New Book
The New Book
By Jerry Mintz

How to Have Freedom and Democracy in Education

NO Homework AND RECESS ALL DAY

www.educationrevolution.org
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.

Looking for News
Who Can Resist High Stakes Testing?....... 4
Starting Charters........................................... 5
Legal Pressure on Homeschooling............... 6
South Korea Experiments............................. 6
Modern School Reunion................................ 7
How Children Teach....................................... 7
IDEC 2003..................................................... 8
Yaacov in New York....................................... 10

Being There
Essential Conference........................................ 11

Mail & Communication
Main Section............................................. 15
High Stakes Testing........................................ 17
Public Alternatives......................................... 18
Home Education ........................................... 19
International Communications..................... 21
Conferences................................................ 23
Jobs and Internships........................................ 24

Revolutionary Times
Tennis and Homeschooling
Jerry Mintz............................................... 27
Too Much Tennis
Brian Cheek............................................... 31
Liberty Based Montessori
Sharon Caldwell.......................................... 33
How To Run A Meeting
Jerry Mintz............................................... 37
The Lie Behind The Ivy
Arnold Greenburg...................................... 40
William Gets Sat On
Chris Mercogliano...................................... 41

Kids Corner................................................. 44
Books Etc.................................................... 45
AERO Books and Videos.............................. 26

The Education Revolution
The Magazine of Alternative Education
Spring 2004 - Issue Number Thirty Eight - www.educationrevolution.org

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
ER Editor, Illustrator and Designer: Albert Lamb
Advertising: Isaac Graves
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 Raywld, John Scott, Tim Seldin, Elina Sheppel, Andy Smallman, Nick Stanton, Corinne Steele, Tom Williams
The Word from Jerry

The IDEC was a smashing success (see Page 8), whose impact can still not be measured as it continues to reverberate around the world. For example, individuals went back to India and Hawaii to organize democratic schools. A parent and a principal who attended the IDEC came back to New York City and we organized a group with the purpose of establishing a democratic school in the City where there aren’t any at this time. The group then spawned two subgroups.

One is starting a private democratic school tentatively called the Brooklyn Free School. The other has sent in a proposal to New Visions, which administers Gates funds, to start a public, democratic, ‘micro-school,’ which would be located in the Bronx. If funded, this would eventually consist of several ‘pods’ in different parts of the City, starting with 25 students in shared spaces, and growing to 75. They each have been meeting every two weeks and I have participated in all of their meetings.

In the latter grant proposal, AERO would be the lead partner and provide the training for the teachers. The initial year would provide up to $25,000 for that purpose, most going to AERO for training and administration. The NYC department of education would pay for the teachers. The initial reaction from Bob Hughes, director of New Visions, was very positive, but the grant must first be approved by the Bronx division.

The Brooklyn group has been meeting every other week for several months. Alan Berger, who has been part of the post IDEC New York City group, intends to start the school by the beginning of next school year.

On the AERO home front, we have decided to follow up on the success of the IDEC and our familiarity with the Russell Sage College site to organize the AERO 15th Anniversary Celebration Conference, to be held from June 25-27th. We can do this in 2004 because the IDEC will not be held until December in India, so we are not competing with it. In fact, we can help organize more participation. The theme of our conference will be “Setting the Agenda for the Education Revolution.”

In conjunction with the 15th anniversary celebration, we have decided that the next issue of the Education Revolution Magazine will go to everyone on the AERO database of schools, over 12,000, plus past subscribers, with the possibility of adding other lists. In sending the magazine to the whole list we hope to spread AERO’s ideas further.

We are putting our database online for the first time on the Education Revolution website. We are doing the latter instead of releasing a new directory. Some basic information will be free but we will charge for detailed access, or offer a yearly subscription to access it.

Vedananda Pandeya at the US Open (See Tennis and Homeschooling page 27)
Who Can Resist High Stakes Testing?

There is very little that could be considered Revolutionary in the arguments about high stakes testing in the USA. To a large degree the debate buys into the whole Big Education mindset that looks at children as receptacles who need adults to pour into them whatever current opinion thinks they need lots of at the moment. There has also not been much defense of the idea that teachers should be in charge of their own curriculum. And nobody is talking about kids themselves having some final rights over their education. This probably reflects the point of view of the majority of Americans. In fact, when the No Child Left Behind act came into force it was initially surprisingly popular. Since then various groups have decided that they can't live with it in its current incarnation.

Bush succeeded in pushing his No Child Left Behind Act through Congress in January 2002. In some surveys since then, Democrats still outpoll Republicans on education. But in other surveys, the parties are even. An ABC news/Washington Post poll conducted in July 2002 found that 62 percent of respondents approved of Bush’s handling of education.

The law, the most aggressive federal education mandate in history, requires annual testing for students in the nation’s 95,000 public schools and orders states to rate their schools based on how many students pass the tests. Schools labeled as “not making adequate yearly progress” are subject to a host of state actions aimed at improving the schools - or letting parents pull their kids out.

Ninety-five percent of congressional Democrats and 86 percent of congressional Republicans voted for the law. But since the Bush administration began implementing it and since Democratic presidential candidates began campaigning, the law has steadily lost its bipartisan aura. Now, No Child Left Behind is shaping up as a presidential election issue.

Lately Bush’s new law hasn’t been getting such a good press:

No Child Left Behind, which Bush’s staff once considered his crowning domestic accomplishment, is under attack by many school administrators, who consider it a rigid intrusion they cannot afford. The states’ first round of school evaluations shook the confidence of some parents instead of reassuring them. Bush’s program eventually will allow pupils to transfer out of public schools that receive poor scores and do not improve.

In Tennessee, 47 percent of the state’s 1,650 elementary, middle and high schools failed to make what the state considers adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind criteria. Mary Ann Blankenship, assistant executive director of the Tennessee Education Association, said she has led 100 workshops on the program in the past year.

“I haven’t found any place where people are happy with No Child Left Behind,” she said. Mike Allen Washington Post, (January 9, 2004)

One reason that schools and teachers are not happy with the law is that the funding that was supposed to go with it and help pay for it didn’t materialize. Something between six billion and nine billion dollars that was supposed to kick in from the federal government hasn’t been paid out. And the law makes a lot of expensive requirements considering that the feds only accounts for 7 percent of school budgets. This has put everyone in a bind.

For months, the Democratic mantra has been that the Bush administration shortchanged states by billions of dollars for implementing the federal education law known as the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires local school districts to test third-through eighth-graders in English and math, raise the quality of teaching forces, and impose sanctions on schools that fail to improve student achievement.

“The more people know about this particular law, the less they like it,” NEA spokeswoman Kathleen Lyons said. She called a key requirement - that all elementary and middle-school children in public schools be proficient in math and English by 2014 - unworkable and absurd.

Indeed, there are signs that the growing pains of implementing No Child Left Behind are spreading beyond school administrators and teachers to Republican and Democratic legislators, who in some states are balking at the new federal mandates in the midst of budget crises that have forced them to cut state funding for education.
Meanwhile, parents are receiving the first reports that their public schools have failed to make “adequate yearly progress” under the law. Data collected by the publication Education Week show that more than 23,000 schools did not reach state proficiency standards in the 2002-03 school year, and 5,200 had missed the target for two years. Under federal law, those schools, deemed “in need of improvement,” must give students the option to transfer to a better-performing school. Those on the list for three years also must provide private tutoring. Mary Leonard Boston Globe (January 6, 2004)

With the NCLB law up and running, and school districts unhappy about the first fruit, many school districts and individual schools are looking at the possibility of opting out of the law by not taking any federal money. This can seem preferable to submitting to something that will prove expensive and difficult for them in the long run. Various groups are up and running and ready to fight the new law.

There is a group in Florida that identify themselves as FCAR - Florida Coalition for Assessment Reform. In Ohio, they call themselves Parents Against Unfair Proficiency Testing. Those in Nevada are Citizens For Alternatives to Standardized Test Abuse. In Louisiana, it’s Parents For Educational Justice. Massachusetts has several groups, one of which is Student Coalition for Alternatives to MCAS (better known by its acronym SCAM. The M stands for “Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System”).

More than 50 Internet sites for organizations opposed to high-stakes testing are listed on the Internet. The members of these organizations have listened to the political blather about educational “accountability” coming from Washington and state capitals, and they don’t like what they hear - evidence of a profound disrespect for the young, and ignorance of the complexity of educating. They’re fighting the claim that one-size-fits-all, high-stakes, one-shot, machine-graded, standardized tests say something useful about kids, teachers and schools.

From Marion Brady

Starting Charters

“New studies suggest that –even with fewer resources at their disposal–charter schools keep pace with, and in some cases outperform, conventional public schools. With over 684,000 students enrolled nationwide, and more than 2,700 contracts between charter schools and their government authorizers, charter schools may be the most common example of education privatization.” Privatization Watch, (October 2003)

One question to do with Charter schools may have been settled. The religious question. The U.S. Supreme Court last June, in Zelman v. Simmons-Harris, ruled that inclusion of religious schools in Ohio’s state-enacted voucher program in Cleveland was not an unconstitutional establishment of religion under the First Amendment. The high court held that the legislation envisioned a comprehensive education system that permitted state support for parental choice of parochial schools as one option, along with traditional public schools and secular charter schools – either public or private.

Charter schools seem to be getting harder to start. Enticed by the promise of freedom, some public schools converted to charters; civic-minded entrepreneurs also joined the movement. But now, for aspiring innovators, the window of opportunity seems to be closing. New state rules and paperwork are tying things down. This gives a big advantage to charters that are started as part of networks of new schools, networks that share the same non-profit management organizations above them. This will make for economies of scale while setting up new schools but it may also make innovation unlikely. An interesting example of a new charter “network” is being started in this one, by the Coalition of Essential Schools:

Coalition of Essential Schools receives $18.7M from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to create a network of “mentor schools” across the country. The CES Small Schools Project, a five-year initiative, will involve the creation of 10 new CES high schools, the improvement of five existing high schools, and the formation of a network of 20 “mentor schools.” The mentor schools will share their innovative practices and offer resources to both the new CES schools and other schools seeking to become more rigorous, personalized and equitable. High schools to be chosen as CES mentor schools are small (typically serving fewer than 400 students) and feature highly personalized learning environments that nurture each student’s intellectual passions. These schools serve large percentages of students who, in other circumstances, would be considered “at risk,” but who are graduating high school and entering college at extremely high rates. The Coalition of Essential Schools, founded in 1984 by Theodore Sizer, is an education reform organization dedicated to transforming American public education so that every child in every neighborhood, regardless of race or class, attends a small, intellectually challenging, personalized school. The CES national office is in Oakland, CA, and there are currently nineteen CES regional centers across the country. Web: www.essentialschools.org. Email: info@essentialschools.org

Liberty School has been involved in another interesting bit of networking:

Liberty School is one of 10 schools in Maine to receive a $400,000 grant over five years to inspire the changing of high schools in Maine. 60 schools applied. We wrote an exciting proposal that will enable us to pursue our vision of where we want to go, but the head of the Promising Futures group at the Mitchell Institute said to me, “We’re counting on you to show us how to
do it.” One of the components in our proposal was having our students organize Democratic Forums for other students and schools around Maine to explore what it means to be a democratic school. They also liked our commitment to developing new ways of assessing the educational virtues of democratic schools. Being a “school without walls” is another proposal they were intrigued by. Web: liberty-school.org. Student e-zine: fertileturtle.org.

Legal Pressure on Homeschooling

In the USA there are some new legal pressures on homeschooling.

HR 2732, SB 1562 (The Homeschool Non-Discrimination Act), written and supported by the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), has been the topic of widespread and growing controversy on email discussion lists and support group websites. Given the seriousness of the concerns this legislation raises, all homeschoolers should inform themselves about the facts and act accordingly. For more information about the situation visit these websites:


An in-depth analysis by attorney Deborah G. Stevenson: www.chomeschoollaw.com

New Jersey Homeschool Association: www.geocities.com/AthensAgora/3009/headsup.html

Illinois HOUSE: www.illinoishouse.org/a17.htm

Washington Natural Learning Association: www.wnla.net/


A bill that would force New Jersey homeschool children to submit to the same statewide assessment tests required of public school students, and force their parents to give the local school board proof the student had received an annual medical examination, is set to be introduced in the New Jersey legislature.

The bill would also give the State Board of Education power to impose regulations on homeschool families. Homeschooled students would be forced to take the assessment tests in a public school. From: Scott Woodruff HSLDA (Home School Legal Defense Association) Staff Attorney

South Korea Experiments

Chris Mercogliano writes with news about the education revolution in South Korea:

I was invited to South Korea in early December 2003 to witness firsthand the nascent education revolution that has been underway there for the past several years. As has been the case in nearby Japan for well over a decade, more and more Koreans are questioning a public education system that is becoming increasingly rigid and pressure driven. Groups of parents, teachers and community activists from around the country have either already successfully founded a number of educational alternatives based on a variety of philosophies and approaches, or are currently in the process of doing.

