetts. Staff members get to know students well. Contact SWS, 115 Greenough St., Brookline, MA 02445. Tel: (617) 713-5401 or email: David_Moore@brookline.mec.edu.

The Community School of West Seattle opens in September of 2003. They would like someone who can obtain a WA state teachers certificate, has had experience in this type/similar school and who wants this experience in their life. Please contact Sarah Airhart at sarahairhart@attbi.com or call (206) 762-2101. Web: www.communityschoolwestseattle.org.

Seeking **development coordinator** to join innovative consensus-governed junior high school in NC mountains at the Arthur Morgan School. Extensive benefits, modest salary, great quality of life. \$11,000 per year, plus housing, full health insurance coverage and a partial food benefit. For more information, see <http://www.arthurmorganschool.org> or contact: Jessica Ruegg jess@arthurmorganschool.org

Play Mountain Place is one of the oldest humanistic alternative schools in the U.S. We are hiring nursery and elementary teachers, as well as looking for interns to train with them. Please contact Judith Accardi at Play Mountain Place, 6063 Hargis Street, Los Angeles, CA 90034 or call (323) 870-4381. Web: www.playmountain.org

Discovery Day School is a small, independent early childhood program located in Las Vegas, Nevada. We are seeking a progressive, nurturing and creative teacher to start up our Kindergarten Program in September 2003. We are a community of dedicated, loving teachers and families. We strive to create an environment that respects and values each individual and their contribution in building a democratic education community. Please e-mail Marianne at: mkainmoran@aol.com.



Pine Hill Waldorf School is seeking a First Grade Teacher and a part-time or full-time German Teacher. The ideal candidates will be enthusiastic, able to work effectively with colleagues and parents, and have completed their Waldorf teacher training. We are looking for individuals who will participate actively in the committee work and festival work that is so important to the life of our community. We offer a competitive salary with benefits and 90% tuition remission at Pine Hill and at High Mowing (Waldorf high school) across the road. Apply by letter and resume to: David Barham, Staffing Committee Chair, Pine Hill Waldorf School, PO Box 688, Wilton, NH 03086.

The Ridge and Valley Charter School is a public charter school set to open in September 2003 in Northwest New Jersey. We are looking for educators with strong team building and leadership skills to mentor the students in an experiential, multi-age setting which requires the willingness to spend significant time outdoors. Send resume and copies of certifications to RVCS Search Committee at Ridge and Valley Charter School, 93 Kerrs Corner Road, Blairstown, N.J 07825. Tel: (908) 362-1114. Fax: (908) 362-6680. Email: ridgeandvalley@earthlink.net. Web: www.ridgeandvalley.org.

The Met, a public high school in Providence RI, has moved beyond tinkering at the margins of school change. We are now six small schools and we are seeking dedicated teachers to join our unique community. To apply, send a résumé, 2-3 letters of recommendation, and a letter explaining why you want to teach at the Met. To help us get to know you, please also include a drawing of yourself as a teacher (pencil, crayon, paint, etc.) and a writing sample (on any topic from any time in your life). For more detailed information, visit www.metcenter.org.



The **CVS Highlander School**, a K – 8 Charter School, seeks a new Principal. Founded in 2000, the CVS Highlander will reach full capacity of 135 K – 8 students in September 2003. As a Big Picture School (www.bigpicture.org), CVS Highlander adheres to certain core design principles. Interested candidates should send their cover letter and resume to: Martha Cook, Ph.D., Managing Director, The Big Picture Company, 275 Westminster Street, Suite 500, Providence, RI 02903 or email mcook@bigpicture.org.

The **Community School of West Seattle (CSWS)** in WA is looking for experienced freeschool type teachers (with certification) and assistants. The school opens in September 2003 CSWS will serve children age 4 to 12 years. We are an eclectic school inspired by a variety of educational approaches. If you can work without direction, enjoy the support of other self-directed staff and have always wanted to live in Seattle please call Sarah at (206) 762-2101 or email me at sarahairhart@attbi.com. Web: www.communityschoolwestseattle.org.

Blue Mountain School, a democratic, non-coercive learning environment, is accepting staff applications for the 2003-2004 school year. Please call (541) 942 -7764, or e-mail blue_mtn@efn.org to request an application. Ask for a member of SHAC. Deadline to receive applications is May 5th.

Summerhill School: The school is advertising for the post of maths teacher. This is a full-time residential post teaching children from 11 to 17 up to the national exams in England called GCSE's. If you can work in England, without the need for a visa please get in touch with the school, or pass this on to teachers who might be interested. Further details from Zoe Readhead at office@summerhillschool.co.uk

Jobs and Internships

I am a teacher-certified library media specialist with 6 years experience in both school and public library service. I am looking for a non-urban, child-centered environment. I live in southern New England, but am willing and eager to relocate to wherever I am needed. Contact **Susan Eshleman** at (401) 722-0535 or email: Foxden2002@juno.com.

Private tutoring services for children instructed at home or in alternative settings. I specialize in preschool, elementary, & special education. I am New York State dual certified in regular and special education and have my master's degree. Please contact me, **Melanie Rasmussen**, at home (631) 473-5233, on my cell phone (631) 804-3623, or by e-mail at MJRasmus@optonline.net.

I am interested in teaching in a setting in which I can pass on the benefits of my diverse background to interested young people. I have 30 years experience in the woodworking trade and have accumulated a variety of valuable skills ranging from carpentry to cabinetmaking to wooden boat building. I can be reached at tpap@optonline.net or (631) 242-2021. Mailing address is **Tom Papell**, 263 Pine Acre Blvd. Dix Hills, NY 11746

My name is **Kai Malloy** and I am seeking a teaching position at an alternative school beginning with the 2003-2004 school year. I am interested in teaching in a public alternative, community-based, or Sudbury Valley type school. You can contact me at 201 Stark Mesa Road, Carbondale CO 81623. Tel: (970) 704-0862. Email: kbmalley@hotmail.com.

I have enjoyed being an educator for about 25 years. I taught English, was a job developer for Job Corps students, evaluated alternative education for the Oklahoma State Legislature, and have presented over 350 professional workshops to parents, teachers, and students (statewide and nationally). Contact **Robert Basinger**, 1515 Cedar Ridge Place, Cushing, OK 74023-5105. Tel: (918) 225-6786.

Richard Graca: Assistant Head (former PE teacher) of a K-6 independent elementary school seeking an administrative position in a K-8 or 6-8 school that supports a developmental and progressive approach to learning. I am looking in the New England or Mid-atlantic. Available July 2003. Contact info: 661-288-1331 or 323-850-3755 rickygraca@earthlink.net

Bob Saxon: I've been teaching at-risk teens for 24 years in alternative programs in California. I would like to gain some experience working in a more democratic and creative setting before I one day open my own school based loosely on the Sudbury Valley model. I live in Fort Bragg on the northern California coast. I would consider the east coast if an appropriate job were available there. I can be reached at 707-961-0293 or each4sky@surfbest.net.

I am looking for a high school Humanities or History position in an experiential school, ideally in the bay area. I would also be interested in an administrative job with a new school or a Dean of Students position. Please email me at susantinsley@yahoo.com if interested. **Susan Tinsley Daily**.

I am looking for work during July and August 2003. I am 19, hard working, responsible, detail-oriented and conscientious. I am a fast learner, fluent in English and Russian. I like challenges and being challenged. Contact **Sergei Sokolsky**, Leninskie Gory, MGU, M 156, Moscow 117234 Russia. Email: v.m.sokolsky@mtu-net.ru.

Conferences

June 20 – 22, **North Europe Home Education Conference 2003**, Verket, Norway. . Presenters include Pat Montgomery, Amanda Petrie, Christian Beck, and many more. For more information, email Marta Straume at martastraume@hotmail.com. Web: <http://folk.uio.no/cbeck/NORTH.htm>.

June 26 – 29, **Learning Alternatives – Strive for a Higher Standard**, Radisson Hotel, King of Prussia, PA. International Association for Learning Alternatives 33rd Annual Conference. Contact Nancy Avoles, State Coordinator Alternative Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education, School Services Unit, 333 Market Street, 5th Floor, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333.

June 26 – 28, **Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child**, London, UK. . E-mail enquiries: eswcconference@roehampton.ac.uk. Web: www.roehampton.ac.uk/ses/edu_confer.asp.

June 28, **Unschoolers Network Conference**, Student Life Center, Brookdale, NJ. For more information see <http://unschooling.org/unnet>, or contact Nancy Plent, editor, Unschoolers Network, 2 Smith Street, Farmingdale, NJ 07727. Tel: (732) 938-2473/ UnNet@aol.com

June 28 – July 1, **Reform with Results 11th International Conference**, Park Hyatt, Beaver Creek, CO. For more information see www.reformwithresults.com or contact Integration Conference, 8235 S Old Hammer Lane, Aurora, CO 80016. Tel: (303) 690-9722.

July 3 – 5, **Fourth International Conference on Information Technologies in Education**, INEAG, Samos Island, Greece. Contact: Nancy Pyrini at ineag@otenet.gr. Web: <http://www.ineag.gr/ICICTE>.

Come together at IDEC 2003 to redefine the future of education: July 16-24, 2003: International Democratic Education Conference, IDEC 2003, hosted by The Albany Free School in association with AERO. Visit www.idec2003.com for updated information. Email: info@idec2003.com. Phone: (518) 928-1234.

July 18 – 19, **New England Homeschool & Family Learning Conference**, Holiday Inn, Boxborough, MA. Theme is Focus on the Future. Web: www.HomeEducator.com. Email: info@homeeducator.com. Tel: (207) 657-2800.

July 18 – 20, **World Future 2003: 21st Century Opportunities and Challenges**, Hyatt Regency, San Francisco, CA. Contact: WFS, 7910 Woodmont Ave., Suite 450, Bethesda, MD 20814. Tel: 1-301-951-0394. Web: www.wfs.org.

Sept. 10 – 17, **Home Educator's Seaside Festival (HESFES)**, Charmouth, Dorset, UK. HES FES, PO Box 20284, London NW1 3WY. Web: www.hesfes.co.uk.

Sept. 20 – Oct. 4, **Celebrating Spirit of Learning**, Byron Bay Region, Australia. The 3rd International Soul in Education Conference. Dawn Emelie Griggs: dawn@spiritoflearning.com. Web: www.spiritoflearning.com.

Nov. 7 – 10, **Montessori Foundations 7th Annual International Conference**, Long Boat Key, FL. For information, contact Margot Garfield-Anderson at Montessorilmcpubs@comcast.net or call 1-800-632-4121.

Montessori Weekend Workshops: Rapid City, SD on September 6 – 7. For more information, contact IMS, 912 Thayer Ave #207, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Tel: (301) 589-1127.

Revolutionary Times



What does the world have against free schools? John Potter looks into the question and finds a few key complaints that come up again and again.

Page 40



Mary Leue tells about building a school from scratch, from the very first birth pangs in her family home, to where it grew up to become a real live school.

Page 46



The Changing Face of Childhood

Childhood in the 1950s and Childhood Now

By Albert Lamb

I recently heard a show on BBC Radio Four here in England that reflected something I'd already noticed. Texting on cell phones (mobile phones), which has become so popular in recent years, has given kids and teenagers a new facility with their thumbs. When the phones were first sold it was assumed that people would use their index finger to do the punching in. Kids, instead, took to letting their thumbs do all the work at high speed. Nowadays some kids can write out text messages so fast that their thumbs look like a kind of blur.