My feeling while I was in Korea is that a formidable alternative education movement has taken root. The developments thus far in urban centers like Seoul and Tae Jon and in rural areas like the Jiri Mountains appear to be the tip of the iceberg. Once the pioneering generation of alternatives begins to establish a credible track record, a second, more widespread one is going to quickly follow. Sensing this, I think, the government recently jumped on the bandwagon by establishing a public agency to support experimental educational models. And at the same time, corporations like Kyobo, which is the largest insurance company in Korea and which paid me to speak at a heavily attended education conference in Seoul, are beginning to fund alternative education.

“Setting the Agenda for the Education Revolution”

AERO’s 15th Anniversary Conference & Celebration

Check it out!

June 25th – 27th
Russell Sage College, Troy, NY
How Children Teach

Sharon Caldwell writes from South Africa:

Today I had the privilege of watching ten children, aged 8 to 13 years old, at an ice rink, for a period of two hours. These children were together (a birthday party) and there was no one else on the ice. After a few minutes I realized that this was an ideal laboratory situation to watch natural learning in action. The only adults were sitting some way off, drinking coffee and chatting, and the children were unaware that I was watching. This is what happened.

As they arrived the children greeted each other, and chatted for a while. They fetched their skates, and went on the ice. The most experienced has only skated about ten times, and for some it was clearly their first or second attempt. All the children skated around, alone, once or twice, staying near the side. They began to venture away from the rails, some going faster. Loose groupings began to form. I then noticed the children were showing each other things, comparing what they could do. They gave each other advice and demonstrated techniques. There was a fluid movement between forming groups and skating alone. Some children were standing watching others. Some were quite daring, clearly pushing the limits of their current ability, while others were cautious. The children were helping another, and in every case I observed, the child doing the ‘teaching’ was only slightly more competent at the specific skill than the ‘learner’.

The more proficient skaters were chasing each other, clearly taking risks to achieve more speed. There was a lot of fooling around, interspersed with very focused and deliberate experimentation with new skills. Some were trying to skate backwards, others practicing ‘crossing over’ around the corners. Now and again a child would leave the ice, sitting on the side and watching, and then going back on. In many cases it was at this point that the child would try something he or she had not done before. Towards the end of the session there was some cooperative experimentation. As their confidence increased the children felt ready to collaborate on a new skill or move.

It was only during the last half hour that the children started falling. It seemed to me that this was because they were ready to really start taking risks, trying new, difficult maneuvers. I noticed children grouping round the child who had fallen, laughing with (not at) the child whose experiment had not been successful. This spurred them on to greater adventure. The children who could not skate well continued to plod around near the edge, venturing out into the middle at intervals, sometimes with, and sometimes without assistance or coaxing from the others.

At the end of the session every child could skate better than when they started. The children who could skate had perfected new skills. The children were happy and contented after two hours of uninterrupted, undirected activity.
A speaker on stage holds forth over an audience below. The message is unmistakable: knowledge in the speaker, ignorance in the audience. Empty vessels wait to be filled with information. On the first night of the International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC), author and activist Bill Ayers began his speech with a critique of this view. How can such an unbalanced relationship form a basis for mutual respect? How does that approach honor the experience and knowledge of those in the audience? As the gathering unfolded over the coming days, it became clear that its spirit was carried in Ayers’ critique: the IDEC was not your standard conference. IDEC 2003 gathered over 500 educators from 25 countries and 90 schools to discuss the notion of democratic education: a vision of schools where students have a real voice in the decision-making process. In this view, students are far from empty vessels – they carry the responsibility and enjoy the freedom of being equal community members, with equal votes in the running of the school.

The conference, which took place from July 16-24 2003, aimed to embody this principle of self-government. Each day, an open schedule quickly filled with workshop postings from the attendees, leaving everyone with several options for each block of their time. At any given moment, discussions were running on topics ranging from abstract pedagogy to the details of running a democratic school. The schedule was further filled with games, music, dancing, and slide shows.

With its structure continually in creation, the conference reached a level of intensity that few could have predicted. Spread across the beautiful campus of Russell Sage College in Troy, New York, the attendees lived, ate, and discussed in close proximity. On any given day the campus’ central courtyard would be filled with pockets of discussion, whether workshops or informal conversations, while children ran about and amateur musicians took advantage of instruments left at strategic locations. The excitement was tangible: educators and students accustomed to battling over their basic beliefs enjoyed the reinforcement of discussing finer points and personal motivations with hundreds of peers from around the world.

IDEC began in Israel in 1993. Teachers and students from democratic schools, frustrated over their inability to talk and contribute during an international conference on multicultural education, were invited afterwards to the Democratic School of Hadera. The teachers and students from the various democratic schools met for two days and gained so much that an annual meeting was established. IDEC was born, and over the years the conference was hosted by schools in Austria, Japan, Ukraine, New Zealand, Israel, and England. IDEC 2003 was the first IDEC in the United States, and later this year the conference will move on to India.

There are no official criteria for democratic schools, yet it is apparent that the United States has a relatively large number of schools with democratic practices. One such school was the host for the conference, The Free School of Albany, New York. Located in a downtown section of the New York capital, The Free School enrolls between 50-60 students from Kindergarten through eighth grade, including a day care section for two through four year olds. The school has been in existence since 1969, and though independent from the public system, it has a sliding-scale tuition that provides all families with the ability to enroll their children. School conflicts and issues are decided through Council Meetings that gather together all students age six and above and their teachers. At these meetings, a student is always chairperson and each student and teacher has one vote. Additionally, each morning begins with an Activities Meeting in which students and teachers can suggest and offer classes, which are all non-compulsory.

Variations on these themes can be seen in democratic schools throughout the world. One list of these schools can be found on the website for the associate host of the conference, the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO): www.EducationRevolution.org. The option for “Democratic Education” will bring you to a page from which you can view the list of 160 schools.

The conference had two central goals. The first was to create a truly global gathering of democratic educators for discussion and sharing of ideas. The second was to challenge the newest fad in education: high-stakes testing. Speakers spoke out against the injustice and failure of these tests, including New York State Assemblyman Ruben Diaz, Jr. (D. Bronx), Fairport, NY school district superintendent Bill Cala, and Susan Oahanian, author of One Size Fits Few. Steve Orel of the World of Opportunity gave a moving account of his organization, which is located in Birmingham, Alabama to assist students “pushed out” of the public schools. School districts around the country are using this “pushing out” practice to raise district test scores, which have become critical due to their ties to school funding and job security.

In particular, the conference provided an opportunity for activists to discuss their concerns and plans regarding the
New York Regents tests. These high-stakes exams have recently become mandatory for high school graduation, threatening the creative practices of innovative schools in the state which employ more experience-based forms of assessment. The leading Regents opponents in the state had the chance at IDEC to meet and discuss their strategies for changing the policy. Soon after the conference, legislators in New York State announced public hearings that will be held in October to address the value of the Regents tests.

Although the nine days of IDEC 2003 were filled with hundreds of unscheduled activities and conversations, the organizers made sure to program a few key events and speakers. Attendees were treated to the premier of a documentary about The Free School created by two of the school’s teachers, a new film on Summerhill School (a progenitor of many democratic schools, in operation for over 80 years in England), and a portion of the upcoming documentary “The Fourth Purpose,” by Roland Legiardi-Laura, which is based on John Taylor Gatto’s book *The Underground History of American Education*. Visits were made to the nearby Free School and the Peace Pagoda, a beautiful structure for peace located on land owned by The Free School in the foothills of the Berkshires. The “Innovative College and School Fair,” held on July 19 and 20, allowed the 90 schools in attendance the chance to showcase their unique characteristics.

Each evening was anchored by speeches and workshops from accomplished educators. John Taylor Gatto, one of the leading proponents of alternative education, spoke on the history of public schooling and the potential for reform. Zoe Readhead, daughter of A.S. Neill and principal of the Summerhill School, spoke on the traditions and ongoing work of Summerhill. Yaacov Hecht of the Israeli-based Institute for Democratic Education gave several workshops and talks, detailing the exciting work being done by his organization. The Institute now works with 25 democratic schools and 250 public schools in Israel, as well as projects to create regional learning communities.

For many attendees, one discussion in particular conveyed the promise of the conference.

On Sunday, July 20, attendees heard a discussion led by Michael and Susan Klonsky of the Chicago-based Small Schools Workshop, which is dedicated to the creation of small, innovative schools throughout the Chicago public school system and around the country. Michael mentioned his praise for the many schools present at the conference that were independent from the public system and carving out their own niche. He reminded them, however, that the vast majority of students are still sitting in the failing public schools.

Chris Mercogliano, co-director of The Free School and author of *Making It Up As We Go Along*, introduced the Klonskys and directed the questions and answers session afterwards. Chris spoke briefly on his thirty-year attempt to justify his work at the independent Free School. He described his realization that, while the “terrible” Albany public schools enroll far more students than the Free School, the movement for reform must pursue projects both within and outside the public system. Upon hearing this, Michael walked over to Chris, and they embraced each other warmly. It was clear they had struck a chord among the conference attendees.

The effects of the conference have already begun to ripple out, in projects, friendships, and personal growth. Many of those in the IDEC online community have
announced travel plans to visit the people and schools they encountered at the conference. One attendee from India has decided to start a democratic school in his country. Another attendee from China made the decision to do her doctorate thesis on democratic education. An attendee from New York quit his previous job to establish a home school resource center in his area.

Additionally, the two authors of this article have decided to travel to Israel in 2004, as members of a team of five young educators researching the Tel Aviv-based Institute for Democratic Education. The research trip will study the various approaches used by Israeli democratic schools, and their success in fostering a movement of systemic reform. If successful the trip will be the pilot year of a permanent program to bring international educators to Israel.

Hundreds of attendees from IDEC 2003 are intent in plans to travel to India in 2004 to further the connections and friendships they have made. They want more music, more dances, more conversations, more debates, more workshops, and more time with each other. Their enjoyment both during and after the conference provides added weight to Bill Ayers’ critique: conference attendees, like school students, enjoy being active participants instead of empty vessels, and can gain a great deal through that process. In that spirit, we invite all readers to contact us with your questions and comments, or if you would like more information about IDEC or any of the schools and ideas mentioned in this article.

This article originally appeared in Green Revolution. Contact the authors at cbalme@alumni.upenn.edu or dbennis12@yahoo.com. Christopher Balme, a recent graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, has taught in traditional settings and is working to link the alternative education movement with the public system. Dana Bennis, who earned a music degree and teaching license from the University of Michigan, has taught in traditional and alternative settings.

But in each manifestation, democratic principles form the core of democratic education. Members of the school community form different bodies, similar to the American judicial, executive and legislative branches of government, which oversee the activities inside the school. In this system, students are treated as equals, and are granted great oversight in the direction of their education. They formulate its content to a degree that may seem unimaginable and unmanageable to those accustomed to the standard model of Western schooling. But Hecht asserts that, much to the surprise of the cynics, this approach often works. “We do not have anarchy,” he said.

Hecht’s philosophy has proven popular in Israel. The Hadera Democratic School was meant to hold 350 students, but it quickly developed such a strong reputation for offering a unique, world-class education that it soon had a waiting list of more than 3,500 students. Before his death, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin championed democratic education, and his Ministry of Education granted it high levels of financial support. After Rabin’s assassination, government support waned. When Benjamin Netanyahu took the reins of power, he cut the education budget, and those who supported a democratic education system left the government. The Institute for Democratic Education picked up the torch in the private sector and continues to spread the word within Israel and internationally. In Israel, public support for democratic education remains strong, Hecht reports.

In a truly democratic school, a peaceful, harmonious learning environment usually blooms, Hecht said. As an example, he pointed to a school in one of the most impoverished, crime-ridden areas of Tel Aviv that now follows the democratic philosophy: Violence, once an enormous problem, has been virtually eradicated, he said. The performance of the students...
has risen dramatically, and the school is looked upon with measured awe by the Israeli educational community.

According to Hecht, democratic education’s emphasis on nonviolence even benefits those schools in which violence has not reached crisis-like proportions. A culture of aggression, he said, is now a major scourge facing educational systems around the world. Students cannot think creatively in an environment plagued by behavior unconducive to creative thought, Hecht said, behavior that urges a sort of simplistic “anything to get ahead, me-first” mentality.

From his travels around the world observing numerous public and private schools, Hecht has come to the conclusion that educational systems have not responded adequately to the technological advances and seismic social shifts of recent decades, from the decline of the traditional nuclear family to heightened levels of aggression.

“The school system has changed,” Hecht said, “just not in the same direction” as the world. Proponents of democratic education demand immediate, relevant change, he said. They want a system that interacts with the world in a positive way, he said, rather than one that forms an insular cocoon of mediocrity.

Dana Bennis, the teacher who organized the conference at Calhoun, emphasized the potential benefits of democratic education to America. “Education is so strict right now, so limiting, that it detracts from learning,” he said. “We’re living in an information age, where there are more than factory-line jobs. New areas are opening every day. You need to know how to learn and how to be creative, and these skills are enforced by a democratic education.”

This article comes from Forward magazine. (www.forward.com)
the high stakes testing mania, and he seems very close to the philosophy of democratic schools.

There were very few students attending the conference, perhaps because of the $400 price (and this did not include food or the hotel). I guess that’s how the real world works. We charged about $10 a day for the IDEC conference, but we did not operate out of a huge conference center.

There were many terrific people at the CES, mostly people running schools or organizations. One was Rick Gordon, who founded the Compass School in Westminster Station, VT. I met a superintendent from Ohio, Damien Bawn, who wants to stop high stakes tests. I also met Don Ernst of the First Amendment Schools project, who was introduced to me by the Paul Foundation Director, Fred Bay. They have about ten schools in their group, including Harmony School, in Indiana.

I reconnected with Hannah MacLaren. The last time I met her she was directing the progressive Sequoia School in Pasadena, CA. Now she directs the LA branch of the CES. There were not many international participants, but I met one from Australia and another from Tasmania. I also got to talk to Debby Meier, whom I had not seen in a long time. She has moved her great reforming energy to the Boston area after turning New York City on its ear. She was a keynoter along with Linda Darling Hammond of Stanford. The two were interviewed on the stage by NPR Education Correspondent Claude Sanchez, whom I had not seen in years. He took a copy of my book afterward and gave it to Neil Connan of Talk of the Nation when he got back to Washington, hoping to get me on the show again.

I met Bob Hughes, who is President of New Visions, the organization which administers the Gates funds earmarked for New York City. I subsequently met with him in his Manhattan office. The map of all the new schools they have created or are creating is quite startling.

This must have an impact on education in NYC.

I went to several workshops, including one for people who want to start one of the new schools being mentored by CES. Laura Flaxman, co-director of the New and Mentor Schools for CES, was one of the conveners. At the workshop we offered to help any of the new schools with developing democratic process.

Elliott Washor of the Met Schools made an interesting presentation on the importance of the environment and the actual physical plan to a school’s educational process. It really hit home. For example, look at the difference in interaction when you have students sitting in a circle rather than in rows. A different dynamic happens in each configuration. Incidentally, they seem to have new Met Schools starting all over the place. Each school is limited to 125 students and each has an individual learning plan.

I went to a workshop and a keynote by George Wood, Principal of Federal Hocking High School and founder of the Institute for Democracy in Education. He considers the high stakes testing issue so important that he switched his keynote to the topic. Perhaps one reason it is of particular importance to him is that his own son plans to refuse to take the test. In Ohio this means that he can not graduate and that if he goes to a state college the state funds can not follow him there.

At one point George introduced me to his son while he went back to his workshop. Together we brainstormed ways in which his son might effectively fight this issue. I suggested that he simply become a homeschooler, because they are allowed to have the funds follow them, even if they don’t graduate from an Ohio school. He said he didn’t want to take the easy way out, that he wanted his protest to have an impact. Another idea was that he file a class action discrimination suit because of the difference between the way homeschoolers and public school students are treated. Fleetingly, we worried that this could hurt homeschoolers, but then I realized that homeschoolers have proved that they can take care of themselves when threatened.

Another idea that we came up with was approaching the Move-on people with the idea of making the dismantling of No Child Left Behind a plank for the Democratic Party’s presidential nominee this summer. Since then I have sent the suggestion to Eli Parriser, a Move-on prime mover, through his father Emanuel, director of Community School in Maine.

I came up with one more idea after our meeting: Why not establish a national alternative diploma based on portfolio assessment? We would send applicants to participating schools in the AERO network, which would evaluate their portfolio and decide whether to issue their own accredited diploma, which would then be supported by issuing the national diploma. Linda Darling Hammond liked this idea so much when I presented it from the floor that she later said to everyone, “This idea must not stop here!” Her office subsequently called the AERO office to confirm her continuing interest. We are to talk soon.

The CES conference was one of the most interesting I’ve been to, and it became clear to me that we need to continue making these connections between networks if we are to have the kind of impact we must have on national and international education systems.
From Derek at the Booroobin Sudbury School, in Australia 12/07/ 03: The Queensland Minister for Education has agreed with the Board in their decision to withdraw our accreditation. Advice was received on Friday, the last day of School. A couple more steps happened in the process, with the Minister establishing an ‘independent’ panel to review all information. It was a ploy to buy more time, and take away chances of parliamentary scrutiny of her actions. We compiled 2 further submissions of some 40 pages of text and accompanied them with some 220 pages of attachments (all submissions will soon appear on the web site). The submission to the panel was compiled in 14 days, as required and delivered on November 25. We will now go into the next phase and seek pro bono legal services, and take the matters of restitution of our costs and losses of at least $200,000 and accreditation to the Courts. Our family will move out of our house back onto the campus as caretakers in early January in order that we consolidate our energy and income. Assistance to achieve our objectives would be appreciated. www.booroobinschool.com.au Ph +61 07 5499 9944 Fax +61 07 3251 0470

From Arkansas Consolidation Debate a Waste of Time, Rural Policy Matters, 09/03: Small school districts in Arkansas accomplish more with less money in more difficult circumstances than do large districts, according to a new report by the Rural School and Community Trust. The report, School District Consolidation in Arkansas, found that small districts have a higher proportion of students in poverty and a much smaller property tax base, and spend less per student than large districts. Despite their high poverty and low wealth, however, these small districts have a smaller percentage of students who score below the basic achievement level on the state’s academic tests and they graduate a higher percentage of students than do the large districts. The analysis was prompted by the spirited debate in Arkansas over district consolidation as a strategy to respond to that state Supreme Court’s ruling that its school funding system is unconstitutional. Consolidation based on academic performance will disproportionately affect poor and African American communities, according to the report. These are precisely the communities that scientific research shows get the best academic performance from small schools. The report concludes that the state is wasting time on the consolidation debate, and should focus instead on the problems that matter most to the state’s school children: poverty, the persistent effects of racial discrimination, and a school funding system whose inequities and inadequacies exacerbate those problems. Rural Policy Matters, 2 South Main St, Randolph, VT 05060.

What People are Saying About Schools: If you think that all students like school, you’re about two-thirds right. If you think that parents dislike teachers, you’re more than 90 percent wrong. These are findings from over 20,000 student, parent, and staff surveys conducted by all categories of K-12 schools - public, parochial, private, rich, poor, urban, suburban, and rural. William J. Banach, the survey author, tracked the thinking of 20,000 respondents. Asked to set a priority for their school, students turn serious. Gone are the days of complaining about food. (Today’s students tend to like school food!) The focus now is on fair policies which are equitably enforced, getting rid of ‘bad’ teachers, strengthening academics, and relating instruction to ‘the real world’. Students single out teachers who are ‘tough’ but fair. They admire teachers who know their subject matter, have high standards, listen to students, provide individual attention, and have a sense of humor. Read some surprising responses from parents, teachers, and school officials at: http://www.banach.com/

The School Liberator is a free service of The Alliance for the Separation of School & State, 1071 N Fulton St., Fresno CA 93728. Tel: (559) 499-1776. We are a non-profit, grass roots, educational organization dedicated to informing people worldwide of how education can be improved for all - not only the poor - by liberating schools from politics. For more information go to http://www.sepschool.org.

From Developer Builds Private School in Exclusive Community, by Steve Strusky, AP: Roman Prilutzky and Lilia Block liked living at Newport so much that three years ago they left their rented apartment and bought a condominium in the private waterfront community. But when it was time for their son, David, to start school, the couple contemplated leaving Newport, and Jersey City, altogether. “That’s basically what drives people away from this place,” said Prilutzky, 43, a technology chief for a Manhattan software company, who ended up sending his son to private school. Newport’s developer agrees. So in a highly unusual arrangement, the Queens-based Lefrak Organization is hoping to reduce its high turnover among families with children by building a 15,000-square-foot private school on the second floor of its newest building. The new home of Jersey City’s 16-year-old independent Cornerstone School will have a dozen classrooms, a library, science lab, and large community room, with a capacity of 180 students in grades K-8. As an incentive, Newport residents will receive a 20 percent discount on tuition, which will be $7,000 for the 2003-04 school year.

From Colorado to be First in School Vouchers by George Archibald, The Washington Times: Colorado is on its way to becoming the first state to enact a statewide school-voucher program since the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision last summer upholding vouchers in Cleveland. Texas and Louisiana may not be far behind. The Colorado
state Senate voted to enact a House-passed bill to allow students in Denver and 11 other districts with eight or more schools rated “poorly” under state criteria to opt out of public schools. Those students can then use 75 percent to 85 percent of its public per-pupil funds, ranging from about $5,000 to $6,000, at private schools of their choice. Next year, the bill would cap enrollment in voucher-funded schools at 1 percent of a district’s students, but could rise to 6 percent by the fourth year. Gov. Bill Owens, a Republican and longtime advocate of school choice, said he is eager to sign the bill, while the Colorado Education Association, representing 36,000 public school teachers, has threatened a legal challenge. School-choice advocates applauded the flurry of state legislative activity to provide options beyond the traditional mandatory public school system, particularly for low-income families whose children are locked in failing schools. The U.S. Supreme Court last June, in Zelman v. Simmons-Harris, ruled that inclusion of religious schools in Ohio’s state-enacted voucher program in Cleveland was not an unconstitutional establishment of religion under the First Amendment. The high court held that the legislation envisioned a comprehensive education system that permitted state support for parental choice of parochial schools as one option, along with traditional public schools and secular charter schools – either public or private.

The Child Medication Safety Act of 2003 (H.R. 1170) is a bill intended “to protect children and their parents from being coerced into administering psychotropic medication in order to attend school…. Each State shall develop and implement policies and procedures prohibiting school personnel from requiring a child to obtain a prescription for a controlled substance…as a condition of attending school or receiving services.” This bill, H.R. 1170, was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce on March 11, 2003. Anyone know how it is doing now?

Audubon Expedition Institute is an academically rigorous alternative to traditional colleges and universities for undergraduate or graduate students pursuing a deeper ecological understanding of environmental education, leadership and advocacy. AEI is a unique collaborative effort between the Audubon Expedition Institute, in Belfast, Maine, Lesley University, in Cambridge, Mass., and the National Audubon Society. Our goal is to create experiential learning communities that inspire informed and compassionate ecological leadership. Our students learn by seeing, touching, and listening to the natural world. Rather than simply reading about such environmental issues as pollution or clear cutting in textbooks, AEI students learn by touring waste sewage treatment plants or interviewing a paper mill executive. This is hands-on learning at its best. Many people associate the name Audubon Expedition Institute with the term ‘bus people’, in reference to AEI’s signature traveling educational programs in which groups of 15 to 20 AEI students and faculty members live in specially designed school buses complete with storage areas, kitchen facilities, and a 500-volume, region-specific library, AEI’s newest program, Ecological Teaching and Learning, offers programming for professional educators to earn a master’s degree while continuing to work. www.getonthebus.org

The ten-year-old non-profit Earth Force (www.earthforce.org) helps young people take on projects that make lasting improvements to their environment and the community. The group works with about 35,000 young people and 1,500 educators in after-school and summer programs as well as in other educational settings in school districts across the country. One recent undertaking involved the Walnut Creek Middle School in Erie, Pennsylvania, where students in Judy Jobes’s science class have been working for a few years to study the quality of water in their local creek and to educate the public about the importance of reducing pollution in their water. The class, which calls itself Walnut Creek S.E.W.E.R. (Saving Erie’s Water & Environmental Resources), has had many initiatives to educate the community about cleaner water, including a billboard and brochures, such as Your Lawn & Pesticides: What Goes Around, Comes Around. They have also worked with local officials to increase street sweeping, which reduces runoff into the water. (Carnegie Reporter, Fall 2003)

Experiential Learning typically involves either outdoor physical activities, or it engages learners in various work/apprenticeship and service projects. In both cases, the idea is that people learn best through real-world experiences, instead of in the de-contextualized and irrelevant vacuum of a classroom. Experiential Learning not only integrates school and ‘real life’, but it also prepares learners better to understand the rapidly changing world around them. And Service Learning is one form of experiential learning. It connects academic inquiry and self- or group-reflection with practical social value education. It seeks to respond to individual and community needs by creating opportunities for students, teachers, and parents to learn and work together to build and sustain a caring community. These service experiences require the practical application of knowledge and theories, and they integrate processes of questioning, creating, reflecting, sharing, and evaluating. Together, schools and their students learn more about and with their larger communities. Unlike voluntary extra-curricular activities, Service Learning is actually integrated into the academic coursework of the school. And unlike ‘mandatory public service’ or practical course placements, the entire process of Service Learning is conceived of and managed by the learners themselves. Also, the activity focuses on a holistic learning process, instead of just a single skill or objective. It requires participants to synthesize various types of knowledge, creativity, concerns, and commitment, in order to grow at a personal level and to do something unique and meaningful for their communities. For more information: The International Partnership for Service-Learning, 815 Second Avenue, Suite 315, New York, NY 10017. E-mail: pslny@aol.com.