They interviewed a British mother and daughter and had them take a speed

test to see how fast the daughter was at text messaging. The mother was able to punch in three words in the time it took her daughter to write a couple of sentences. Then the mother said an interesting thing. She said that her daughter now rings doorbells with her thumb and uses her thumb to unlock windows and to do other things that she wouldn't personally think of doing that way.

So there you have it. The evolving thumb.

And yet I heard from another source that kids are not as adept with their fingers as they used to be – so there may

be a price for this new facility. The human organism is still using childhood to evolve into something new.

Looking at a huge Benneton ad featuring two young children of different races sitting next to each other and smiling, on a billboard in London a few weeks back, got me started thinking about whether there might be, as well as a changing thumb, a changing face of childhood. These two kids seemed so absolutely modern to me, unmistakably of our time. They were only two or three years old, and I couldn't quite put my finger on what the special quality was. They had a slightly glazed, guarded look, maybe from too much TV or too many different day-care minders. But they both seemed sociable and intelligent in a slightly slack-jawed way. American, I would say. Nice. But a little out of synch, too. A little old-before-their-time.

What are we doing to kids these days? And what strategies are they evolving to stay sane?

Childhood as viewed by adults has always been a mythological moment, freighted with our hopes and fears for the future and with all our personal memories of the past. Babies and young children are so precious and fragile that our hearts go out to them. They need absolutely constant care and attention. Then they enter a magical time when they seem half of this world and half of some other. After that they grapple awkwardly with all sorts of things, not least the high (and often unconscious) expectations of the adults around them. And always the days push them onward, marching them inexorably toward

whatever maturity they can manage. And at the end of the process they are out there on their own, just like the rest of us. All grown up.

But the *idea* of childhood is a historical construct, quite different from one epoch to another. Both the reality of childhood and our image of it go through changes as time goes by.

In order to look at the special qualities of childhood today, as an idea and in reality, I'm going to need a benchmark, a basis for comparison. I'll make use of the only alternate world of actual childhood that I can readily lay my hands on, without making some great sociological, historical study – the world of my own childhood. I'll try to keep things general but I will inevitably be at the center of this story, as it is partly my own. And I'll make no claim for its general significance other than as a record of childhood as it was lived in one neighborhood of one medium sized American city in the 1950s.

The Face of My Childhood

I spent my early winters, back in the 1950s, on a tree-lined street in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was a ten-minute walk to Harvard Square and on a wet day I could walk most of that distance through Harvard buildings, museums, lecture halls and dorms. But on my street and on the streets near my

house it looked very like the neighborhoods portrayed in 1950s sitcoms or Disney movies. Big comfortable wooden houses, all different, with nice backyards, some with little picket fences, all with lots of trees. And lovely it was, too.

Our house was on the corner of Kirkland Street, a busy street, and Francis Avenue, a backwater. One of my early memories, from when I was four, was spending a good part of one spring morning out

on the sidewalk of Kirkland. I had been given an autograph book for my birthday and I decided to get it filled up. I went out on the sidewalk with my book and a pencil and stopped everyone who walked by and asked them to write something for me in my book. I don't remember many people refusing to sign in as they walked past. A few of the people knew my parents and wrote funny things. Most of them probably thought I was pretty cute. I'm sure that nobody wrote anything about how outrageous it was for my parents to be letting their four-year-old stand out on a busy street talking to every stranger that walked by.

From around that time on I could walk outside and go anywhere I wanted on Francis Ave. If I wanted to leave my street, I'd clear it at home, unless I was with one of my older brothers. I may have been given this latitude early because I had two older brothers who had been out on their own for years. My next-door neighbor, Billy Miller, who was just my age, similarly had an older brother and sister and had the same rights as I did.

The kid life on our block was very active. From when school let out until it was dark kids would be out on the street playing kick the can, hide and seek, Cowboys and Indians, and riding bikes. We'd get out of the way when the occasional car went by. Whenever possible we lived in a gang.

We played games that took us up our row of houses at the back, climbing over the fences from one backyard world into another. The older kids spent a lot of time on war games up at the end of the street, in an unused area of brush and open land, and they used us as foot soldiers. Us little kids were initiated into a non-adult world of mostly unspoken rules and regulations about how to relate to each other. The games, the play, all combined generally accepted kid practices with a strong awareness of our local conditions. In other words, there were rules and an established sense of fair play, but we got to alter the rules as need be.

On our street we had several professors and a few professional people but mostly we had ministers. For some reason every parsonage in Cambridge was on Francis Ave. Up at the other end we had Harvard's huge Divinity School.



“Today let's look at the parts of your childhood that you haven't used in your books.”

Many of the Divinity School professors lived up that end.

I don't remember any kids having parents who were divorced in those years (though many of these families broke up in the early '60s). No one had half-brothers or sisters. Two-parent families were the norm. After my father died of cancer, when I was four, I felt I had somehow been separated from my peers by having only one parent. Many of the local mothers were very active, and some of them even had housekeepers who looked after the kids, but I believe that mine was the only mother on our street who went out to work at a real job every day. We had a housekeeper, and it seemed to me that the two housekeepers on our end of the street were a stronger presence in all our lives than the mothers were.

My family had three kids, which was average. I knew many families of four kids. Five in a family was rare, as were singletons. Grandparents were common. My own grandmother looked after me up in the country all summer and I spent a night with her every ten days in the city. She took me to dentists and to buy clothes in Boston. I also had lots of cousins round and about.

Boys and girls were very different beings, clearly, right from the start. The boys were more active and the girls more reflective and intelligent. We often all played as a group when we played outdoors and when we were little it was all right to play girl games with the girls indoors. When I was five I would walk up Kirkland after supper to brush the hair of a three-year-old girl with red hair, an operation which her parents found adorable. It wasn't until the onset of puberty that hanging out with girls became a fraught issue. But as kids headed into their teenage years everything became fraught: suddenly the pressure was on.

Men and women seemed even more different from each other than the boys and girls: the men in their tight suits and thin ties, and the women in their knee length dresses. The women's movement in the late '60s may have done even more of a favor to men than to women.

In the early '50s, the paranoia of the McCarthy era was all around us. There was a dark underside to that world and it's amazing, really, how the feeling of fear filtered down to us kids. Nobody

was building bomb shelters, but a whiff of panic hung in the air, and people generally avoided nonconformity. The threat of the bomb affected all of us; my friends and I wondered if we'd get to grow up to be adults. In a lesser way, the Korean War, which rolled along until I was five, was also a presence; it eventually killed five million people, including lots of Americans.

We had a good-sized field behind the Divinity School where they held a Spring Fair every year. When I was six Harvard built some sort of science project there. First they dug the deepest hole any of us kids had ever seen, lined it with mountains of concrete and



covered it over with a bunker. Then they piled tons of dirt around the edges so it just looked like a low unobtrusive building. The last thing they did was come with huge round rolls of already growing lawn, which we found very impressive. They unrolled the lawn rolls onto the dirt slope around the building and drove away. We kids all agreed that something serious, and probably nuclear, was going on in there.

Anyway, Soviet Communism seemed to everybody like it might be catching. We were always hearing about people who had caught it, one way or another. My family was left wing and we knew many people who had been called up in front of anti-Communist committees, including my grandmother. Many of my parents' friends had had



“What if we don't like strong government?”

their careers destroyed. One or two had even committed suicide. Politics was generally a subject you were careful about, as if it were something private.

And my father's cancer, still a relatively rare disease then, struck some kids as akin to Communism, something potentially dangerous and wrong to have had in the family. Death was a bad thing, generally, but anything that made you different was suspect, particularly cancer. I was taunted several times for having a dead and cancerous father.

At the end of the '50s, dyslexic years before they had a name for it, I was put in a special school for kids with 'mental blocks'. When my old school friends would see me coming they would cross the street rather than talk to me. Little did they know that later, in the '60s, many of their parents would funnel them off into mental institutions for a while. Psychiatry was still rising up to its high water mark of power and influence.

And in lesser ways, we were expected to stay in line; for instance, boys only had one haircut available to them during those years, a less-than-one-inch-long crew cut.

Most of our conformity was imposed from above. We had little control over what we wore and what products we used. That was mostly in the future. The hula hoop, the second coming of the yo-yo, and Davy Crockett's coonskin cap were the start of it, in the '50s, and those events woke the business culture up to the great new pool of shoppers out there.

Room was made, however, for many sorts of non-conformity to do with personal interests and initiatives. One friend had a train set that took over a whole upstairs room. Other kids made



The Good, the Bad and the Snugly.

short-wave ham radios or got seriously into the Boy Scouts. Billy Miller and I invented an electric toothbrush years ahead of its time. His father, a Unitarian minister, took it away from us, saying it could strip the enamel off of our teeth in a week. Billy's older brother edited a newspaper that he mimeographed and had us distribute around the neighborhood.

Kids usually got a decent allowance, and there were a lot of moneymaking schemes around. Most kids had to do chores but could also make some extra money on the side by working for their parents. I tried lots of things. I sold greeting cards door to door and also fell for some scam for a catalogue shoe company — both miserable failures. I set up a bicycle repair shop in a tool room attached to the house and did some good business, especially by buying old bikes, fixing them up and selling them on. I bought and sold used comic books and kids books. My best business was a weekend movie theatre I ran in our large basement when I was ten and eleven. I put up posters in the neighborhood and in Harvard dorms to advertise compilations of silent movies on 16mm. That made a lot of money, particularly the concession stand. I poured the profits into my passion of the time — trying to make a 16mm animated cartoon with a friend of mine.

I grew up in the last era where you could still take most things apart and fix them yourself, bikes, radios, record players, clocks, typewriters. If you made a hash of it, you could get somebody older to step in for you. It was considered a normal part of childhood to be handy with such things and any kid who was a fumble-fingers was pitiable.

Some kids had afternoon music lessons and dance lessons or team sports but not much else. I tried piano lessons but quit them when the teacher rapped my fingers with a ruler. You could usually gather a good group of kids after school. Older kids, particularly in private schools, had some homework but it wasn't too oppressive — just enough to make Sunday night unpleasant. There was a sense that you had some rights over your time if you were a kid,

when you weren't in school or needed for doing chores.

The vacations were long in coming but then they went on for a long time, particularly in the summer, which seemed to go on almost forever. Kids got out in late May, early June, and didn't go back until September. Some kids went off to camp or got out of the city to stay with family or friends. The length of the summer vacation split kids lives into two parts so that one way or the other kids had another life to the one they lived in school.

Sometimes that other life was adult dominated: sports teams, Sunday School, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts — that sort of thing. I hated the Cub Scouts, even though my Den Father was someone I had known and liked before. The whole thing seemed dull and regimented, though it had worked for my eldest brother. I inherited many of his merit badges, which was good enough for me. Fat, or very thin, elderly men ran all the scout events in Boston and as much as I liked the idea of wearing a uniform I didn't actually enjoy wearing it around and looking after it. I quit after a year.

I also tried summer camp and hated that. Many kids loved their camps but I found it too much like the Boy Scouts: a summer of regimentation with unruly brats on a lake, eating bad food, endless team sports, followed by a reunion dinner, with more bad food, in the winter. I guess I never developed a taste for being pushed around.

On the other hand I liked going to church. It helped that Billy Miller's father was the minister at the church I went to, and we had the run of the place. We even sneaked up to the belfry with his older brother one time and looked

down over Harvard Square. I liked the way that church wasn't school and it wasn't home. We entered a different sort of community when we went there. Also, we happened to be Unitarians, so church wasn't too theologically rigorous. We went on visits to the other churches in Cambridge, to see how they did things, and spoke kindly about them. Our choir was active and I got the only decent musical training I ever received. I liked wearing my brother's large hand-me-down suits and dressing up like a "little man". For a while I would routinely pack a rather realistic toy 'detective style' pistol in my inside pocket when I went to church, occasionally flashing it to my friends.