Five new Sudbury Schools opened last fall. Two of them are in Ontario, Burlington Natural Learning Center and Beach Sudbury School, bringing the number of Sudbury schools in Canada to four. In addition, Big Rock Sudbury School opened (to excellent press coverage) in California, the Blue Ridge Discovery School opened in Lynchburg Virginia, and a second Danish Sudbury school opened in Funen, Denmark.

The Eight Year Study is Now Online: Thanks to The National Middle School Association and several collaborating institution in Maine, you can now access Wilford Aiken’s detailed write-up about this elaborate study online at: http://www.8yearstudy.org/index.html.
Although the goals of holistic education and progressive education are arguably distinct (with one aimed at the fullest human development, and the other aimed at social democracy), the diversity of practices shown within each field often share some overlapping approaches and methods in their creativity for helping students learn. For policy makers as well as anyone looking for “evidence” of the effectiveness of non-traditional methods in education, this research is the “trump” of studies conducted in the 20th century. The original New York Times article is available for a fee at http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/03/opinion/03TUE3.html

First Amendment Schools: Educating for Freedom and Responsibility, co-sponsored by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and the First Amendment Center, is a national initiative designed to transform how schools model and teach the rights and responsibilities of citizenship that frame civic life in our democracy. The project has four primary goals: (1) Create consensus guidelines and guiding principles for all schools interested in creating and sustaining First Amendment principles in their school; (2) Establish project schools, in every region of the nation, where First Amendment principles are understood and applied throughout the school community; (3) Encourage and develop curriculum reforms that reinvigorate and deepen teaching about the First Amendment across the curriculum; and (4) Educate school leaders, teachers, school board members and attorneys, and other key stakeholders about the meaning and significance of First Amendment principles and ideals. To achieve these goals, the First Amendment Schools project serves as a national resource for all schools — K-12, public and private — interested in affirming First Amendment principles and putting them into action in their school communities. Web: www.firstamendmentschools.org/

If people bookmark this site www.thehunger site and click on it every time they use the net they will be making a food contribution to the poor and hungry of the world. It is a way of teaching children what the problems are concerning hunger around the planet such as that 24,000 people die a day from starvation and malnourishment. From Robert

Carl Rogers: A Daughter’s Tribute CD-ROM has just been released. This CD provides fast, cross-referenced access to Rogers’ writings in chronological and thematic formats. It helps teachers organize and print course materials, and provides students with a research/study tool of chronological excerpts from Rogers’ 16 books which illustrate the development of his theories, practice and personal reflections. It includes the most exhaustive bibliography to date, as well as 120 photographs spanning his lifetime, award-winning, vintage video footage of counseling sessions and encounter groups, sections of his never before published China Diary written at age 20, and courtship/love letters to Helen. Mac/Win compatible. This CD is authorized for up to 12 Continuing Education credits by the APA, Calif. MCEP, Calif. Board of Behavioral Sciences, Association of State Social Work Boards, National Association of Social Workers, MFTs and others. Developed and distributed by Mindgarden Media, Inc. for Dr. Natalie Rogers. For more information, contact Janet Fuchs, VP of Operations, Mindgarden Media, 3141 Stanford Ave., Marina del Rey, CA 90292. The CD can also be can be ordered online at: http://www.mindgardenmedia.com/cr.html.

The International Institute for Humane Education offers the only Masters in Education degree focusing on humane education in the U.S. For more information, visit www.IIHEd.org or call 207-667-1025.

“...only about 13 percent of eligible young people cast ballots in the last presidential election. A recent National Youth Survey conducted by CIRCLE revealed that only half of the 1,500 young people polled believe that voting is important, and only 46 percent think they can make a difference in solving community problems.” Carnegie Reporter, Fall 2003 pg. 15

Gates Foundation Grant Supports CUNY’s Plan to Open 10 New High Schools, by Karen W. Arenson: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will give the City University of New York $6.8 million to create 10 early-college high schools, CUNY’s chancellor, Matthew Goldstein, told his trustees yesterday. The plan is for CUNY, working with the New York City Department of Education, to open two new schools next September, four the following year, and four in 2006. CUNY officials said the early-college high school plan called for the students to complete two years of college work in the time they would ordinarily finish high school, earning associate’s degrees. CUNY officials said they had not worked out the selection process for the new schools, but did not expect them to employ the competitive test now used for Stuyvesant High School, Bronx High School of Science, Brooklyn Technical High School and three CUNY high schools set up a year ago. The schools will be on or near CUNY’s campuses, but the precise locations have not been decided. Last month, the Gates Foundation announced $51.2 million in grants to create 67 small, theme-based public high schools in New York City. http://www.nytimes.com/.

Fundraising Help: A collection of resources to help small nonprofit organizations fundraise, including ways to motivate your board, sample fundraising letters, phonathon advice, and tips to improve your direct mail solicitation can be found at http://www.nonprofit-innovations.com/

From Keeping Their Word: Mohawk Children Taught in Their Native Tongue, by Andrew Metz, Newsday: There’s a small school in the far north of New York where English is a foreign language. The tongue taught here is Mohawk. And though the 64 students at the Akwesasne Freedom School learn math and history and reading, their real purpose is their people’s cultural survival. In a last change to reverse the consequences of American policies that sought to obliterate Indian identity, the school is immersing children in traditional language and customs and counting on them to emerge the faithkeepers of the new century. The intensive teaching on this reservation that spreads over the Canadian border begins before kindergarten and concludes at the eighth grade. Mohawk is the only language allowed except for the final two years during a crash catch-up in English to prepare for public school. The linguistic revival is at the core of broad efforts by Indian people to uplift their communities, yet it is also an act of desperation, as native languages are vanishing and taking with them irreplaceable traditions. The immersion programs, which are privately or tribally funded, are considered by many experts the surest way to stem the onslaught of cultural illiteracy, imparting an Indian perspective on everything from geography to botany. Because of this intense focus, students can be set back in mainstream subjects, particularly English, when they enter public schools. But after some quick catch-up they usually excel: four of the five Indians inducted into the National Honor Society in the local high school last year had attended the Freedom School. 11/09/03.
Alternatives at Skidmore College: 60 students and 2 faculty members of traditional Skidmore College gathered under the common interest of Alternative Education in April of 2003. Jerry Mintz came to us and offered several suggestions to us in passing the first student-proposed course at Skidmore College. He reminded us that we could begin the course on our own, without credit or as an independent study, to see what interest there is. He said that in proposing the course we must let the college know how embracing alternatives in pedagogy will attract more students. And most importantly he supported us with enthusiasm and even the willingness to solicit letters from educators around the world in support of us. Since the gathering, we have met several times with professors who are now in support of us and working with us to approve the course –

“Empowered Studentship.” Briefly, the course is designed to focus on how each person learns by offering three structures of class set-up: an oligarchy, democracy, and monarchy. The students move the course by choosing from suggested readings such as Freire and Chomsky, films such as Waking Life, and activities such as meditation, camping and group projects with the community. Please contact us at: cud-list@skidmore.edu.

Mayor Says High School is Too Boring, by Fran Spielman and Rosalind Rossi, Chicago Sun-Times: After an eight-year campaign to improve Chicago public high schools, Mayor Daley on Wednesday reached a simple conclusion: High school is boring. Daley said the morning curriculum in particular has to be changed, implying that teens have trouble getting up early and focusing on classwork. High schools have been a top priority from the beginning of the Daley era. Since 1995, the system has launched test-based high schools for smart kids, given all high schools a souped-up homeroom – called an advisory – modeled after a $1 million program at Winnetka’s New Trier High School, and offered extra reading and math periods. Meanwhile, dozens of high schools are on academic probation, some have even been restaffed, and many have new principals. And yet, state data indicate Chicago’s one-year high school dropout rate last year was 14.4 percent – nearly three times the state rate of 5.1 percent. Despite an eight-year crackdown against social promotion, Daley said students still enter Chicago public high schools who “can’t read to high school level,” posing a challenge for teachers. Daley also revealed he has received lots of ideas on how to improve high schools from teachers and that he has passed them on to schools CEO Arne Duncan. Duncan said Daley has expressed interest in the late start of the school day now used at a new high school – Community Links Academy. There, students attend JROTC from 11 a.m. to noon, spend two hours helping teachers in elementary-school classrooms, have lunch, and finally start their own classes at 2:30 p.m. Classes end at 6:30 p.m. Duncan also touted Links’ program in which students tutor elementary kids in the building, initially for free to fulfill a service requirement and then for a stipend. He also wants to break more large high schools into small schools, each with different focus, so kids can find a niche. And, he said, he believes more after-school programs will encourage more kids to come to high school.

HeartLight Schools are grateful to folks locally and from all over the world who sent their words of encouragement, prayers and dollars to help keep us open. We have several volunteers and numerous parents who are supporting us with their time and talents. It is with the help of so many that our programs succeed. We are honored and humbled by the outpouring of generosity we have received. Bless you all. In Chicago, our students will be publishing an e-newspaper bi-monthly. It is titled ‘United for Peace’. The children are writing it to raise money for the school. There are over 600 folks on our mailing list! If you are interested in receiving the paper, please contact HeartLight Chicago, 865 E. Wilmette Road, Suite A, Palatine, IL 60074. Email: HLCInfo@heartlightchicago.org.

American teens are notorious big spenders, plunking down $170 billion in 2002 for electronic gadgets, movie and concert tickets, food, clothes and other pleasures, according to Teenage Research Unlimited. But increasingly, teens are reaching into their pockets – and those of others - to help other youth. reports Andrew D. Beadle. Almost unheard of 15 years ago, youth grant-making programs now run in almost every state. The Michigan Council on Foundations estimates there are more than 300 such programs across the country. Organization, membership selection and fund-raising activities among the programs vary greatly: Some are faith-based, such as the Community Youth Foundation in San Diego, while others are gender-based, such as Girl’s Best Friend in Chicago. Some offer grants of $100, while others offer grants of $3,000 or more. Nearly all are community-based and focus on meeting the needs of local youth. Youth often volunteer for some of the organizations they’ve visited, or encourage more participation and giving from friends and family. They learn about community needs, nonprofit structure, teamwork and finances. The boards are also a constructive outlet for teens who want to get more involved in the communities. “Teenagers are frustrated in many ways. There is a large number of teenagers that really want to help people, to do good things,” said Cecilia Patterson, program director and former youth coordinator for the Arkansas Community Foundation. “This is just a vehicle for them to act on their philanthropic urges.” Grantmaking fits in a broader philosophy of youth philanthropy, which also includes personal giving, volunteering and fund-raising. http://www.youthtoday.org/youthtoday/story3.html

My family and another family here in Portland, Maine, have started a small, multi-age school for ages 6-11, called New Hill School. The school opened last year (2002-03) with one paid teacher and 10 students. This year we have two paid teachers with 16 students, still in the age range of 6-11. The classroom is multi-age, student-centered with a very low student-teacher ratio and a focus on teaching to the whole child, creating a community within the school and giving students a chance to connect to the community around the school. We offer music, art, Spanish and theater for co-curricular classes. This year, we began an after-school program that is open to families in the Portland area. We would be happy to send our information packet, which gives more information about our school and its philosophy. We would like to be in touch with other elementary schools such as ours across the country to exchange information and ideas. We are also interested in start-up middle schools, as we are beginning to plan for those grades.

E-mail: baf@smemaine.com. Tel: (207) 773-6679. Susan Webster, Co-Director, New Hill School.
High Stakes Testing

Education Group Calls for Revised Law: With thousands of schools across the country branded in recent weeks as “needing improvement,” a newly formed group of educators and civic leaders is calling on Congress to rewrite the No Child Left Behind Act by discarding its stiff penalties for schools that fail to measure up. The group, Citizens for Effective Schools, said the law should focus less on punishing schools that fall short and more on prescribing specific steps that could help them improve. The group’s signers include officials of the New York Urban League and the Education Law Center of New Jersey, along with scores of teachers, principals and administrators from around the country. The new law has run into opposition as school researchers Philip G. Zimbardo et al. in the Journal of Experimental Education (Vol. 71, No. 2). “The results of this research, conducted over many years within multiple class settings, challenges a fundamental assumption of education, namely that student achievement must be assessed by testing individual performance,” says Zimbardo, APA past-president. “We have found that when students work in pairs and take examinations cooperatively, they perform much better than when solo: learn more and enjoy the course and the exam more.” From Bob Kay.