Boy Scouts and Sunday School were non-school efforts for children, sponsored by the adult world, that were clearly in a decline. Kids found them uncool and parents didn't care about them in the way their own parents had (the churches we Unitarians visited were full of old people). Still, they were a source of an alternative set of values and an alternative social world to life at school or life out in the neighborhood. Kids got to be with adults who cared enough to volunteer their time without being paid for it.

Television was just coming in, but it didn't dominate the lives of children in the way it would later. In the early '50s, Boston only had two stations. It was a big deal when the third one, an ABC station, started broadcasting. My memory is that on their first night they broadcast Mary Martin in the musical version of *Peter Pan*, which filled us kids with happy expectation. Saturday morning television for kids made a small start late in the '50s but mostly the children's shows were local affairs, broadcast in the daytime. They featured puppets and ancient animated cartoons from the '20s and '30s. We didn't have a TV until my eldest brother bought an old one second hand around 1956, and negotiated to have it put in a small room down in our basement. It wasn't seen as something fit to go into the living room.

I was very aware of the swift development of technology. For instance the early TVs were big boxes with tiny screens. Later the screens got bigger and the boxes smaller. I yearned for a color set and I read about them in TV Guide. The first one to come into our

neighborhood was at the Divinity School and I sneaked in a few times to watch *Bonanza* in color. (For whatever it might imply about their godliness, the Divinity School also had Boston's last five-cent Coke machine.)

I wanted color so badly that I invested in a so-called Color Conversion Kit. I had to take the subway into Boston to buy it at Radio Shack. It came rolled up in a cardboard tube and when I got it home I rolled it out over the TV screen and taped it on. It was a sheet of colored plastic, blue at the top, flesh-colored in the middle and green at the bottom. It was surprising how often it worked out and looked quite good.

I only remember one time when I felt I had been well cooked by TV addiction. I remember stumbling out of my basement into the afternoon sunlight and wondering what I'd been doing with myself. That came about because Warner Brothers sold their old movies to TV and a local station had started airing them daily. I became hooked on noir. By the end of the 1950s people became concerned about what TV was doing to kids. The content was being dumbed down and shows were factory produced. We were no longer being given adult hand-me-downs like old animated films or silent comedies, we were being given cheap, stupid, manufactured pap. They were right to worry.

Other media was important to us kids. My mother got the only two papers with no real comic strips but I'd read the comics at my grandmother's or Billy Miller's. Strips were shrinking fast, post-Peanuts, but they were still twice as large as they are now, and very well drawn. Many of them had been going for fifty years and there was a lot of variety. The color comics on Sunday were all solidly drawn.

Comic books were also quite high quality, even though there was a movement to clean them up and remove the violence. Most of them were harmless. Disney's *Uncle Scrooge* was particularly good, but we also had *Little Lulu*, *Superman*, and many others. These were all regarded as semi-trash by our parents and seen as something potentially harmful even if they included no sex or violence. Because of this attitude my own efforts as a budding cartoonist were usually frowned on.

Parents preferred the children's magazines that were available at the time. These were also excellent and I regretted their passing, or their diminishment, when my own kids were young. *Jack and Jill* was the best, but others were worth reading, too. When we discovered *Mad Magazine* we all loved it.

The children's books being published in those years, for older children, were of a high quality, too. All the kids' books in those days first were published in hardback. The Narnia books and the Little House books came out then, and many others. Great illustrators were working at the time, including Garth Williams and Robert Lawson. Kids were still regularly given books that had originally been written for adults, like *Gulliver's Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe*. With TV still in the background, reading aloud was something that my friends and I would look forward to on winter evenings. My



mother was an excellent reader. A strong continuity existed between current books and books from earlier decades. We all made regular trips to the library.

Radio was still an important medium in those days. The world of network radio, with its comedies, dramas and daily 15-minute soap operas, was dying a slow death. When I was in first grade

I'd run home for lunch so I could listen to a 15-minute comedy show, *Fibber McGee and Molly*, with my adored housekeeper. At night I'd listen to my favorite shows with the radio next to my bed turned down and a pillow over it. Rock and roll was making a very slow entrance on the scene, but the hit parade still included many sorts of music. Us younger kids often shared our parent's rock and roll prejudices for a while, but got won over by the big kids or by the cute novelty songs that were a part of the early rock and roll output.

Movies were a big deal for me. My grandmother or my mother would take me at first, but by the time I was nine I'd go with friends or by myself. No rating system existed at the time, so there were no movies that kids couldn't get into. The first film that my mother wouldn't let me see was *Psycho*. I loved the animated cartoons, but I had generally eclectic taste. When Danny Kaye's *The Court Jester* came out I borrowed money so I could go to see it every day after school, for the length of its run. Out beyond Harvard Square, the Brattle Theatre showed many old black and white movies. I saw a lot of those, and I'd go into Boston to see recent English comedies at the Exeter.

Across the board, the various media available to us showed a high level of inspiration and talent and was kid-friendly. The comic strips were, for the most part, beautifully drawn. The music on the radio and on records showed great range and flair. The entertainers on television and in the movies were wonderfully gifted and assured. The culture had a unitary quality, for all the dross and the trash, which was comforting to a growing child.

I dwell at length on the mass media because it provided ballast to the culture we were force-fed in school. We were part of a larger world than the world of school, and it was not just a 'youth'

Computerized Playschool



world but in many ways the same world that the adults around us inhabited. Even the dinner table discussion of current events, or of ideas generally, was often conducted on a level in which children could join. I would be taken to evening lectures around Cambridge and often see other kids I knew.

I don't mean to over stress the elements of life shared between children and adults. In many ways the adults seemed like separate beings to kids (as always). But we did share things too. Most of the grown ups I knew liked playing cards, for instance, and other games. We were all to make our own fun and be up and doing in a friendly, social way. And we certainly shared a sense that many of the worldly values around us were inherently sound and permanent

Our diet had a unitary quality as well. Kids would mostly eat conventional home cooked meals at set mealtimes with their family around them. Usually it was meat, potatoes and a couple of vegetables. At home we ate a salad every night. Few people were vegetarians. Mothers, or housekeepers, did all the cooking. Freezers were becoming popular and frozen food quickly became a staple part of people's diet. Everyone tried frozen, or TV, dinners, and everyone found them somewhat gross.

Blattitudes



Many bear the torch of some great cause not realizing that is has gone out.

Some families tried to limit their sugar intake. I knew one family who didn't believe anyone should drink tea or coffee and many people believed tea would stunt your growth. Cigarettes, until the '60s, were bad for children but OK for grownups. Most adults smoked. Parents bought books on nutrition and childcare, notably Dr. Spock, and probably had an insecure sense that they should be doing better. My grandmother's generation seemed much surer of themselves.

Grownups popped a lot of aspirin and sleeping pills were becoming popular, but drugs generally had a low profile. A lot of the ads on TV were to do with indigestion and hemorrhoids. I sometimes saw adults who had had too much to drink or who seemed over dependent on the cocktail hour. I remember the first time I saw one of my uncles drunk.

People felt strongly that kids should not take drugs, except baby aspirin. The exception was penicillin, or antibiotics in general, which were handed out freely. When I was eight or nine I started getting swollen glands under my neck and they sent me to bed, on antibiotics, for weeks at a time. I always loved being sick and stretched it out as long as I could. At public school, when I was six, we had to line up for smallpox shots, which left a circular scar of pinholes that we wore like a badge, and all other vaccinations were also non-negotiable. Doctors were tremendous authority figures.

From a child's point of view the world was filled with powerful authority figures who had no compunction about exercising their authority. Many adults made a habit of laying down the law. In fact, growing up into a puffed up, selfish despot seemed one of the fraught dangers of becoming an adult. Older kids who aped that style, who were commanding and disdainful and who had the ability to get away with it, were feared, hated, and reviled. The song *I Won't Grow Up*, from the musical *Peter Pan*, echoed an anxiety we all shared.

Kids got hit or spanked by their parents. Some parents felt free to hit other people's kids as well (like me). Common punishments included being sent to your room or losing your allowance. "A spanking" implied a formal sort of punishment, with a fearsome pause between the crime and the beating. To be "hit" was to be hit in

anger. Most beatings we heard of were mild. Still, we were aware of the imperious pushiness of all grown ups. Things often wouldn't reach the point of punishment because once parents laid down the law, we obeyed.

Kids swore privately, and there was quite a lot of talk about swear words, but swearing publicly was not common; us kids felt ambivalent about it, I think. Most kids' swear words related to insults and anger, and were used for their power to shock. We would sometimes show each other dirty words in books, but they were hard to find. I rarely heard adults swear, there was no real swearing in the media, and, generally, the taboo against it was still completely in place. Still, we knew all the favored swear words available at the time.

Sex was the greatest taboo. Dancing lovelies with enormous breasts would parade half nude around our television set or movie screens, but actual sex was dealt with gingerly. Pornography was not evident in any public way. Kids were not supposed to be interested in sex, though reading Freud was popular amongst the adults. The '50s had a sort of blindness when it came to sex. In Cambridge I knew Harvard graduate students who were clearly, obviously and actively homosexual, yet I know it didn't occur to any of the adults around me to suspect a thing. They were thought of as 'artistic.' When they came out of the closet in the late '60s everyone was surprised.

The first time I was caught playing doctor with another child I was dragged by his teenage sister into another room, forced to kneel before a large, bleeding, statue of Christ, and made to pray audibly for forgiveness. But as I've said, every house adjoining mine was a parsonage. As I was of the younger generation on my block I had a certain amount of sexual experimentation forced on me by older boys and girls, but this didn't happen often. Things were generally prudish and yet it was considered perfectly all right for kids to swim naked together in the summer, and little kids could walk around the back yard naked. It's hard to get the measure of it all; in some ways there was an innocence around the human body and things were pretty loose.

Other things were loose, too, back in those days before anyone had thought of seat belts. I, personally, was bounced around in two major car crashes during

those years. We played on busy streets with no sense of danger.

By the time I was ten years old I was riding my bike all over the city, through the warren of Harvard's amazing facilities, out to Central Square and the YMCA pool or down Mass. Ave. to do some shopping or sometimes up along the Charles River, way beyond my grandmother's apartment. When we closed the doors on our family houses we would all, as we fanned out across the city on our bikes, feel for a moment like we were the true masters of our world.

The Face of School

I almost forget to mention school.

School always seemed like a waste of time, or worse. Luckily there were enough hours in the week so that we could pursue our projects, do our shopping, ride bikes, hang out with friends and have a relatively normal life around the edges of school. At best, school was like a strictly part-time job.

My kindergarten was called The Little Red Schoolhouse. I went there in the morning the first year, walking the three blocks with Billy Miller. The next year, when I was five, they split us up and Billy Miller had the afternoon shift, which was devastating to me. Didn't people understand that we were best friends? Who cared about the playtime, the roll-up mat, or the milk and crackers if it meant losing your best friend?

First grade at my local public school, an ugly big brick building, was boring and a little depressing but I had a horrible time in second grade. I got into a power struggle with my teacher (never a good idea when you are seven), and was sent to the principal frequently. Luckily, he had a summer house 30 miles from my grandmother and we could talk about New Hampshire. He was always kind and only looked stern while my teacher was in his office. The only major tussle I remember with my teacher was when she threw a boy's shoe at him, in the reading circle. He had been taking a long time taking off his shoes. She took the shoe and threw it at him and I was outraged and threw it back at her. That's the one full-scale rebellion I remember.