From Bush’s Education Law Leaves Schools Behind: When it comes to education policy, President George W. Bush has it all backward. His new No Child Left Behind Act threatens to withhold federal education dollars from underachieving schools. But the reality is that money – or the lack of it – is the prime reason most schools underachieve in the first place. In fact, Bush’s goal of increasing test scores in low-performing schools would be better served by increasing aid to underachieving schools…. The recently released list of 25 Long Island schools that didn’t make the grade, with few exceptions, are in communities with relatively high poverty rates, low property wealth and lower per-pupil spending than the region’s average. Less money means fewer resources, lower-paid faculty, older textbooks and larger class sizes. For urban schools, No Child Left Behind has become a logistical nightmare. In New York City, 40 percent of schools are on the failing list. In Chicago, the failing list comprises 60 percent of the system’s schools, resulting in 19,000 students entitled to apply for just 1,000 seats in better-performing schools. In North Carolina, federal aid is down $70 million, causing Dem. Sen. John Edwards, one of the congressional negotiators who helped craft the legislation, now to become one of its biggest critics. Even Republican governors in Nebraska and Louisiana – GOP allies of President Bush – have said they are willing to dump the legislation and forgo the concomitant federal aid just to be relieved of the program’s administrative burdens. By Mark J. Grossman, Newsday 10/09/03.
transferred to other schools. Maybe we should be doing exit interviews. There are kids who are falling between the cracks.” The debate over how to measure dropout rates is hardly limited to this state. Last month, The Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, released a report that said school officials in many states were “fudging” dropout numbers, and that across the country, three out of every 10 high school students fail to graduate. For black and Latino students, the number was half of all students. http://www.worcestermag.com/Archives/10-09-03/Cover.htm

Public Alternatives

City to Use Private Funds in Creating Charter Schools, by David M. Herszenhorn: New York City education officials plan to turn the charter school concept on its head by becoming the first school district in the nation to use private donations to open as many as 50 of the schools. Charter schools traditionally operate outside of local school district control. The city’s plan would establish a nonprofit corporation to create the schools, using more than $50 million in private donations, according to private foundation officials familiar with the plan. The direct involvement of the city’s Education Department in creating charter schools presents extraordinary possibilities. Often the greatest obstacle facing charter schools is finding classroom space. Education officials have suggested that any number of failing public schools in the city could be turned into charter schools. The idea of building groups of charter schools is not new. One such effort is under way in northern California by the NewSchools Venture Fund, a nonprofit group that is working to create systems of charter schools - essentially privately run charter school districts. The group operates seven charter schools under the name Aspire Public Schools. NewSchools Venture Fund is heavily supported by the Broad Foundation. And in June it received a $22 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to create charter schools in California, New York and other districts with great needs.

The Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School for Public Policy (www.cesarchavezhs.org) in Washington, D.C. is a diverse group of 250 students, with about 25 percent recent arrivals to the U.S. House in a former laundry and with few amenities, Cesar Chavez’s mission is to “develop young people who will make the country a better place by influencing the public policies that affect their communities.” After taking a Foundations in Public Policy course in the ninth grade, tenth graders select an issue that is relevant to their community, form a relationship with a local group and develop and put into action a plan that addresses that issue. The following year students partner with policymaking organizations and meet with government leaders. The students apply for a fellowship with a public policy organization and spend three weeks with the group. The high school experience in the public policy arena culminates in a senior policy thesis that involves research and analysis of a problem and challenges the students to become experts who can propose solutions. Carnegie Reporter, Fall 2003

The Flight of the Schoolkids: In Massachusetts, many students are leaving the public schools behind. Worcester’s students are very mobile, more so than you’d think. Some go to schools outside their neighborhoods. Some leave the country. In 2002, one local school had a 65% mobility rate and that counts only the students who transfer out of the system in the middle of the school year. Explaining why the public school system is shedding so many students depends on whom you ask, reports Noah Schaffer. “Where are those kids going?” asks School Committee member Joseph O’Brien. “What is the cost to society of these kids not getting a high school degree? Everyone should care about this. That these kids are dropping out or disappearing and not getting the skills they need, we’ll all pay a price for that.” “Why is there such a big gap between the attrition rate and the drop-out rate?” asks Tracy Novick, whose school committee candidacy is built on a platform that is heavily critical of education reform and testing. “It doesn’t feel like we have a good handle on how many of those kids go other places. We should get a record of who

“Sweetie, why can’t you just ‘hang out’ at home?”

College. Gary Stillman, the principal last year of School 18, helped to push the big, creaky boat of the Buffalo school administration into the innovative educational rapids. The School Board will now look into creating more charter schools, either by converting existing schools or working with outside groups. After years of partly blaming charter schools for its financial woes, the district realized it can’t hold back a rising tide. Instead of trying, it will now try to ride it. By Donn Esmonde Unlikely rebel shakes up public schools 4/2/2003

From Charter Schools Choke on Rulebook by Joe Mathews, LA Times: A decade ago, California launched a populist experiment with charter schools. Teachers, community groups, business owners — anyone with a worthwhile idea for a school — could apply to a local school district for a charter. The charter would entitle them to public funds and to operate free of most state regulation. The idea was to encourage innovation. It gained momentum after President Clinton embraced charters as “public school choice” and as an alternative to vouchers — direct aid to parents who sent their children to non-public schools. Enticed by the promise of freedom, some public schools
converted to charters; civic-minded entrepreneurs also joined the movement. But now, for aspiring innovators, the window of opportunity is closing. Today the charter movement looks less like an educational laboratory and more like a maturing industry. And the future of charters, leaders in the school business say, lies in creating vast networks or alliances that, in some ways, mimic the giant school districts to which charters were supposed to be an alternative. The reasons lie in simple economics and in a wave of state regulation that individual entrepreneurs say robs charters of much of the freedom that made them so appealing in the first place. The new regulations were adopted in part to curb abuses. But these rules have also complicated the starting and operating of charter schools. They require extensive paperwork and financial disclosure, limit where and when the schools can operate and subject them to three levels of overlapping oversight by local boards of education, counties and the state. California charters face more regulations than those in most other states, but efforts to oversee such schools more closely have gained in states ranging from Texas to New York. And as bureaucratic burdens have increased, start-ups have leveled off. The schools that do open are increasingly linked to growing networks. Even mom-and-pop charter schools are joining alliances and networks so they can share administrative costs. The seven Aspire Public Schools offer a glimpse of the future of charter schools in California. Aspire is a nonprofit company known as “a charter management organization.” Aspire officials believe that a successful large network of charter schools in the inner city will push more poor children to go to college and will provide a model for traditional public schools. Aspire’s schools are small and combine grade levels in the same classes. Students have a longer school day and year than those in regular public schools. By growing, Aspire can achieve economies of scale while keeping administrative costs relatively low, it says.

From Regent's Act on Report of Charter School Success, by Michael Gormley, AP, 9/11/03: Critics of charter schools were skeptical of a draft report that shows the nontraditional schools have improved student performance better than traditional schools without hurting local district finances. State schools Chancellor Robert Bennett, however, said that he’s not surprised by the state study. He said the Board of Regents will explore measures that could help nurture the success cited in the draft report. The state Education Department’s draft of a five-year report to the governor and Legislature on charter schools states: “The pattern of gains in the districts housing charter schools has remained steady over the past two years, while the results for the charter schools have improved dramatically in 2002-03.” The state Education Department report also says that most traditional school districts suffered minimal financial disruption as a result of charter schools, although districts with large charter school enrollment such as Albany and Buffalo reported significant hardship. Charter schools are publicly financed but privately run. The report is scheduled to be in final form in December. It disputes the contention of many school officials that charter schools were forcing higher local taxes and cutbacks in traditional classrooms while failing to match the performance of traditional schools.

From Re-educating the Voters About Texas’ Schools, by Francis X. Clines: George Bush is more than two years gone from the Texas statehouse, but his signature ‘can-do issue’ as a presidential candidate — education — showed increasing wear and tear as this year’s legislative session ground to a close. For one thing, his state, like others, had to relax the testing standards for the new federal No Child Left Behind Act to avoid failing youngsters wholesale and subjecting schools to federal penalties. For another, the budget crunch of the less glamorous, more revenue-starved era of statehouse politicking that succeeded Governor Bush had plans afoot to cut such basics as textbook financing and to procrastinate once more on a revision of the state’s outdated school-aid formula. But of all the products of the education hothouse that lent such bloom to the Bush candidacy, none is looking more wilted than that beloved conservative stratagem called charter schools. These are independent schools run at public expense as a nonpublic alternative to public schools. In the closing legislative hours, the latest sorry wrinkle in the charter agenda was struck down — a siphoning of public funds for computers to create ‘virtual’ schools for students working in their homes. But the charter school movement lives on, six years old and costing taxpayers $5,000 per pupil, with limited state oversight on how the money is spent. Unsurprisingly, considering the deliberate reining in of state controls, some of the schools have become standouts not for academic excellence but for the sort of greed and gamesmanship more familiar to patronage politics: nepotistic staffing, inflated attendance, false academic records, exorbitant salaries and employees with unchecked criminal backgrounds, according to investigators. Critics agree that there are good exceptions, but about 25 of the 200 charter schools created so far have gone under or have been closed for management abuses, with millions of dollars unaccounted for. These scandals helped force the enactment of the first serious fiscal controls over charter schools two years ago. Early assessment tests are finding that public schools are outperforming charter schools by nearly a two to one margin. This pits the charter movement against the other one of President Bush’s headlined cures for schoolhouse ills, his No Child Left Behind mandate to raise standards by rigorous, early testing of students. As that law takes effect, Texas is among a number of states that have had to ease their own third-grade reading test standards to avoid failing thousands of students and subjecting hundreds of schools to federal penalties in the preliminary stage of the new law. A conflict is thus becoming clear between the more demanding No Child Left Behind Act and the laissez-faire charter schools.

Home Education

Zan Tyler describes the beginnings of the Home School Legal Defense Association in his article, The Curtain Rises on HSLDA, published in The Home School Court Report in recognition of the HSLDA’s 20th anniversary. The author recounts how Mike and Elizabeth Smith were introduced to homeschooling in 1981 by hearing Dr. and Mrs. Raymond Moore on a Focus on the Family radio program. Mike, a lawyer, “quickly found himself inundated with requests to defend homeschooling families.” In 1982, Mike Farris was convinced by Dr. Moore to homeschool his child as well. Soon, he too was being contacted by homeschooling parents who were having legal troubles. The dilemma for both Mikes was that these families couldn’t afford good legal representation, and neither Mike could afford to neglect their private practices. When they finally met in 1982, Mike Farris explained to Mike Smith his idea of a legal defense association for homeschooling families. In March of 1993, the HSLDA was founded. Since then, the HSLDA has grown to be an organization representing over 70,000 families worldwide. The Home School Court Report, PO Box 3000, Purcellville, VA 20132. Web: www.hslda.org.

From California Homeschool Advocates Celebrate Victory by Diana Lynne, 06/02/03, WorldNetDaily.com: California homeschool advocates are breathing a sigh of relief after the state education department reversed its former stance that home education is illegal. The California Homeschool Network is spreading the news that a reexamination of California statutes and case law, made at the request
of the newly elected state superintendent of education, Jack O’Connell, prompted the reversal. According to education deputy general counsel Michael Hersher, school districts will receive notification that the earlier references that “homeschooling is not legal in California” have been removed from the California Department of Education’s website. Several documents had indicated that parents who homeschool their children without a teaching credential don’t qualify as private schools, which is the only exemption from state compulsory attendance rules. Children in these circumstances were deemed truant, and parents faced criminal prosecution for habitual truancy. Although the department stops short of endorsing homeschooling, advocates hail the turnaround. “Since most, if not all, of the truancy problems suffered by homeschoolers in the past several years have been a direct result of the [California Department of Education’s] position regarding the legality of home-based private schools, this is a major victory,” Linda J. Conrad, the Homeschool Association of California’s legal chair, wrote in an e-mail announcing the “good news.” WorldNetDaily has reported the state’s laws and education code do not address homeschooling. This prompts both advocates and foes to interpret the void as being in favor of their stance.

According to the National Home Education Research Institute, more black families nationwide have turned to home schooling, and national observers say increasing affluence might be making it possible. Only 5% of the estimated 2.1 million children who are home schooled nationally are black, but that percentage has doubled since 1997. Black parents are able to choose home schooling as education and affluence increase, said researcher Bill Lloyd, who runs the research institute’s Washington office. Parents have varied reasons for home schooling, Lloyd said. They might want to teach specific religious or philosophical values, control social interactions, develop a closer family relationship, focus on high-level academics and keep their children safer. Joyce Burges and her husband, who home schooled their four children at their home in Louisiana, founded the National Black Home Educators Resource Association as a support group. Public schools are failing to educate black children and do a poor job teaching black history, Burges said. http://www.ohio.com

“No, Daddy! Not the mandatory sentencing!”

According to official reports for the American College Testing Program, homeschoolers have scored higher on average than students in public and private schools. In 2000, the average composite ACT score for high-school students was 21, while homeschool students scored 22.8. Dr. Lawrence M. Rudner, an expert in quantitative analysis and one who has studied the performance of homeschoolers, once remarked that the move to make homeschoolers meet public-school standards was “odd” given the superior academic performance of homeschoolers. Rudner conducted a study in 1998 that included 20,760 students in 11,930 families. He found that in every subject and at every grade level (K-12), “homeschool students scored significantly higher than their public and private school counterparts.” Some 25 percent of all homeschool students at that time were enrolled at a grade level or more beyond that dictated by their age. According to the study, the average eighth-grade homeschooler was performing four grade levels above the national average.

From Issaquah 11-year-old Wows State Science Fair, by Michael Ko and Tan Vinh, Seattle Times: Andrew Hsu won a silver medal at the Washington State Science and Engineering Fair. Michael Huey, head judge at last week’s Washington State Science and Engineering Fair in Bremerton, recalled his first impression of Andrew Hsu standing in one of the booths — “He must be saving a spot for his older brother.” After seeing Andrew’s presentation, Huey said, “I came back and told the other judges, ‘Every now and then, you come across a prodigy.’” “He blew us away,” said Lois Lugg, the state fair’s director. “We’ve never had a kid that young competing in the high-school level.” Andrew, 11, of Issaquah, won the Silver Medal and became the youngest participant to be awarded a grand prize in the fair’s 46 years. Hsu and Gold Medal winner Dona Sharma, a senior at Sunnyside High in Yakima County, will be in Cleveland on May 11 to represent Washington in the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, considered one of the nation’s most prestigious pre-college science fairs. That Andrew is home-schooled initially raised eyebrows among judges over the legitimacy of his entry, titled “Identification, Characterization and DNA Sequencing of the Homo Sapiens and Mus Musculus COL20A1 Gene (Type XX Collagen) with Bioinformatics and Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR).” After two rounds of interviews, the panel was convinced it was his. Andrew’s project involved examining the genetic makeup of humans and mice and isolating a building-block protein found in both, the COL20A1. Understanding its location is the first step in solving other genetic riddles associated with the protein, such as mutations and diseases, and also potential cures.

From Washington Homeschooler Wins Geography Contest, by Niala Boodhoo: A 14-year-old who is taught at home by his mother bested 54 students yesterday in winning the National Geographic Bee and a $25,000 college scholarship. James Williams of Vancouver, Wash., correctly answered a tie-breaker about which country possessed the Indian state of Goa until 1961. Runner-up Dallas Simons, 13, of Nashville said, incorrectly, that it was the United Kingdom, but Williams, who missed just three questions during the two-day National Geographic Society competition, never wavered when he wrote Portugal — the right answer. Williams and his fellow competitors are a far cry from the majority of young Americans. About 11 percent of Americans aged 18 to 24 could not find their own country on a map, and 50 percent could not properly identify China, the United Kingdom or Japan, according to last year’s National Geographic-Roper Global Literacy Survey. The survey placed the United States second to last, ahead only of Mexico, in geographic literacy. Williams has never attended school but is educated at home by his mother, Ann Williams, who said he “pretty much teaches himself.” It was the second straight year a home-schooled pupil has won the bee. Forty-eight boys and seven girls from 55 states and territories competed in the bee. More than five million participants entered local contests.
International Communications

CANADA
From the Atlantic Co-operator, Sandra Phinney writes about Fairfield School in Wolfville, Nova Scotia: Co-founder David Greenberg was weaned on the Sudbury experience in the U.S. He’s passionate about Fairfield and how it operates. “The whole point of this school is vision. The ground of the school is trust and the process of being here is learning about self-motivation. The world is screaming for people who know themselves and who can see and feel and have the confidence and the internal resources to follow that vision,” he says. The school has an open admissions policy. The only criterion is that the students be responsible for themselves. Greenberg adds, “What’s groundbreaking about this school is that we’ve mirrored the freedom that a modern social democracy like Canada offers but we’ve coupled that with a functioning judicial system that is purely democratic. Children here know about rights and morals and what ‘due process’ means in their bones.” The school accepts students ages 4-17. For a brochure and further information please contact the school at (902) 542 0548 or email us at: info@fairfieldschool.org. www.fairfieldschool.org

CHILE
The English School in Puerto Montt Chile was founded 11 years ago by Teofilo L. Martinez. It’s a private school that follows a holistic model of education and has 260 students. While by law they must adhere to the Ministry of Education’s curriculum, the school offers 25 workshops and extracurricular activities from which students can choose. Students can take as many of these year-long classes as they like, and these classes have non-compulsory attendance. They also learn and grow through service activities within the community. Classes are small so teachers can tailor some of the classes very well to the interest of the students. The school is in need of financial assistance and funding contacts. Email: contacto@telsur.cl. Tel: 56-92791624.

GERMANY
From Precedent Breaking Decision for German Homeschool Family: In August 2000, German homeschoolers asked HSLDA for assistance. We provided support and encouragement to them in establishing their own national legal defense association: Schulunterricht zu Hause (School Instruction at Home). In April of 2003, Schulunterricht zu Hause attorney Gabriele Eckermann successfully represented a family charged for disregarding the mandatory school attendance laws. At the beginning of the trial the judge indicated that he was predisposed to rule against the family. Thanks to Gabriele’s effective advocacy for the family and homeschooling, the judge completely changed his mind and the family was acquitted on April 28, 2003. The judge wrote that the parents were not preventing their children from receiving an education and were not ignoring their duty to educate their children. He recognized that they provided an alternative for their children which required significant dedication. The judge said that this dedication should set an example for many parents, who merely formally fulfill the mandatory attendance requirements. This case is significant as it is the first formal recognition of the validity of homeschooling in Germany. Web: http://www.hslda.org/

HAITI
From Well Rouned Children by Jane Regan: A pie-shaped school and Reflection Circles characterize an original education initiative. At first glance, it might be any school in Haiti; but all is not as it seems. The school building is round, with classrooms divided, like pie slices, by bookshelves. Inside the chairs are all in circles. Students are writing on blackboards, preparing lessons in Haitian Creole. The Learning Center sits on top of a hill in the middle of La Gonâve, a mountainous island 30 minutes from Haiti’s coast, which, at 37 miles long, is larger than many Caribbean nations. La Gonâve is officially part of Haiti, but centuries of neglect and abuse might make one think otherwise. “My dream was to create a school where students were at ease, where there was mutual respect, where students and teachers reflected together,” said 46-year-old Abner Sauveur, one of the school’s founders, as the day’s classes for the 183 students began. The coordinator of an adult literacy program influenced by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s work in popular education, Sauveur wanted to try using consciousness-raising, participation and dialogue in formal education. One of the founding principles was to teach in Haitian Creole which, for about 95 percent of the population, is the only language spoken at home (only about 5 percent speak fluent French). Most Haitian schools immediately bewilder and alienate children by trying to teach them to read and write in an unknown language. Once a week, most of the Learning Center’s classes read a text by such authors as Aristotle, Euclild and Machiavelli from the Touchstones Discussion Project (called “Reflection Circles” in Creole), a reading and discussion method developed by US professors. As Sauveur and the other teachers continue their experiment, they have been holding meetings to introduce cooperative learning and the Reflection Circles into other schools on the island. Web: www.latinamericapress.org

INDIA
A Celebration of Walkouts (dropouts) was held in September in Bhandardara, Maharashtra. Co-hosted by Abhiivyakti Media for Development, Shikshantar Andolan, and Multiworld-India, the celebration brought together 35 walkouts and 15 unlearners to spend five days co-creating together. In India, and around the world, millions of young people and their families feel frustrated and angered by the educational system, both while in it and afterward. They are filled to the brim with expectations of and desires for material luxuries, but after their education, they neither know themselves nor can they stand on their own feet. Very few opportunities exist for them in the government sector and they are de-skilled from their traditional family occupations. Indeed, most are at the mercy of a highly competitive market, which daily grows more cut-throat and exploitative. While calls for increasing access to education continue, most Education for All advocates have failed to realize that access to random, useless and mugged-up information is hardly worth the trouble. Moreover, they do not see that there will never be enough seats for everyone. The education system is actually set up for manufacturing failures; if it does not select, filter and then reject the majority of human beings, it cannot fulfill its purpose. It is time to recognize that the education system cannot be reformed by simply changing the syllabus or textbooks, or by training teachers and adding some computers. Something more radical is required: something that takes us beyond the monopoly of the education experts. Here is where walking out (and walking on) comes in. This Vimukt Shiksha Utsav is a first step in inspiring others to see the strength and potential of rising out of stifling, dead institutions. These walkouts vibrantly challenge the dehumanizing labels of “failures” and “drop-outs”, and reaffirm the consciousness, creativity and courage that lie within the choice to pave a different path of learning and living. At the close of the Celebration, many walkouts and unlearners have launched several
ISRAEL

The name of our school is Yaldey Adama, which means children of earth. We are situated in Beit Yanay, near Netanya in Israel. After three years of negotiations with the Ministry of Education, during which we asked for approval and it was denied, an appeal was made to a committee external to the Ministry. This committee accepted our appeal and recommended approval for us to get a license. The approval means we have a license for this year. Regards, Shanee.

The first state-sponsored democratic school for Arab children in Israel will open next year in Haifa, the result of a Supreme Court petition brought by NIF grantees ACRI and HIWAR (Dialogue): for Alternative-Democratic Education. ACRI and HIWAR brought their petition against the Ministry of Education to the Supreme Court last June, charging that the refusal to open a state-sponsored Arabic school is a violation of the right to a free education. The one existing state-sponsored Arabic junior high school and one state-sponsored high school are inadequate to meet demand; 64 percent of the 4,000 Arab students in Haifa attend private parochial schools that have no set curricula and minimal oversight by the Education Ministry for which they must pay tuition. As a result of the pressure brought to bear by the petition, an Education Ministry committee announced its decision to open the school in 2004, which will set a precedent for other Arab-Jewish mixed cities with skewed educational resource allocation. Hiwar, an NIF grantee since 2002, was established to advance democratic education in Israel's Arab sector and to reduce the gaps between the Jews and Arabs in the Haifa educational system by using democratic, humanistic tools to develop students’ critical thinking and creativity.

Tenth Anniversary Celebration of Kanaf Democratic School in Israel, October 2003. The Golan Heights was the setting for a country-wide conference of educators and political leaders in honor of the 10th anniversary of the first Sudbury school in Israel. The valiant and committed staff of the school struggled for years to establish its legitimacy within the Israeli educational system and has now become a beacon for other such schools, another of which opened in Jerusalem in the fall of 2002. Daniel Greenberg, of Sudbury Valley School, was invited to make a presentation and join the festivities.

MALAYSIA

At Stepping Stones, we had a school meeting to discuss how to get more money for the school. Most of the 19 kids (4-9 yrs) attended, participated, behaved better than a lot of adults I’ve seen at meetings, and we decided to start a shop to sell food twice a week at the children’s suggestion. Parents were informed and were very supportive, some contributed cash for starting capital, some paying for groceries etc. All the kids are excited. They helped make honey crunch, which they sold and bought like hot cakes, while parents & teachers cooked local dishes. Our total earnings may not be much, but the experience for the kids & teachers & some parents has been fantastic. The children volunteer for duty & come to school at 7 a.m. to get things ready. One child who is particularly good at math is the cashier. Children contributed designs for the menu card and we hand-printed them. I love the 2 issues of ER that I received recently. The Changing Face of Childhood by Albert Lamb and John Potter’s article are very good. The first made me reflect on the changes I’ve seen myself in Malaysia, the most drastic & negative being the increase in violence and the sense of danger everywhere. I used to take a bus alone to & from school when I was at primary school – it’s unthinkable now as much as I want my kids to be independent. Potter’s article gave me a feel of Neil, and the thought that we should be detached and critical of even the most respected teachings. From Jeanne Hon.