I couldn't learn to read at all so I was assigned a special teacher who would

pick me up early from school and drive me home through the snow in her open, canvas-topped jeep. We'd sit at my mother's desk and work with reading games that stressed phonics. She was an extremely tall and lovely young woman who wore light gray sweaters and under her tutelage, for what it's worth, I learned very quickly.

In the third grade I was sent to a private school where each class had its own hut. Things looked up for a while, but soon it seemed like the same old grind - but in huts. My homeroom teacher in the fifth grade was John Holt, who was writing a journal about his experiences teaching my class. That journal became *How Children Fail*, which lifted the lid on the strategies kids use to pretend they are interested and engaged in class, when they really just want to get out of there.

Some kids liked school, I think. Girls mostly. Everyone played along. My school was a good school, in its way, and it didn't get too pushy until you were in the upper grades. But by that time they



had pushed me out. My inability to spell and my poor handwriting seemed obviously willful to my sixth grade teacher. I got into another power struggle (still not a good idea at 11), and the next thing I knew I was in a sort of mental institution in Boston. I suppose I should be thankful they hadn't come up with Ritalin yet.

But the main thing, for me and my contemporaries, was the way in which we mostly just marked time during the school hours of our days, shuffling around from class to class. We made a pathetic effort to form a real tribe and have solidarity but we mostly had to fight it out on our own. It was OK, or a bit of a drag sometimes, and there were moments of real fun, but mostly it was just the dull, demanding world we inhabited. A world that did what it could to shape us, individually. A world that wasted our time.

The Changed World of Childhood

What has happened to kids in the last forty years? Many good things. Society has loosened up and men and women take on different roles than they used to. Children have some new freedoms, and are better protected from danger and abuse. But kids still live in the dark shadow of adult projections and are now put under enormous, and almost constant, pressure to perform.

Our social world has been transformed since the 1960s. Families are smaller, and mostly out on their own, with less connection to any extended family. Most kids experience divorce first or second hand while still young. Families now routinely start to extend into half-siblings and step-siblings and step-mothers and step-fathers - all trying to do their best.

One income is not enough to live on any more. Our standard of living has gone up, but often at a high price for families. Most husbands and wives go out to work and many kids start daycare when they are still babies. Daycare leads to preschool and the regimentation and pressure for literacy now start very early. Kids often come home to find both their parents still out. Many families rarely eat together. Evenings are spent in front of separate TVs or computers. There are fewer card and board games, less reading aloud, fewer hobbies. Kids go back and forth between structured social time and an atomized existence. It gets harder and harder for even very young children to self-generate activities when all their time is booked up. For kids and adults alike, life is becoming all dull work and then all dull play.

At school age the demands gets ratcheted up and then the tests begin. Many kids have daily after-school events built in and then come home to lots of homework. The media for young people is now a sort of separate world and may hardly touch on the sort of interests the adults in the house are involved with. Computers and expensive toys lead to a sedentary, acquisitive population of children who spend half their time in a two-dimensional TV-screen world.

Exercise increasingly either means “doing exercises” or is part of an organized sports activity. Many kids have no access to their own outdoors world. If an activity isn’t ‘scheduled in’ it doesn’t happen.

A recent study claims that kids, while they sit at screens, are losing some of their physical dexterity and their hand eye coordination. Another study says there is a definite link between violent TV and children’s violent behavior. Food is increasingly processed and mass marketed – truly “junk food.” Drugs are now common for children with behavioral problems or, illegally, for recreation. Parents, too, are more drugged than ever before.

Sex is everywhere, on TV and the Internet, in magazines and movies, and the fear of pedophiles is also everywhere. Kids cannot be left to play alone outside or off among strangers. Adult-child relations, other than between parents and children, all have a cloud of sex hanging over them. Sex play for young children is considered unhealthy but young teenagers are almost tacitly expected to get into intercourse early. Clothes for young children are increasingly sexualized. And yet with a resurgence of religious feeling there has also been a resurgence of sexual guilt.

New technologies live at the center of many children’s lives, one spawning another at a dizzying rate. Many of these function as a sort of safety valve for lives that are under too much pressure: pressure to be good, to conform, to study hard, to get ahead, to compete. We are creating little consumers, who need their next fix to feel satisfied with their lot in life. There can be tremendous peer pressure to buy the latest high tech item. Most of all there is pressure to accept the status quo. Kids can’t fight City Hall, and yet now City Hall is locking children into a lot of choices they would never have made if given the option. None of this will end until they are well out of college, if it ever ends.

Kids who try to get relief from their stressed lives are being micromanaged by the companies who make money catering to them. When kids escape from the compulsion of the classroom they usually run straight into the arms of big business. The corporate giants now even manufacture products to help kids simulate rebellion, like tee shirts or rap

music. The teen rebel has become just another niche market.

Considering the pressures they are under these days, today’s kids and teenagers seem to be doing pretty well. The recent child protests at America’s war in Iraq showed spirit and gumption. The older brothers and sisters of these young protesters, who have mortgaged their future by going deep into debt to get through college, were not at all so active. But it is hard to judge, from anecdotal evidence, how really well young people are doing – how much love and good sense and individuality they will be capable of as they enter their grownup life. How programmed are they, really?

It seems as if children everywhere are now growing up in an occupied country. They are like adults walking around in some absurd fascist state, just trying to keep their heads down and get by. Who knows what kinds of appropriate anger and violence are currently suppressed? For the most part their childhood seems ignored or wasted. How are we to judge the real strength of their hearts and minds, when children exist almost invisibly within the factory-school system? Will they become corporate automatons that do what they’re told or break out and be freethinking citizens with their own hearts and minds? Only time will tell.

Facing Forward

What can we do about all this? Not much. The thing to aim for is to create a little island around very young children to protect them from the worst of the modern world. Give them everything you’ve got until they’re six or seven. After that, just be there for them as they roll through it, and try to help them create the conditions they need to stay sane. When possible, get them out of it for a little while, or show them that you play by different rules. We don’t have to buy into absurd ambitions for our children. The bottom line, as parents and educators, is that we try not to be part of the problem. So much of the modern project with young people is based on fear, fear of failure and fear of being wrong or different, that we can help kids

most just by being unafraid. Remember, the Emperor has no clothes. Kids will do fine even if they fail tests, get thrown out of school or lose their way for a while.

You can help create a counterbalance for individual children for some moments of their childhood, but you can’t fight the tide of stupid TV shows, insipid kids’ books, mediocre schools, inadequate daycare, having to live life indoors or stuck in cars, ugly architecture, idiot computer games, pushy adults, weird social trends and all the other garbage of modern life. Even if you can protect children with an island of your own creation, they are going to have to swim in that tide someday, or learn to avoid it for themselves.

The answer has to be someplace else. But first we have to let go of false hopes. Schools are not going to improve. For the foreseeable future they are part of the problem and not part of the solution. If you can find a good one and it works for your child then you are one of the lucky ones – but don’t think there is a panacea out there. “Child-centered” should mean “this-particular-child-centered.”

No one will disagree that a great teacher is a wonderful thing. And some subjects can only be learned in a group setting. But real education is elsewhere, and working it out is something that each of us has to face as a challenge for all of our life until we are dead. School is not the answer. The whole project of school infantilizes people and we pay a heavy price for it. Even if someone came up with a perfect school, Big Education and Big Business would co-opt it. The only way to go is to look for individual solutions for individual kids. And then be ready to look for a new solution when your kid has grown out of the last one.

We can’t hide from those two potential enemies: Big Education and Big Business (we could add a third: Big Government). The thing to do is to hang in there with your kids and not get caught up in all the lies and half-truths. And remember, you don’t have to do everything for your kids, you just have to be there for them as much as they want and need you. You don’t have to be some adorable and charming parent who has the gift of being so cute and ‘kid friendly’. Help them negotiate a way through the minefield they are growing up in, and I promise you they’ll thank you for it later.

Everyone has to come up with his or her own educational creed. Here is mine:

I hold these educational truths to be self-evident: Any good educational idea can be co-opted by repressive regimes – so beware. No adult-imposed set general curriculum is of any value educationally – the price is always too high. School is only rarely of primary importance in a child's real development. You can't always get what you pay for: in other words - Childhood is Paradoxical and Mysterious and the issues are not as damn obvious as everyone takes them to be. Paternalism, a top down power structure, has been institutionalized and must always be fought off if real education is to take place. The only educational tools that are really effective are ones that are freely given to kids to administer themselves. Virtually any system of education will work for some kids, but no system is perfect for everybody. Specialist schools, like ballet schools, often work better for kids than normal schools. Any educational system, of whatever sort, that is seen to be unique (one-of-a-kind) by all the participants will have some great benefits for everyone involved. Schools in the process of dying or being born can similarly have great life-educational benefits. On the other hand, factory schooling always destroys souls. Any time spent away from conventional educational institutions, for instance in homeschooling, will always benefit a child (even if it's hard to see the benefit at the time). Occasional boredom is positive and necessary and not to be shunned or pandered to. Kids should always have the final say about all the major choices to do with their own education. The idea that the difficulties to be eventually faced in adulthood should be modeled in childhood is an evil myth. Childhood has its own most important job to do, and it isn't "education." The real job of childhood is to learn how to find happiness. In this difficult world the only people who can really discover this great and lasting secret truth are children. If they find the key while young they can hold onto it forever. We should do what we can to let them find it.

And one more edict I've always appreciated in dealing with kids: Don't Sweat the Small Stuff.

Jerry's ten signs that you need to find a different kind of education for your child!

Many parents do not realize that the education world has changed drastically since they were in school. Back in those days, schools were smaller, class sizes were smaller, dropout rates were lower, violence in school was almost unheard of, and teachers were not terrified of showing affection to the children, or of teaching and discussing moral values. Even through rose-colored glasses, we know that school back then was no picnic, was far from perfect, but at least the teachers and usually the principal knew every student by name at a minimum, something which is not necessarily true today.

Because our public school system has now considerably deteriorated, many parents, teachers, and individuals have taken it upon themselves to create public and private alternatives to that traditional system which is definitely failing. It is important for parents to know that they now have choices, alternatives to the neighborhood school. How do you know that it is time to look for another educational approach for your child? Here are some of the signs:

1. Does your child say he or she hates school? If so, something is probably wrong with the school because children are natural learners. When they're young you can hardly stop them from learning. If your children say they hate school, listen to them.

2. Does your child come from school tired and cranky? This is a sure sign that their educational experiences are not energizing but are actually debilitating.

3. Do your children come home complaining about conflicts that they've had in school and unfair situations that they have been exposed to? This is a sign that your school does not have a proper process for conflict resolution and communication.

4. Has your child lost interest in creative expression through art, music, and dance? These things are generally not encouraged in the traditional system today and are not highly valued. They're considered secondary to the "academic" areas. In some cases, courses are not even offered in these areas any more. This tends to extinguish these natural talents and abilities in children.

5. Has your child stopped reading for fun, or reading or writing for pleasure? Are your children doing just the minimum for homework and going off for some escapist activity? This is a sign that these spontaneous activities are not being valued in their school and another sign that they are losing their creativity.

6. Does your child procrastinate until the last minute to do homework? This is a sign that the homework is not very interesting to your child, is not really meeting his or her needs, and is tending to extinguish their natural curiosity.

7. Does your child come home talking about anything exciting that happened in school that day? If not, maybe nothing exciting is happening for your child in school. Would you want to keep working if your job was like that?

8. Does your child find it difficult to look an adult in the eye, or to interact with children younger or older than they are? If so, your child may have become "socialized" to that very narrow group which many children ordinarily interact with in most schools, and may be losing the ability to communicate with a broader group of children and adults.

9. Does your child seem fixated on designer labels and trendy clothes for school? This is a symptom of the shallowness of the traditional schools' approach, causing children to rely on external means of comparison and acceptance, rather than deeper values.

10. Did the school nurse or guidance counselor suggest that your child has some strange three-lettered disease, like ADD, and that they should now be given Ritalin or some other drug? I suggest that it is more probable that the school has the disease, EDD—Educational Deficit Disorder, and time to get your child out of that situation!



That Dreadful Educationalist:

Answering A.S. Neill's Critics

John Potter

This article was first published in Japan, in the Kogakkan University Journal of the Faculty of Social Welfare.

Neill: Influential but 'Misunderstood'

The influence of the educationalist A.S. Neill has been considerable. At the beginning of the twenty-first century there were schools around the world which had been founded because of Neill's inspiration or which had borrowed or adopted many of his ideas for their philosophy. David Gribble's recent study *Real Education* discovered democratic schools offering varieties of freedom in countries ranging from Japan to Ecuador and from New Zealand to India, and these were found in a number of different settings intended for children of all ages and from many backgrounds. Adaptations of Neill's philosophy were present in many of them. Prior to this, Neill's ideas had also found some partial acceptance in the state schools of his native Britain and his philosophy was already being taught in teacher training colleges and universities there at the time of his death in 1973. The writer's own first encounter with the ideas of A.S. Neill and of his radically free school Summerhill, was in the mid-1970s as a student at what was then Northampton College of Education.

However, Ray Hemmings in his 1972 book *Fifty Years of Freedom*, was already finding at this early stage that many of Neill's ideas had been misunderstood or were being diluted in the process of their adoption by other schools. Despite the award of three honorary degrees by British universities and Neill's emergence as an educational celebrity the most important tenets of his philosophy were often not taken very seriously or were overlooked - especially in the state sector - in favor of the view of Neill as an eccentric who had some good ideas but was just a little bit mad. Hemmings discovered that although Neill had had some influence on state schools, particularly in such matters as the development of friendlier relations between teachers and pupils, other things advocated

by him such as sexual freedom or the right to stay away from lessons forever if you wanted to, were much more frightening for the mainstream education system. The establishment of some school councils was also a pale shadow of the full self-government envisioned by Neill. Most schools were still run by adults, and children were merely allowed a modicum of democracy or freedom by the more benevolent ones. This has continued to be the case in the state system. It seems there is always a danger that we defuse the threat of radicals such as Neill by paying lip service to their importance and by embracing some of their less 'dangerous' ideas while ignoring their more fundamental or important messages. In this way the philosophies of Neill and other radicals can be absorbed into the mainstream while nothing really changes.

Hemmings' study is valuable even now as a comparatively rare and sympathetic attempt to get to grips with what Neill was really saying and it also illuminates the problems of gaining general acceptance for such unusual ideas. He accurately pinpoints what the school Summerhill is all about by referring to it in one chapter heading as 'The Bare Minimum of a School'. For this is what Summerhill was and still is, and Neill often pointed out that he saw it more as a big family than a school. Croall's later biography of Neill also follows the difficulties which Neill faced in his lifetime, while Matthew Appleton's book *A Free Range Childhood* takes the story of Summerhill well past Neill's time and almost up to the present to show a picture of a remarkably thriving and successful school but one still largely ignored by the mainstream world. It is significant that two of the rare books which best explain sympathetically and with understanding the real nature of life at Summerhill should be by Hemmings and Appleton who had both experienced life as members of the staff at Summerhill.

A typical problem has also been that Neill has often been seen as an educator of 'problem children' and his methods only deemed appropriate for them. Some children have always refused to accept the lives forced upon them in schools in which they have no say and where they have to attend lessons that are compulsory. Only when violence or truancy is the result, have governments and educational 'experts' been quick to support alternative and free methods such as those advocated by Neill. But this is seen as a temporary measure with the ultimate goal being a return of the individual child to the orthodox system.

Neill has shown that most of what children do in schools is in fact a complete waste of time and that there are much better things that they could be engaged in: exploring their own interests, acquiring new skills, making friends, chatting, playing, thinking or daydreaming. This is all dangerous stuff and cannot be taken seriously by the majority of people as it doesn't sound like anything they've heard of before which might be called education.

While Hemmings was writing his book back in the early 1970s, Neill's philosophy as embodied in his work at Summerhill, had already come under attack from the British government as a series of inspections found things not to their liking. This was an uncanny forerunner of the later troubles to befall the school after Neill's death when in the 1990s it suffered what amounted to harassment from a series of unsympathetic and completely inappropriate inspections from Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education), only managing to free itself after an expensive court case which effectively found in favor of the school.

The later inspections and subsequent court case in 2000 were not least remarkable for the government's stubborn refusal to try and understand anything at all about Neill's real philosophy. This attitude seems to have contributed largely to their defeat in the appeal made by the school and heard at the Independent Schools Tribunal. Despite this the HMI Report claimed that it did not pass judgment on Summerhill's philosophy. Clearly though, its own rigid view of what constitutes education was greatly at odds with the reality of Summerhill. The expert witness statement by Professor Ian Stronach on behalf of the school which was heard at the Tribunal catalogues an incredible ignorance on the part of the HMI inspection which failed completely to address Summerhill's unusual aims and methods. Stronach takes apart the Ofsted argument piece by piece to devastating effect and shows that the inspectors were in effect trying to judge "tennis by the rules of basketball" or "entering a raccoon at a dog show." Not surprisingly, the question most frequently asked of the Summerhill children was "How often do you go to lessons?"

This association of education with the academic side only, to the detriment of everything else, goes hand in hand with the idea that education is a preparation for some undetermined future. Therefore the present must always be sacrificed to the contingent future. This is found almost as much with those who purport to have some understanding of Neill's ideas or who imagine that they are sympathetic to Summerhill. Therefore, even parents of students at Summerhill are doubtless weary of being asked questions concerning their children's 'learning' progress.

Parents of Summerhillians who understand and support the school must also be very strong and clear in expressing their opinions to others. Misunderstandings though seem almost inevitable given that the true nature of Neill's ideas put into practice is still shocking in a world where it is assumed that adults know best what is good for children.

Educationalists and university professors, who on the surface may be sympathetic or reasonable in their discussions of Neill, are by no means immune to this problem either. A stumbling block here is that Neill is not quite like other educational philosophers. He was comparatively little read in educational theory and even less impressed by the ideas of other educationalists, and claimed his initial inspiration to come from

psychology rather than education. Although often described as a progressive educator he held no 'progressive' theories about learning or the classroom and is completely different from those such as Rudolf Steiner or Maria Montessori with whom his writings are frequently (and wrongly) grouped. For Neill, Steiner's spirituality, his attempts to mould and guide children, and his disapproval of self-government were enough to put him beyond the pale. Similarly, he saw Montessori as a religious woman who placed too little importance on the child's fantasy life and too much on learning and intellectual development. Neill felt that Homer Lane's one book, *Talks to Parents and Teachers*, was of greater value than all the work of Pestalozzi, Rousseau, Froebel and Montessori put together, because Lane touched on deeper things to do with child nature rather than learning and the classroom. Moreover, Neill's own books do not read the way that many people think a book on educational philosophy should read. For one thing the books, although often repeating the same ideas in different ways, are immensely readable, enjoyable and entertaining. They are heavily biased towards Neill's own experiences and full of anecdotal material to support his theory and practice at Summerhill. And of course he is irreverent and, needless to say, always on the side of the child. (Hence titles such as *That Dreadful School* and *The Problem Teacher*). This is a tough one for teachers and educationalists to come to terms with as opinions like these question the whole validity of their existence and so Neill's ideas have a tendency, if not to be dismissed, then to be written about with many reservations. He is often damned with faint praise.

Neill: The Usual Criticisms

Peter Hobson, an associate professor in the School of Education Studies of an Australian university, wrote a short chapter on Neill as a contribution to the book *Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education* which claims to look at "fifty of the most significant contributors of modern times to the debate on education." The book is a companion to the earlier history, *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education*, and was published by Routledge in 2001. Neill rubs shoulders here alongside names such as Heidegger and Wittgenstein, as well as Jean Piaget, Paolo Freire, Ivan Illich and Howard Gardner. All the essays are brief and summarize the life and works of each thinker ending with a list of major writings and suggested further reading. The four page essay on Neill summarizes very well his development as an educationalist and his work at Summerhill and gives a good deal of credit where it is due. But the final page and a half contributes criticisms of Neill which are by now very familiar. In an introduction of this kind the author must feel duty bound to find something to criticize if only to show he's done his homework and has been paying attention. Hobson's is in some ways a useful introduction and has not been singled out here because of any unusual animosity towards Neill. It is simply that his reservations are such standard fare nowadays that they serve as a good example of the kind of thing continually said about Neill. They also deserve a response. His final section contains three broad complaints: that Neill lacks a systematic, considered philosophy of education; that he had a simplistic and outdated view of moral and religious education; and that he had an anti-intellectual bias.

Neill's philosophy was inextricably linked with his work at Summerhill and so attempts to respond to criticisms of the ideas will also inevitably address the situation at the school in which they were put into practice. In attempting to offer a reply to these criticisms I would like first to draw attention to the following quotes:

"You cannot have a school based on respect for the individual if the ultimate governing system is authoritarian. A school must be run from within because when you go outside it you cannot see what is going on. To give people authority over an institution is to make them believe that they understand it. A school which allows children to find their own values cannot avoid providing ammunition for its critics...Only people inside the school, seeing the many children who succeed without any problems, seeing the children with difficulties change and progress, can form any true picture of its merits." David Gribble, *'Dartington Closes'* in Lib Ed Vol.2 No.3 Leicester, 1986, p.6.

"Would we expect a zookeeper to be able to hold forth on the natural behavior of animals in the wild without studying it first? The conclusion we might reach in the case of a tiger, for example, is that in its natural state it spends its day pacing listlessly up and down and is unable to fend for itself. Expertise in one field does not justify judgment in another. We must first gain experience of and familiarity with the

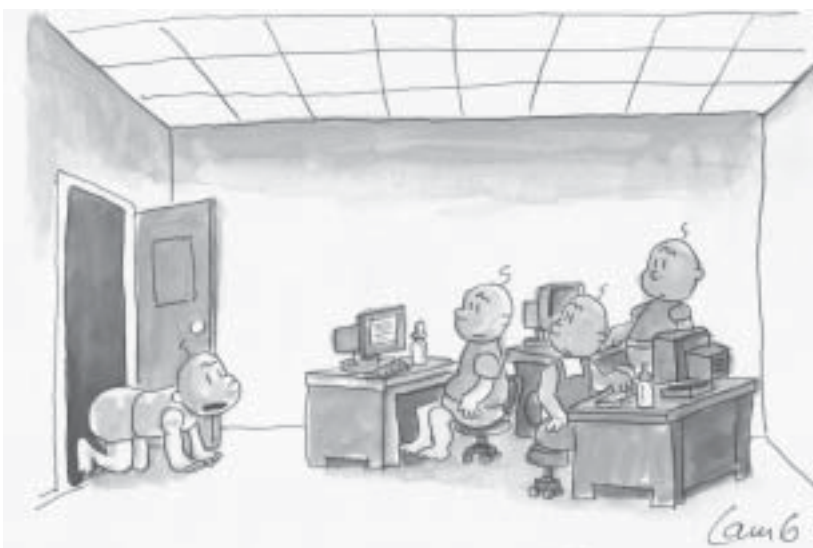
new field before we can comment with authority on its content. As such, the world of the 'free range' or self-regulated child lies outside of the auspices of any academic institution or tradition, be it psychological, sociological, or educational. Until such time as these disciplines embrace this world seriously and practically it remains the province of those who have; namely the handful of parents, educators, physicians, and others who have had hands-on experience, and the children themselves." Matthew Appleton, *A Free Range Childhood*, p.2.