UNITED KINGDOM

School Councils UK is developing a network of school councils and believes that an adult lead will be needed for some time before a student run secondary school union emerges. Maybe they are right – but then that is not how school students’ unions have developed in many other countries. The Irish school students are the latest to ‘do it for themselves’ – they have got a national secondary school union up and running in less than 2 years. They would like to make contact with interested school students in the UK. Contact Emer or Barry at the Irish Union of Secondary Students info@ussonline.net. Networks of school councils are also emerging from the activities of local education authorities in places like Bedfordshire, Essex and Portsmouth –though not all are genuinely run by the school students yet. Anyone can make contact with the European network of school students – OBESSU – just e-mail obessu@obessu.org . Their office has just moved from Amsterdam to Brussels. Derry Hannam, Project Director, The Phoenix Education Trust, 7 Newtown Road, Warsash, Southampton, SO31 9FY, UK.

Girl, Seven, Passes GCSE: A seven-year-old girl has passed a GCSE (the subject test used in the UK with 16-year-olds) becoming the second child in her family to hit the headlines for exam feats. Safiya Shariff, from Northwood, Middlesex, took a grade C in information technology after taking a course at Ryde College. She said: “I feel really good, I feel I’ve achieved something very good. It was a lot of hard work but I really enjoyed doing it.” Safiya said she loved to write stories on the computer and her next project would be writing about the day she got her results. Her brother, now 17, achieved a GCSE pass in the subject when he was eight. A boy who became the youngest person to pass a GCSE two years ago, when he took the basic maths paper aged five, is celebrating gaining the top grade in the subject. Arran Fernandez, taught at home in Surrey by his father, Dr Neil Fernandez, achieved an A grade.
Summerhill School has a handsome new website. Here is a quote from their description of the end of their school day, starting in mid-afternoon: Tea is at 3:30 pm – a cup of tea and biscuits (cookies). At 4:00 pm the afternoon classes begin. On Tuesdays and Thursdays these are more activities than classes. Subjects range from sewing and discussions to taking a walk to watch wildlife. Supper is at 5:30 – 6:15 pm. After that there are any number of things to do. Some days it may be ‘gram’ (disco), or activities organized by the ‘social committee’ (‘word games like “The Paper Game” or action games like “Kick the Can” or “British Bulldog”). An evening snack, ‘Evening Breakfast’ (cereal) is at 9:30 pm, organized by the pupils. Bedtimes range from 8:00 pm (lights out at 9:00 pm) for the smallest (or ‘San’) kids, to 11:30 pm (lights can stay on) for the oldest (‘Carriage’) kids. Elected ‘Beddies Officers’ put you to bed, make sure you keep quiet and get you back to bed if you ‘sneak out’ after lights out! They also make sure everybody is up in the mornings.

www.summerhillschool.co.uk

The website for Sands School has a tour with good photos. “Sands has been likened to a small University for 11-17 year olds. Whether this is true is hard to say, but we do know that students are waiting to get in the gates as soon as staff arrive and would stay after school if they could. We think this is a good measure of success.”

www.sandschool.demon.co.uk

Conferences

March 7 – 10, 2004 - National Youth-At-Risk Conference, Savanna, GA. The conference focuses on eliminating and preventing at-risk conditions that threaten student safety, health, emotional well-being, or academic achievement. Presenters will share practical programs and strategies on how to create safe, healthy, caring, and intellectually challenging educational environments to make our young people better students and community members. For more information call (912) 681-5555 or see the conference website: http://coniedgasouedu/ yar.html.

April 13–15, International Confluence: Education for Sustainable Peace. Mumbai, India. The role of education in leading to a peaceful earth will be deliberated in this international confluence. Peace should form the focal point of all curricula in school and higher education. Alternative processes like heritage education, learning from nature need to be integrated into the curriculum for peace. For more information, contact Dayanand Institute of Education Management and Research DAV Public School Campus, Sec. 10, New Panvel, Navi Mumbai, 410206. Tel: 91-22-27456520. Email: davanvel@yahoo.com. Web: www.diemr.org.

April 23-24 - 50 Years After Brown: What Has Been Accomplished and What Remains to Be Done, at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

April 28-May 1 - IALA Annual Conference The International Association for Learning Alternatives will hold its annual conference in conjunction with the Michigan Alternative Education Association conference at Crystal Mountain resort, Thompsonville, MI near Traverse City, MI. Ask for the Michigan Alternative Education Association rate of $90 per night. The conference will begin Wednesday, April 28 with a 7:00 p.m. reception and end on Saturday, May 1 at 1:00 p.m. A brochure on the conference, and forms for registration and lodging are now available on our conference page www.learningalternatives


May 28-31 - The 8th Annual Rethinking Education Conference, Memorial Day weekend, in Irving, TX. Sherri Lander Smith and Barb Lundgren bring you an educational event unlike any other. The theme this year is “Do What You Love, Love What You Do” with speakers including Elizabeth Kanna, Lynn Stoddard, John Anderson, Laurence Becker, and John Breeding and Jan Fortune Wood - all the way from North Wales. The program includes tons of fun, creative activities for the whole family! This one-of-a-kind family event will challenge you to “think outside the box” while supporting alternative education (unschooling), parent advocacy, and self-education for your children, teens...yourself. ww.rethinkingeducation.com - contact: Barb Lundgren at (817) 540-6423. or write to Barb and Sherrie at info@rethinkingeducation.com

June 4–6 - 28th EFFE Conference, Heppenheim, Germany. Topic to be announced. Email: effe.Deutschland@web.de. Web: www.effe-eu.org.

June 25-27 - AERO’s 15th Year Conference: Setting the Agenda for the Education Revolution, Russell Sage College, Troy, NY. Keynote speakers to include Dr. Michael Klonsky

June 27-30 - Eleventh International Literacy and Education Research Network Conference on Learning, CojÃ–mar Pedagogical Convention Centre, Havana, Cuba. In recent years, the Learning Conference has been held in Malaysia (Penang, 1999), Australia (Melbourne, 2000), Greece (Spetses, 2001), China (Beijing 2002) and the United Kingdom (London University, 2003). The overall theme of the Learning Conference 2004 will be “Learning Today: Communication, Technology, Environment, Society.” Critical issues to be addressed include education for local and global cultural diversity, the impact of new technologies, changing forms of literacy, and the role of education in social and personal transformation. Full details of the conference are to be found at the conference website: http://www.LearningConference.com

July 1-3 - 5th International Conference on Information Communication Technologies in Education, Samos Island, Greece.
The 5th ICICTE conference will seek to address the many challenges and new directions presented by technological innovations in educational settings. Providing keynote speakers, plenary sessions, workshops, and forums with a focus on integrating technology into all facets of education, the conference will provide participants with a forum for intensive interdisciplinary interaction and collegial debate. Those attending ICICTE Samos 2004 will leave with an excellent overview of current thinking and practices in applications of technology to education. Thematic streams will include alternative processes, procedures, techniques and tools for creating learning environments appropriate for the twenty-first century. Web: http://www.ineag.gr/ICICTE. Contact Nancy Pyrini, Conference Director, at icictc@ineag.gr.

July 5-9 - World Council of Curriculum and Instruction (WCCI) 11th Triennial World Conference, Wollongong, Australia. The theme is “Education for a World View: Focus on Globalising Curriculum and Instruction”. Some of the sub themes include global citizenship, cross-cultural studies and communication, globalising education for all, global technology and the media, equitable sharing of world’s resources, inclusion of oppressed and indigenous populations, arts in global education, multiculturalism and human rights. For more information email: jburnley@uow.edu.au. Tel: 02 42214667. Web: www.conferenceimages.com.au.

September - Encounters 2004. Artists’ Symposium, Turkey. Artists from various fields of art and different countries are asked to meet in Turkey to exchange ideas at a 3-week-event, the Artists’ Symposium 2004.

Place of meeting is the site of a former tile-making works in Turkey. Contact Brigitta at brigitta.edler@aon.at

Jobs and Internships

We are very happy to announce that we are opening The Highland School this fall (2004). We have been holding monthly Core Group meetings since August - after our exciting experiences in Albany at IDEC. Our school will be democratic and individuals will have the freedom to pursue their own interests. Our web site is www.ruralnet.org/highlandschool. We are looking for an intern for the 2004-2005 school year. Let me know if you know of anyone.

Thanks! Candy Landvoigt

“The Nobody trolled me I’d be needing some kind of degree in here!”

The Alternative Community School (ACS) in Ithaca NY is seeking a new principal beginning in 2004-05. We are a public middle school and high school of choice and a member school of the Coalition of Essential Schools since 1987. Our founding principal, Dave Lehman, will be retiring in the summer of 2004 after 30 years of leadership to ACS. Our students, staff, parents and caregivers offer the following reflections to urge you to consider applying: In U. S. Public Education we are a state and national model for alternative, democratic, performance-based education. Our holistic, student-centered approach to curriculum, pedagogy, and governance defines our work and working relationships through constant reflection and revision. Our commitment to innovation and experimentation has established practices at ACS like: Graduation by Exhibition, shared decision-making, inquiry-based learning, participatory democratic structures, and community involvement. Students are evaluated, not graded, through multiple assessments; many are performance-based. For an application and information, contact: Dr. William Russell, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Ithaca City School District, 400 Lake St., Ithaca, NY 14850 Tel: (607) 274-2134 wrussell@icsd.k12.ny.us Application Deadline, March 10, 2004

Aaditto Shen is a motivated teacher looking for an art teacher position in a middle/high school in the United States, preferably a school with an alternative approach to education. A Fine Arts graduate, Aaditto has been teaching art, crafts, photography and sculpture in India for the past 4-plus years. He specializes in art history, sculpture, and printmaking and is skillful in basic painting techniques. He is proficient in Photoshop, Illustrator, and PageMaker. Contact Aaditto at 209 Rashbehahari Avenue, Kolkata 700019, India. Email: aaditto@yahoo.com

Sowilo Community High School in Perth Australia is looking for a dynamic innovative mentor who is a qualified teacher. The school currently has 18 students enrolled. The curriculum is developed from student’s interests with volunteer community experiences an integral part of the learning for all students who wish to participate. The school takes a whole of life approach to learning. Individual pathways are developed for students to follow their passions into the community for work and leisure pursuits. Students are seen as part of the whole community and the community is part of the ‘school’. The school can be contacted at +61 –8 9385 5638 or email adrienne@huber.net.

I am leaving Currambena at the end of our school year 18 Dec 2003 and the school is searching far and wide for a replacement. The job is teaching 8-10 year olds and is to start in the first week of February 2004. It’s a great opportunity for a passionate and energetic educator who believes in truly child-centered education. The job description and loads of information about Currambena is available at our website www.currambena.nsw.edu.au. If you need any further info don’t hesitate to contact: Tim Perkins.

I am an ex-Waldorf teacher and ex-public schoolteacher with a M.Ed. in Elementary Education who wants to work in a democratic school setting. I am open to participating as a staff member in any school who can pay me a minimum living wage. I have also been a professional singing teacher and have led children’s choirs in two different schools. I’d like to hear from you if your community might have room for me as well as my 10 year-old son. Please contact Sally Mabelle at (808) 828-0833 or email sallymabelle@hotmail.com

Ms. Leigh Doherty: looking for a leadership role involving curriculum development in a progressive school/organization. I would love to be involved in getting a new school started, or to actively participate in the developing a relatively new school or even working to improve a well-established, “old” school. I am also interested in homeschooling. I have been working abroad for the past 6 years but I am returning, preferable to the New England and beyond region, in June 2004. I am very dedicated to inquiry as an effective means to supporting students on their quest to learn and understand. My educational background includes a BS from Lesley College, a K-8 credential from San Francisco State University and a Masters from Oxford Brookes University in England.I have an excellent professional resume which includes educational experiences in the US, Africa and Europe. I also have written a personal statement, which expresses more regarding my values and experience. Please email me at loveleighalicet@yahoo.com.

Lewes New School is a small independent school in Lewes, Sussex with currently 45 children aged 5-11 (max 60). Committed to holistic learning and small class sizes, the school is a member of Human Scale Education. This is an opportunity to take part in the development and growth of an innovative and dynamic school. Successful applicants are expected to be enthusiastic and flexible, and willing to develop personally. We do not have a head teacher at our school; the staff work together to develop and implement the curriculum, and also have some day-to-day responsibilities for running the school. We are looking for someone with particular strengths in the humanities, the arts and PSE. She/he should also be willing to take an interest in and train in progressive teaching methods and emotional intelligence. For more information please call Adrienne Campbell at 01273 477074 or email: office@lewesnewschool.co.uk. Lewes New School, Talbot Terrace, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2DS. Web: www.lewesnewschool.co.uk.

A Teacher / Counselor needed for thirty hours a week for an alternative home-based high school diploma program for teen parents covering Knox and Waldo Counties. Program utilizes both individualized curriculum and collaboration with staff and community resources. Knowledge of early childhood development, life skills, and a broad range of academic subjects preferred. Must have reliable vehicle. Teacher Certification is preferred. Submit cover letter, resume, and a list of three references to: Nan Stone, Director, Passages Program, The Community School, PO Box 555, Camden, ME 04843.