What follows are Hobson's three criticisms as quoted by me from his essay, followed by the comments of some of those best able to respond as they are all in some way connected with Neill, Summerhill or with what can very loosely be called Neillian ideas. They are therefore unlikely to have any of the common misunderstandings or misconceptions about this kind of education and in all cases have had the benefit of being 'insiders'.

Dr Dane Goodsmann was a Summerhill pupil, then teacher, and now Summerhill parent. She completed a doctoral study on Summerhill and is now Education Adviser at King's College, London. David Gribble was a teacher at Dartington Hall School and then at Sands School which he helped to found. He is the author of *Real Education: Varieties of Freedom*, a book which investigates schools around the world where respect for the individual child is central. Albert Lamb was a pupil at Summerhill School, is married to an ex-Summerhillian and was a Summerhill parent. He is the editor of the Penguin edition of A.S.Neill's writings, *The New Summerhill*. Bryn Purdy was the founder of Rowen House, a school for "girls under stress" which was largely inspired by Neill's example. He is also the author of a book on A.S.Neill. All were asked to comment in any way they liked on the criticisms and to send their replies to me independently of each other. Their answers provide an interesting and fitting conclusion which presents clear and informative arguments in a much needed response to these criticisms of Neill.

Criticism 1

"(Neill) lacks a systematic, considered philosophy of education, especially a coherent theory of knowledge. His ideas are based primarily on his own experiences and observations, supplemented with some study of psychological (especially psychoanalytic) theory. Certainly one's own experiences are an important part of any educational theory but they need to be supplemented by some more systematic philosophical position such as the nature of knowledge, learning, morality, hu-



"Back to work, babies, the bottle break is over!"

man nature, society etc....He also tends to oversimplify complex philosophical issues such as the crucial distinction between freedom and license, where he thinks it sufficient to merely distinguish the two conceptually and give some random examples of acts he calls either freedom or license."

Dane Goodman:

Neill always claimed that Summerhill itself was an experiment. It is my view that this critique would itself have to address/question its own notion 'systematic'. A term that could be challenged simply by referring it back on itself: "because I name x and ascribe it meaning - therefore it is." 'Systematic' is, in itself, a particular and value-laden term. Educational theories, especially theories of knowledge, tend to simply stand to prove themselves (e.g. IQ tests etc.) Neill could argue that by creating Summerhill as a longitudinal, ongoing 'experiment' he could and did prove his basic tenets relating to children's behavior, development, meanings and purposes.

David Gribble:

Only a professor in an education department could complain that Neill lacks a systematic, considered philosophy of education. He embodies such a philosophy. What he did not do is express this philosophy in the sort of abstract terms that professors of education, alone in the world, seem to savor. If Neill had written about the nature of knowledge, learning, morality, human nature and society in an abstract and academic way then no one would have listened to him. He threw light on such ideas by his interactions with the world which he described wittily and provocatively. It is up to those of his readers who wish to know the abstract theories behind his work to deduce them for themselves.

Albert Lamb:

Neill never claimed to have a systematic, considered philosophy of education. He would probably have questioned whether such a thing were possible or of any value. Educational theory, as applied to young people, always presupposes some form of compulsion, some way in which Adults Know Best and should continue to have the right to impose their program on children. It was enough for Neill that his Summerhill children, when not under compulsion, were sometimes able to perform little miracles of high-speed educational attainment.

Neill wrote as a gadfly and his first intention was to drop a bomb into the accepted patterns of educational thought and get people to look at children and schooling in new ways. A lot of his stories were like Jesus' parables - intended to work as puzzles that would help people along to their own direct understanding of the truth that was already before them. Part of his sense of life and education included an acceptance of paradox. If you don't force kids to learn they will want to learn. If you don't teach morality but simply put kids in a situation where morality will be required they will explore the subject themselves.

Neill definitely simplified philosophical issues but I think he was pretty good on the distinction between freedom and license. If his readers didn't get it that could be because it is hard for people to see the distinction when they are only used to a top down social order. Your modern paternalistic, or materialistic, family tends to spoil their children in the little things while being extremely pushy about whatever they perceive to be the big things. To see the difference between freedom and license clearly you first have to embrace your own freedom and grant it to those around you.

Bryn Purdy:

I read the title, which included the word 'thinkers', and the Neill that I knew, albeit too briefly, would have harrumphed his protest at being included in their company. Neill was, I submit, not so much a 'thinker' as a 'practitioner', a 'doer'. He was, to me at least, a shining example of sane priorities set in a world of crass 'academicism'. I submit that the author is among those "highly educated men" whom Pestalozzi argued did not "confine themselves...to the simple starting-point" to which both he and Neill aspired.

Would not the criticisms be best answered by quotation from my book, that the author purports to have read, having included it in his bibliography? My quotation, happily Neill's own, on page 22 and at the foot of my page 71 answers, if not wholly rebuts, the author's criticism above:

"You won't want to visit the classrooms if you are interested in education."

So I would replace the author's criticism that "Neill lacks a systematic, considered philosophy of education" with:

"Neill possesses a boundless, faith in the child."

**"You cannot have a school
based on respect for the individual
if the ultimate governing system
is authoritarian."**

Criticism 2

"Similarly it could be argued that Neill had a rather simplistic and outdated view of moral and religious education as necessarily authoritarian and didactic. Modern educational notions of moral and religious autonomy in which children are introduced to such areas through open-ended discussion seem not to have been part of his understanding."

Dane Goodman:

What Neill may have thought personally about moral and religious education does not have much bearing on his views on who should have the right to choose for others (in this instance children) what their beliefs should be. His views on the right of the individual to choose, given the context of their lives within the community, are viewed by some as an indication that Summerhill was/is a truly spiritually fulfilling experience.

David Gribble:

I can't believe there are any conventional schools where religious and moral ideas are introduced exclusively through open-ended discussion. Before the discussion starts respect must be demanded and discipline imposed. Moral and religious education are indeed not necessarily authoritarian and didactic, but Neill's assumption that in most schools that is precisely what they are is just as true today as it was fifty years ago.

Albert Lamb:

Neill's moral education, built into the fabric of Summerhill life, was light years ahead of what is done in other schools. He looked at conventional morality as mostly cant. On the other hand he was prejudiced, for some good personal reasons, against religious education and he never considered ways in which it could be taught effectively at his school. In his writing he told a stretcher and said that no Summerhillian ever became religious when he knew that it was not true. I have a Talking Meeting for teenagers at a local Quaker Meeting and the kids love it. They talk freely about a topic of their choice and then have to agree on a joint statement that goes no further than any individual in the room. Now that I think of it Summerhill kids did have similar discussions, led by Neill.

Bryn Purdy:

May I quote a clergyman who visited Summerhill? "It's a wonderfully happy bunch of children you have here, Mr Neill... What a pity they're pagan."

Yes, Neill's view about moral and religious education probably was 'outdated': it could be argued, however, that it was 'timeless'.

Criticism 3

"Another significant problem with Summerhill is the anti-intellectual bias that Neill brought to it. Is learning as unimportant as he maintains? Are books really 'the least important apparatus in a school'? Do children always know what is in their best educational interest? Can one fully utilize one's freedom without a solid core of knowledge and understanding on the basis of which to make meaningful choices? Why does educational relevance have to be always of an immediate and practical nature?"

Dane Goodman:

Here is an interesting quote from an ex-Summerhillian who at the time was a Professor of Math at a university in

London: "I learnt to do my thinking at Summerhill." It is my view that the author of the critique has a mixed-up understanding of the notion 'self-direction'. Summerhill would take the view that the individual is worthwhile *per se* and not simply as a result of their academic endeavors or achievements. Therefore academic activity is granted back to the individual to make their personal choice - and not seen as a purpose for adults to have over children - thus academic endeavor is fully supported by teachers but remains the responsibility of the individual child.

David Gribble:

My interpretation of Neill's allegedly anti-intellectual bias is that it was not a dislike of learning - he tells of ex-Summerhillians who have gone on to be university lecturers and doctors and so on - but a dislike for rote learning at the expense of personal development. To take the points one at a time:-

Learning without understanding is not just unimportant, it is harmful, and puts many people off learning altogether.

No, books are not the least important apparatus in the school, but nor are they the most important. Neill was exaggerating to emphasize this point.

Does anyone actually understand the term 'best educational interest'? Children may not always know what is in their 'best educational interest', but do adults always know what is in a given child's 'best educational interest'? Isn't the attitude behind this whole question rather authoritarian and didactic?

I'd back the child who made a choice between a range of possibilities against an adult who required everybody to do the same thing.

That's what the adults are for - but they are not around to impose choice, but to illuminate them.

When children's interests are immediate and practical, then their learning will be immediate and practical. There is no point in teaching children to parrot abstractions when they are not ready for them.

Albert Lamb:

I'd have to agree that Summerhill has had an anti-intellectual bias that Neill built into it. I suppose he was afraid that once the teachers got in the saddle his school would turn into another kind of beast, a tamed one, so he kept them somewhat neutered - with a few exceptions.

Neill never said, to my knowledge, that educational relevance always has to be of an immediate and practical nature. That is more like the ideas of John Dewey and the Progressives.

"I'd back the child who made a choice between a range of possibilities against an adult who required everybody to do the same thing."



"Thank God for Suzuki!"

This anti-intellectual bias is a real criticism and means, to my mind, that Neill's school never tested out how valuable an education, in the sense that people conventionally think of one, it could offer to its kids. So many things at Summerhill worked through the culture but there was never an effort, as there often is in intelligent families, to create a culture where learning is prized. I can see why Neill feared the academics holding sway but Summerhill in his time, certainly in my time there, could have offered a richer and more questing intellectual experience. Other aspects of the culture were carefully looked after but that one was rather neglected.

When I was at Summerhill there was a tradition of kids learning to play the piano by copying boogie woogie figures played by the older kids and ex-pupils. The kids gave you praise for your efforts and the school's administration kept a couple of pianos going in different parts of the school. I went away for twenty years and when I came back there were no pianos in the school and the tradition had died. The adults had only a small part to play in that particular tradition but if they didn't attend to it the tradition couldn't continue. I don't think the staff saw it as their role to monitor issues to do with the ongoing culture and traditions of the school. Many of these things don't apply to the school in its current incarnation.

But I don't want to give too much weight to this side of things. Teacher types always think it is so important but it isn't that important. I do believe that if it is really valuable to get a conventional education people will find a way. My son Roland, who has had only one year of schooling - not counting his five years at Summerhill - in the last 13 has just been accepted into Harvard University to study Philosophy, and on what passes today for a full scholarship.

Bryn Purdy:

This is the area in which I permitted myself to come into most overt conflict with Neill's thinking when I came to write my book for the Educational Heretics Press. My opinion is so equally passionate for the two apparently antithetical points of view that it must seem schizophrenic. On the one hand, I am passionate for my own study and on my pupils' behalf over the years. On the other, it was deeply repugnant to me to 'encourage' the pupils to attend class. Indeed, it didn't last more than a few weeks before we decided to close the school.

What I think is important about my experience is that I introduced Summerhillism or at least 'Summerhillery' into the State system for a period of seven years (which must be regarded as 'successful', according to the statistics provided). It may be added at this point that Rowen House had its first two university graduates in 2002, one with a First in Mathematics.

As a devout bibliophile myself, I dissent from Neill's quoted opinion that "books are the least important apparatus in school," but I know what he means. But when he asserts Hearts not Heads in school, then I must fall silent. Children have as equal a right to learn intellectually as emotionally. In an ideal world, I affirm the equal importance of Hearts and Heads in school.

Robert Owen said on entering what he judged a too zealous classroom in New Lanark: "Don't annoy the children with books." I conjecture that Owen emphasized the word 'annoy'; he does not say, "Do not enthuse children with books." So I declare myself in favor of 'the book', but, at a higher level still, I can see that the human race might have been better without 'learning'.



The trajectory of the author's criticisms of Neill are below the water-line of Neill's aspirations. One does not expect the Captain on the Bridge to attend to the menu in the messroom, or shovel coal in the engine room. You might as well tax Socrates for not having left us with a canon of principles of sartorial elegance, as Neill for not setting out the principles of running a 'good school'. May I re-cast the author's third criticism: Another significant boon of Summerhill for the child is the anti-intellectual bias with which Neill has endowed it. The following story was not included in the book published by Educational Heretics Press.

Neill is a silent witness to an uncongenial on-ship conversation about criminality. Bored, he gets up to leave. One lady asks him, "What do you think we ought to do with the criminal, Mr Neill?" Over his shoulder, Neill replies, "Reward him." "And, as I left the company, they laughed at my little joke."

What did Matthew Arnold say about Shakespeare, which encapsulates what I think of Neill the educator, and also addresses the issue of 'knowledge'.

Others abide our question. Thou art free.
We ask and ask: Thou smilest and art still,
Out-topping knowledge.

Or, if one's interests are cricketing rather than literary, one might quote from another book published in Australia last year, on the cricketer Don Bradman:

"The argument will go on as to whether Nicklaus was better than Woods, Pele better than Maradona, or Ali than Louis, but, if cricket is still around in 10,000, no-one will be claiming that anyone was better than Bradman."

Let us not stretch ourselves so far. May we not claim, however, that A.S Neill was the Greatest, if not the most complete, Educator of the Twentieth Century?

Note:

Many thanks to the above contributors. Thanks also to Professor Ian Stronach of the Institute of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University for his help.

This article is dedicated to another great educator, my friend
Ozaki Mugen (1942-2002)
of Kansai University.

John Potter - potter@asaki-net.email.ne.jp



Movin' On Down – And In *The Beginnings of The Free School*

By Mary Leue

The year before The Free School of Albany first opened its doors Mary Leue prepared the ground in her own home. This process is described in the following extract, taken from Chapter 34 of Mary Leue's autobiography which is a work in progress available for viewing on her website: www.thoughtsnmemories.net

In this story Mark, Peter, and Tom are Mary's sons. The sources of various entries are marked by Mary as: M, for Mary's memoirs, B for her husband's journal and S for an earlier account of hers, of the school's origins.

M. Returning in the early fall of 1969 [from a year's Sabbatical at Oxford University] to the prospect of Albany's awful city schools triggered protests and importunings from Mark for the right to be taught at home. Although he had been relatively accepting of his previous two years there, his fifth-grade class was affecting him mainly as a mix of boredom, anonymity and curricular oppression on the part of his teacher, who was fixated on long division, both for homework and the following morning's class work every day. From his (mostly lower-middle-class) classmates, Mark had become the target of bullying and racist intolerance, his best friend being Billy Wooding, who was black - evidently being lumped in with Billy and his little brother Andy as a fitting object for their persecution.

I had read *Summerhill* before we went to England, and had even

corresponded with Neill once or twice, and had developed a wish to start a free school in Albany. The first symptoms of Mark's acute unhappiness did not appear right away, as my husband Bill recorded in his diary:

B. Wednesday, September third

Overcast, cool, slow rain this evening.

Mark started the fifth grade this morning. Mary went with him to see that he got properly readmitted. There seemed to be no trouble about accepting his year in England. His teacher is Mrs. Reuss. Mary was favorably impressed with her. Mark says that she runs a closely disciplined class. He came home at eleven-thirty with homework to do and more supplies that Mary had to dash right out and get for him. She also bought him a sort of dispatch case in which to carry them.

M. But that good beginning did not continue.

B. Monday, October sixth

Quite warm today.

Mark made a big fuss about going to school today, says that he is terrified of the teacher and of some of the other pupils, who give him a hard time. Mary wants to transfer him to PS 19, which is located way down on New Scotland [Ave.]. He would have to take two buses to get there. Mark Gordon [Mark's other good friend] and Greg Staley [the son of a colleague of Bill's] go there and claim that it is better. I fear that his going-to-school trauma will just be increased by such a transfer. I feel that Mary has been stimulating this reaction of his and that it is more a symptom of his underlying emotional difficulties than a principal cause of his troubles. He finally went off to school around quarter after nine.

One of Mary's current projects is to start a "free school." She went down to the Education Department (State) this afternoon and got herself a certificate of temporary qualification as a teacher at the secondary level. She wants to visit schools being run in conjunction with the Unitarian churches in Syracuse and Buffalo.

M. I reproduce a few paragraphs of the story I wrote later about the origin of The Free School offering more details of this exploration of my options as a school founder:

S. I decided to ask for advice at this point, and went to see a friend of mine whom I trusted as having an enlightened view of children's education, she being the religious education director of the local Unitarian Church where I had taught Sunday School for a number of years. Her advice was to have a talk with an educational filmmaker in Newton, Massachusetts, Alan Leitman, who was running a resource center for early childhood education and whose films dealt with the development of successful alternative education programs in various places, notably the experiments in Philadelphia associated with the Parkway Program, but on an elementary level.

I made some phone calls and then went on my travels. Alan received me warmly, and gave me several suggestions. One was that I first ask a local newspaper to do a feature on our little school, and then that I rent a few films depicting the kind of school I was interested in creating and show them in community places, in order to attract the kinds of families who would want our kind of school for their kids. He also suggested that I visit a few “free schools” in the New York state and New England regions, to see how they actually look in action.

He warned me to start small, learn my “trade” at every stage of the process before moving to a larger operation, and in general, to ensure that the enterprise was sound at every step of the way; that we really knew our business and were accomplishing what we set out to do, not just playing kid games. That advice still governs everything we do.

So, I began that very day, visiting Jonathan Kozol’s Roxbury Community School on the way home, and three others over the following few days, one in Buffalo, one in Syracuse, and a third in New York City - the Fifteenth Street School.

M. Bill’s journal continues the saga of those tumultuous days:

B. Monday, November seventeenth

Mark refused to go to school again this morning. After asking me for my stupid opinion and condemning it as not only stupid, rigid, and conformal but as also utterly unfeeling, Mary decided to take him out of school and tutor him herself. She had called up the Board of Ed. last week and says that she was told that she can do this and needs only his textbooks. The enterprise needs also a consistency of effort on both their parts and a certain objectivity which they do not have in their relationship. These are my contentions, and, of course, Mary has theoretical objections to both of them. Mark will be her trial balloon for her new school. ...

I don’t think that I have been quite fair to Mark; haven’t specified his complaints against the school. He says that he has been getting beat up every day by some of the over-age slow

learners, of which the school has many. He feels that he has been singled out as an object of ridicule and scorn by the teachers and principal, this helping to make him a target. This has been mostly because of his long hair. The tormentors, he says, also hate him because he isn’t stupid. His teacher assigns too much stupid and repetitive homework and is invariably boring and stupid in her classroom instruction. The program is meager and uninspiring. Well, he has some valid points there. On the other side, of course, one can claim that he is going to have to continue to live in a stupid world full of stupid people,



something which I’ve never learned to do very well myself. I guess I’ll just have to wait and see how it comes out.

Tuesday, November eighteenth
Quite mild today.

Mary continued Mark’s education, says that he is making rapid progress, shows a great deal of enthusiasm and initiative. They launched several new projects. Mary bought another bird feeder (the old one got lost), and Mark put in a solid hour of bird-watching, identifying them with a book we have.

Mary got Mark some art supplies and he painted another one of his volcanoes as a birthday present for Peter. When he asked me how I liked it, I replied that he seemed a little hung-up on volcanoes, which was not a good response.

Mrs. Laperche, the school nurse at PS 27, called up this morning to inquire about Mark. She was also the school nurse at PS 16, so has known Mark for some time. Mary explained the reasons for Mark’s “withdrawal” to her, and she was not unsympathetic.

M. About two weeks after Mark and I got started on our tutorial venture, I

had run into a friend (Betty Ahr, the mother of a family of six kids, whose father Art had been our older boys’ shop and crafts teacher at Milne, and had inspired them to express their creativity) with six children in another of Albany’s “finest” public schools. When she heard what I had done, she begged me to take on her three youngest, who she said were acting as though their lives were on the line every morning when going-to-school time came around, and whom she usually ended up having to accompany there. One of my chief worries had been that Mark would feel isolated from his friends, and this sounded great, so I agreed at once, and we were in the school business!

The first thing I had to do was to establish the legality of keeping Mark at home, and the principal of his school left me no doubt on this issue, calling me to warn me of legal action against me the very day the school nurse ascertained from me that Mark was indeed not sick but had withdrawn from school. Being in the state capital, I decided to make some phone calls to find out for myself if this was actually the case, since I was a teacher.

I was fortunate indeed to find a man in the curriculum department of the state department of education who assured me that my action was legal, and who offered to give “state guidelines” to anyone from the local school board who hassled me. This, again, was fortunate, because the very next day I received a call from the head of the bureau of “attendance and guidance,” (the truant officer, a Mr. Joseph Markham), who began an impassioned harangue warning me of the terrible things that were about to occur to me should I refuse to bring Mark back at once, but calmed right down when I gave him the name of the man from “State Ed.”

Shortly after this, he called back and apologized for his previous manner, assuring me that what I was doing was fine, and that he would be happy to give me any help he could if I should run into any problems. And, actually, during all the years of the existence of our school, Joe Markham has been our liaison with the superintendent of schools, has given us a lot of help in various times of trouble including a brush with the county health department, and has been not only

respectful of our operation but really sympathetic with our purpose, since his chief clientele comes from the same "population" most of ours do, and he knows the problems that can arise.

M. Back to Bill's journal:

B. *Tuesday, December second*

...Mary's enthusiastic invitation to the Ahrs is being taken up immediately - the three youngest Ahr children are to be dropped off here shortly after eight tomorrow morning. Mark is furious. He was enjoying Mary's exclusive attention. I guess I'll be getting to the office somewhat earlier in the future.

Wednesday, the third

Mary's school got going this morning, a little late, but quite successfully, according to her. She showed me examples this evening of the great progress made by the Ahr children - Jo Amie (5th. grade), Artie (3rd. grade), and Nanny (first grade). She thinks that she'll soon have them all doing fifth grade arithmetic. Their paintings made today adorn the walls of our family room.

And I, stick-in-the-mud that I am, am angry about them using our sofa cushions for gym mats, and about Mark's taking an expensive fireplace implement, a brass-handled brush, out to his tree house and leaving it there.

Mary is having trouble with the emotional relations among her [school] children, especially with Nanny, the

youngest Ahr child. She has been getting them to talk out the problem and to try to settle it and regulate themselves. Mark is sort of acting up too. She took them all to the State Museum this afternoon, is taking them back tomorrow to be allowed to enter the Iroquois house, a privilege reserved for "school groups." She parked the bug in a place reserved for school buses and received a five dollar ticket.

Thursday, December eleventh

Rain, followed by still quite mild but windy weather.

The children made colorful signs saying "Free School" which they pasted in the windows of the bug, and Mary took them back down to the State Museum this afternoon and parked again in the school bus area. This time the car was not ticketed.

M. My account of the second half of the school year of 1969-70 is much more cheerful than Bill's account might suggest:

S... The school year we spent at my home went swimmingly. We all loved the experience, and since it was the year of the student strikes and the Cambodia crisis, as well as the initiation of "Earth Day," it was a very exciting time to be "free" of school - and for me, to be actually conducting my own little "unschool," planning and carrying out my own design of curriculum, which included a lot of projects like picking

up twelve trash bags of cans, bottles and other garbage thrown down an embankment by the side of a public road near the house (on Earth Day); helping at a day care center set up for the children of university strikers and others; putting on home-written plays; learning to develop film and making our own movies; cooking and baking, and generally enjoying ourselves a great deal while learning the three R's.

Early in June, 1970, we took a vote and decided to go on with the school the following year, even though the other three were moving during the summer, and so, we would be back to a population of one.

A week later an article appeared in the newspaper which included large pictures of the five of us gathered (untypically) around our round dining room table surrounded by books and papers. It also mentioned that I would be showing three films [following Alan Leitman's valuable suggestion!] on "free school" education, at the Unitarian Church and at the university, which I did the following week to crowded rooms of fascinated adults whose appetite for information about this new "thing" seemed boundless. Out of these three exposures to the public, I found a group of four families interested in sending us their children and in working as a group to help us find a suitable building and at least one other teacher for the seven kids who would be involved.

Suddenly, providentially and wholly unexpectedly, a friend of my older sons gave me a call and asked if he could drop over to chat. Puzzled, I agreed, and lo, what he wanted to talk about was his wish to quit high school teaching (where his best friend had been recently fired for refusing to shave off his beard) and come to teach with me at our fledgling school, now christened "The Free School" by my four students. I agreed enthusiastically, and introduced him to our little group of parents at the next strategy meeting. They were equally delighted.

By mid-June our little school was out for the summer. One other mother and I set out in earnest to find a building where we could hold forth, and right away, the first snags began to appear. There were no buildings to be had that we could afford which would give us what I knew



to be an absolute necessity as a school site - one large room for gatherings, roughhouse, and general togetherness, plus enough additional space for activity rooms, eating, a lab, at least one good bathroom, an office, a good-sized kitchen, and play space outside. We literally searched for weeks, surveying the entire region - even including the top floor of a factory building which would have been ideal as a huge area on which we could erect our own partitions at will, the owners of which had been playing with offering it to the city for a municipally-funded day care center. At the last minute, they said no, after learning that we would be privately funded at a rate far below what they had been hoping to get from the city! Like Tom Lehrer's "old dope peddler," they had wanted to "do well by doing good."

We began desperately asking churches for space in their Sunday School quarters, were refused by at least three church boards and suddenly, were offered the rental of an entire church building for \$100 a month by a black minister whose congregation had bought a fine stone church across town and were moving out. This was a frame building in a state of great neglect but essential soundness, and we grabbed for it frantically and with great relief, because, by this time it was nearing the end of the summer and we had not yet even begun to prepare the space for the school. After a hasty consultation with our parent group, and with the reality of our financial straits before our faces, we all agreed on this building, which was in the inner city. The price was right, the size was ideal, and our appetite for renovation was boundless, none of us having done any!

Immediately, we all set out to put it into usable shape. Working virtually around the clock, sharing coffee and sandwiches far into the night, we worked to cover up the grime with new paint, even going so far as to paint floor-to-ceiling blackboards in several rooms, scrubbing whatever we could not paint, attaching as a fire escape an iron staircase we found at a wrecking company to an upstairs door which had opened onto thin air, for a reason none of us ever fathomed. By the time school started, we had already grown to love this place, funky as it was, but indisputably ours!

Books etc.

The Happy Child by Steven Harrison is a groundbreaking book that will have readers questioning every form of education in our society. Harrison forces the reader to consider the unthinkable: children can learn without adults to tell them how. Children naturally want to learn, so let them direct their own education in democratic learning communities. With practical suggestions, the *Happy Child* details how to provide a living and responsive environment that can meet the expanding heart and mind of a child. A happy child will flourish with an education that recognizes that the child is already fully expressive and relating to life. And a happy child, the author asserts, is at the core of a truly functional and creative society. Part social critic, part humanistic visionary, Harrison not only describes a reorientation of education, but the possibility of rethinking our families, communities, and workplaces, and ultimately what gives our children - and all of us - real happiness. Available from Sentient Publications, 1113 Spruce St., Boulder, CO 80302. Web: www.sentientpublications.com

George Meegan - in his book **Democracy Reaches the Kids!** - sets forth the basic requirements for establishing democracy in education in the Twenty-First Century. These are: Communication (fluency in one's mother tongue); Computer Literacy; Environment; Culture (local and the world); Fitness; Social; and Personal Money Management. He also takes a special look at education in the United States, relates lots of personal experiences, and provides examples of democracy at work in education and why it's the only way to succeed for the future. A fundamental reform of education which can create an honestly educated population with the prospect that every child will become the best that he or she can be. For more information, contact George Meegan, Japan National Maritime University, Kobe 5-1-1, Fukae, Higashinada ku, Kobe, Japan 658-0022.

A new book called **Magical Parent-Magical Child** by Michael Mendizza with Joseph Chilton Pearce, helps adults rediscover the playful, childlike genius of their own nature as they guide, learn from and mentor their children. Exploring this creative energy transforms the adult, which results in radically different learning environments for children. Changing the adult changes the environment called childhood, which transforms the child. The adult-child interface is optimized by applying to parenting and to education the proven strategies that allow top athletes and other performance specialists to respond to ever changing and challenging environments with grace, peak performance and true intelligence. The authors believe the results are radically different human beings, and therefore a different culture than we see today. Available from In-Joy Publications, 123 Nevada St, Ste A, Nevada City, CA 95959. Tel: (530) 265-8484.

For the Love of Learning is a book written by Jenny Sockey, a homeschooling parent since 1981 and owner of a used homeschool bookstore which grew into the largest in the country. In the book

she gives a synopsis of both Charlotte Mason and Classical Education, shows the similarities and differences, and how they can be combined to give children a love of learning that will never end. There is also a book list and resources by subject. It's available from Xulon Press, 11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, VA 22030.

Web: www.jennysockey.com.

SageWorks Press is announcing the newest edition of **Making A Difference College & Graduate Guide, Education to Help You Shape The World Anew** (8th ed). The Guide focuses on colleges with a strong ethic of service, strong service-learning programs, and central concerns for peace, social justice and the environment.

A wide array of criteria are used to evaluate the colleges including high participation in community service, practical majors leading to meaningful work, third-world service-learning, holistic and interdisciplinary education. The result is a unique spectrum of colleges. This is a college guide students actually pass from hand to hand.

Web: <http://making-a-difference.com/>

Contributors to **Beyond the Silence: Listening for Democracy**, edited by J. Cynthia McDermott, investigate some of the essential elements of a democratic classroom: reflection, self-evaluation, counseling, community building, consensus building, authentic projects, and intrinsic practices. The ideas expressed by Alfie Kohn, Peter McLaren, Shelley Berman, Hilton Smith and others are all classroom based and holistic, drawing on the cognitive, the physiological, and the spiritual. Students explain why classrooms in which they have the freedom and opportunity to pose problems and work out solutions are the best environments for learning. All of the authors are in agreement: A democratic paradigm is what is needed in our schools. The book is available from Heinemann,



"Hear Ye! Hear ye! The King says the Queen died naturally!"

Schools Where Children MATTER

Exploring Educational Alternatives

Schools Where Children Matter gives parents and teachers **common sense advice** for finding the right balance of freedom and structure and the right environment for each child's unique ways of learning. Author Doralice DeSouza Rocha describes three distinctive alternative schools that practice a more **authentic** and **caring** way of teaching and shows how children **thrive** when they are treated as valued individuals. This insightful new book shows successful alternatives to standardized learning.

Visit www.PathsofLearning.net
or call toll free (800) 639-4122
 Foundation for Educational Renewal • P.O. Box 328 • Brandon, VT 05733

361 Hanover St., Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912. Web: www.heinemann.com.

In Empowering the Child: Nurturing the Hungry Mind, Ray Hartjen, PhD has crafted a solid philosophical and practical basis for self-initiated learning and the creation of a progressive "Elementary Education for the 21st Century."

Hartjen lays the groundwork for his ideas by citing such diverse authors as Erich Fromm, Kahlil Gibran, Stephen Covey, and Joseph Chilton-Pearce. He adds personal stories of his own children as well as vignettes from open/progressive education classrooms. The result is a clear and inviting book in which everyone from parents to seasoned educators can find much of value.

Hartjen describes 4 main rules as the basis for elementary schools and classrooms: 1) helping children to focus; 2) supporting self-initiated activities; 3) fostering thinking skills; and 4) providing a space for creativity. Although Hartjen's background is in elementary education, these rules can be useful as a basis for middle schools and high schools as well.

The friendly and passionate style in which Hartjen writes is inspiring! Let's take his positive spirit and well-thought out ideas and begin to realize an educational system that empowers and nurtures each child. But lets also pay attention to Hartjen's final words: "If you are encouraged by this model, move slowly and purposefully. Don't let it be just another fad. Develop five- and ten-year plans. Create pilot programs and learn from small commitments, and finally, don't inflict it on everyone. Respect the rights of those who choose to stay with the tried and traditional methods." Published by Alternative Education Press, Ltd. 43 Old Fireplace Rd., East Hampton, NY, 11937

The Growler Tapes, Audio adventures are 30 minute long tapes and CD's with radio style drama for kids, created and produced by Bob Sakayama. These stories have kids for actors and are completely original, not spin-offs of TV shows or kids

books. They have no weapons or violence but they do have quite a lot of science fiction and magical elements and some social comment. There is music and sound effects and the stories are broken up with news and other sound elements very effectively. There are elements that run through the whole series and the kids in the stories are often pitted against authoritarian adults. 6 to 12-year-olds might like to listen to the clips on the Growler website before investing \$8 a tape or \$12 a CD, as buying them all 30 of them could mean a sizeable investment. www.growler.com

Children's Rights and Power, Charging Up for a New Century by Mary John. This just published book is part of a series published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers called *Children in Charge*. Mary John has edited the whole series, which focuses on the theme of children's rights, and now she has written her own survey of the field, looking at the issue from a global perspective. She is a developmental psychologist and an English academic who is known for her research on the transformation of power relationships. In this dense book she looks at the worldwide reality of children's lives, including even children who are forced into armies or into jobs, and brings in quotes from a great many of the academic studies of children made in recent years. There is also interesting material about the Children's Parliament in India and from her visit to the Albany Free School. If you need you need some academic support to prove that kids can act democratically this book could be particularly valuable.

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.

Only \$65.

Call 800 769-4171
for an appointment.

Education Revolution Subscription Order Form

**Save \$4.80 off the
Cover Price**

One Year's Subscription is \$15 plus shipping charges of: \$3.40/yr in U.S., \$5.00/yr in Canada and \$14.00yr outside North America.

To pay by credit card call 800-769-4171 (Outside the USA: 516-621-2195) or mail/fax this page to: 516-625-3257. To pay by check make check out to AERO and send with this page.

Education Revolution
417 Roslyn Road
Roslyn Heights, NY 11577

Your Name _____
Street _____
City _____ State _____
Zip _____ Country _____
Telephone: _____
Credit Card: _____

Visa MC AE

Other Items

Item	Price
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Please add \$3.50 for first item and then \$1.50 for each additional item for shipping in the USA



“Mom, are they going to test me my first day?”

AERO

417 Roslyn Rd.
Roslyn Heights, NY
(516) 621-2195

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Albertson, NY
Permit No. 124