I have been interested in being part a democratic school staff for quite a while now. I have visited different schools and am very familiar with processes. My interests and background span many topics and skills such as graphic design, painting and drawing, music, poetry and prose, social issues, environmental issues, theology, philosophy, and political theory. If anyone is interested or knows of a staff opening please contact me at: Boyfromthefuture@go.com or 860-367-0049. Abe Karl-Gruswitz.

Julianne Madrid. I am seeking a position in a democratic school for the 2004-2005 school year. I was a public high school Spanish teacher - I loved teaching Spanish - but I really disliked the coercive environment in which I had to teach. I can think of nothing I would rather do than facilitate authentic learning. When I was completing my masters in education I came across the Sudbury model and have since investigated additional democratic models. I participated in the founding of the Mountain Laurel Sudbury School in Connecticut and am currently a foundation fundraiser at a university. I am certified in both English and Spanish and ideally I would like to work in a public alternative democratic school in the Boston area. However, I’m open to other possibilities. Please contact me at huli_madrid@yahoo.com or 860-833-7529, or 208 Morrison Ave. #1, Somerville, MA 02144 for

Arthur Brenner I am seeking an opportunity to work at a Sudbury-model, free, democratic school. As a high school science teacher with five years of experience in public schools, I am painfully aware of just how ineffective (and damaging) traditional school can be. A coercion-free, grade-free school environment would be a refreshing new challenge. In addition to my traditional school teaching experience, I also homeschooled/unschooled my son for four years (grades 3-6). So, I have seen the benefits of a less rigid approach to schooling. My New Jersey certification is in Physical Science, but my original (Wisconsin) certification also included “Broad Field Science.” I’m sure that I can also be useful in the areas of math, computers, and English language/writing skills. I currently live in central New Jersey but am open to considering other areas. (732) 297-0402 brenner@tenet.edu

Sue Eshleman I am a teacher with five years of classroom experience and a master’s degree in school library media. I am presently living and teaching ESL in Dalian, China. My contract with my present school ends on July 9, 2004. I will be returning to the United States as soon as possible after this date and will be looking for a position for the fall. I am looking for a non-urban, loving, child-centered environment that considers the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the child in equal measure. I am also looking for a place where I can grow and stretch my own boundaries of learning and teaching into something more than what my title as library media specialist implies. I am interested in guiding my children in exploring and discovering how to use information on their own. I can be reached any time at foxden200@Juno.com for further information.

From Jonathan Zap: I am an English teacher and youth counselor seeking employment with a learning community dedicated to empowering young people to become self-actualizing learners. My background in education ranges from the traditional to the experiential and holistic. Working with inner city kids in the South Bronx, I developed a whole language approach to teaching English. As part of a cohesive team in a suburban alternative school, I helped youth at risk rediscover the excitement of self-directed multidisciplinary learning and the fulfillment of service. I have prepared honor students for college, and coached them in debate. I have designed district wide core curricula, worked with kids as a wilderness guide, and taught writing, research, literature, and communications.

The new address and phone # are: Tel: 303-596-0539 - 637 B South Broadway #108 Boulder, CO 80305

Innovative and caring teacher from NY looking for teaching job in elementary school. I was an assistant to a supervisor in an afterschool program, and I have taught for over 20 years using the creative arts: scriptwriting, storytelling, clowning, and puppetry and have been a counselor at various camps for many years. I can be reached at: Michele Broder 718-832-5837 or elvesring@yahoo.com, or elvesring@hotmail.com
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. $19.95


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. $28.95

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. $11.50.

A Free Range Childhood: Self-regulation at Summerhill School By Matthew Appleton - An updated, insightful account of everyday life at Summerhill. $18.95

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. $12.95

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)

What are Schools For, by Ron Miller $19.95 The Homeschool Book of Answers, Linda Dobson, $15.95 Making It Up as We Go Along, Chris Mercogliano’s book about the history of Albany’s Free School. $14.95

AUDIOLCASSETTES:
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

Stork School girls from the Ukraine
Although I’d been wanting to do this story for years, I felt like an interloper, getting to go behind the scenes at the US Open.

The story I’d been seeking was about the alternative approaches to education that young tennis players must find, particularly homeschooling. I direct a non-profit organization which networks and promotes educational alternatives, which include homeschooling and alternative schools. I also help edit our magazine, the Education Revolution, which people can now find on the newsstands. I knew, for example, that both Williams sisters homeschooled. I actually got to talk to them about that back in 1997, just before Venus played her first U.S Open match, and before Serena ever played on the circuit. I even got both their autographs on the program for that day, which still hangs on the wall. I think the fact that they homeschooled explains their wide academic interests, and continuing interest in pursuing their own education in clothing design, for example.

There are now an estimated 2 million homeschoolers in the United States. Many young movie stars
homeschooled, such as Elijah Wood, who was enrolled in the Laurel Springs program.

My involvement with tennis goes way back. I was a high school and college player, and as a teenager got an umpiring job at Forest Hills, even umpiring matches for Arthur Ashe and Billie Jean King. I’ve been going to the Open ever since.

I’m a member of the Education Writer’s Association, but I had never received media credentials to cover the US open, until this year. After calling and emailing for a year, they agreed to give me credentials for just two days so I could do the story.

Not everyone knows that the qualifying tournament starts the Wednesday before the official Monday opening of the championships. They start with 128 of the players below the top 100, and those who get to the round of 16 become the qualifiers. It is free to the public! I love to go and pick out the potential stars of the future. A few years back I picked out Marcello Rios when he was a qualifier. Within a couple of years he was briefly #1.

I brought four students from the table tennis club at a local Boys and Girls Club where I volunteer. They had a blast!

I went into the registration center for media, and they found my name. They sent me into the next room to have my picture taken and put the result into a scanning code at the top and a map of all the open courts on the back. I wore it proudly, and it got me in to anywhere I wanted to go.

It was very hot, but we stayed for hours. The media center was wonderfully air-conditioned. All the fully credentialed journalists had their own booths with monitor and phone. There must have been hundreds. Also, we got to take free water and soda.

The Arthur Ashe Day was on the Saturday before the start of the open. It benefits several charities, including AIDS research. I was there at the first one, and met Arthur Ashe again. He died of AIDS that year. This year I brought a student with me from Nepal who had attended a conference on democratic Education which we had organized this summer. There were tennis demonstrations by top stars, interspersed with pop music. One of the performers was Daniel Bedingfield, whose first single, “Gotta Get Thru This” has become #1 in England. Daniel is a former homeschooler, originally from New Zealand. I had met his father at a home education conference I spoke at in England.

I started to ask the staff in the media center which players had been homeschooled. At first it was hard to find out, but eventually I discovered that Carly Gullickson, the 16 year old daughter of former Yankee pitcher Bill Gullickson, is a homeschooler. I signed up to interview her after her Tuesday first round match.

On Monday we watched matches until late at night, looking particularly for the qualifiers we had seen a few days earlier. This year I was particularly impressed with Nicolas Mahut from France, Jeff Salzenstein from Florida, Karlovic, the 6 foot 10 inch player from Croatia, and Wesley Moodie from South Africa.

Carly Gullickson was scheduled for the third match on court 7. Before that I knew I had to watch Michael Chang play his last match at the US Open, in Arthur Ashe Stadium. I had watched Michael play his first match at the US Open in 1987, as a 15-year-old, with ten people watching on an outside court. Basically there was his family and I. He won that match, making him the youngest man to win a round at the US Open. He’s had a great career, winning the French two years later at the age of 17. But in the end he was just too short and slight to go much further. Now, here he was, at age 31, playing his last match. But he did not go down easily. He took a set from the 15th seeded Fernando Gonzales of Chile, before he gaveway to wear and time.

I raced down to watch Carly’s match. She was already behind 3 to love when I arrived, but she took the next five games against Dinara Safina, Marat Safin’s sister. Then Safina took a game and the flood gates opened. Gullickson didn’t win another game until 5-0 in the second. She won two games then, but soon the match ended. Gullickson’s potential was clear, but this was not to be her year. I went back to the media center to wait for her.

They said they were looking for her, didn’t know when she’d be there. Then they announced there’d be a press conference at 5 PM. They told me I’d me able to have a short personal interview with her after that.

The press conferences were in special rooms designated for that purpose. It appeared that any reporter could go to a press conference for any player and ask questions. Carly came to the interview still wearing her baseball hat. I was surprised that there were about a dozen other reporters in the room, including Sky News from Europe. They asked her about the match, about her famous father. I asked her if she thought she might have won the match if she had won the first set after leading 5-3. She said she has difficulty closing out sets and matches, but she thought she might have won, except that “All the girls have so much more experience than I do. They know how to come back.” Sixteen-year-olds are limited to 10 tournaments a year by the tennis association.

After the press conference they cleared the room of reporters and I was able to interview her personally about her homeschooling.

She said she has been homeschooling for two years. Before that she was missing a week or two a month from school and the teachers were
complaining about it. So “Two years ago at the US Open I decided to homeschool. I had asked other players about what programs they used, and I decided to take the University of Nebraska’s homeschool program.”

I don’t know if a reporter is supposed to do this, but I told her that I thought that program might be too traditional and inflexible and suggested the Clonlara Home Based Education Program. She laughed. She said it’s a lot of work, but “It’s been good so far.”

Carly said that her sister will start homeschooling this year. She’s just turning 13 and is starting to play serious tennis. She has other siblings but they don’t homeschool. She doesn’t think her parents are supporters of homeschooling for them yet. Her sister will use the Calvert system.

She said it was hard at first, missing her friends somewhat, and tackling a high school curriculum by distance learning. Her parents work with her, help teach her the work, and she sends it off to Nebraska. Sometimes at home she uses tutors. “At first it was hard, but now it’s great. I don’t have to worry about getting assignments into my teachers at a certain time.”

She plans to graduate from this program and will eventually go to college. “But I just turned professional, so that’s what I’m doing now.”

After the interview I heard about another homeschooler, 17 year old Bethanie Mattek. Later I watched her match. She took a set from 23rd seed Nathalie Dechy but lost the match.

As I was talking to the staff in the media center about Mattek, on the far side of the room I had a fleeting glimpse of Michael Chang walking down the hall toward the door after his press conference at the Open. I really wanted to talk to him one last time before he left. I remember last talking to him in 1994 as he practiced for the open. We talked about his first match in 1987 against McNamee and I asked him who I should watch that year. He said I should follow an 18-year-old named Mark Philippoussis, who went to the final at Wimbledon this year.

I ran outside the media center into the heat, looking for Chang, but he had disappeared into the crowd. September 4th, when they had his retirement ceremony, was the 16th anniversary of the first match I saw him win at the Open.
One bright autumn day, I walked to school with my friend Jamie. We arrived at school and put our jackets on our assigned hooks and took our seats.

I remember clearly the facial expression of my teacher, Ms. Givens. She was stuck in a half-hearted grin, as if her emotions had been apprehended on their way to excitement. She was tense, as if she was not exactly sure she agreed with what she was about to tell us.

Clearly, something was about to happen, and that made the class excited: we loved new stuff.

Ms. Givens cleared her throat and said, “Good morning boys and girls. Today we have a very special treat for you. As a result of the fact that the our Mayor thinks people in this town are becoming more and more out of shape and unhealthy, our town is going to test all students in athletics to determine who is in shape, and who needs to improve their physical health level. The test will begin tomorrow.”

I felt excitement surge through my body. I was a tremendous athlete, even at age ten. I played football, baseball, and I wrestled. In the summers, my mother had to drag me inside to eat dinner, sweaty and scraped from physical activity.

My friend Jamie was a little concerned. He was active, but not quite as athletic as I was. He played golf often with his brothers. He also played a mean game of ping-pong and I envied his manual dexterity. When he expressed concern to me, I reminded him that he always beat me in ping-pong and that he played tennis with his mom once a week. I was concerned for him, because in the physical arena, I did not see him performing as well as me, an accomplished athlete.

I could barely sleep that night. As I watched the sun slowly rise and cast a soft glow through my window on my wood grain dresser, I thought about the excitement of the day ahead. I thought of all the great feats I would accomplish just hours from waking up. I thought of the other students cheering for me as I completed my events triumphantly. I saw the ten-year-old girls, the pretty ones, pecking me on the cheek and offering me their extra fruit rollups in their lunch. Candy offers were flooding me, and I picked out my favorites from all the straining, outstretched fists.

I sprang out of bed and almost forgot my lunch box as I head off first for Jamie’s, and then for school. Jamie looked ragged, with dark garbage bags under his eyes from lack of sleep. I bounced to school, with Jamie walking anxiously beside me. We entered our bustling classroom and took our seats.

Ms. Givens announced that the test would begin today, as scheduled. I literally could not keep myself in my chair. She read from and official bulletin for the test:

“This test has been designed to measure your athletic ability and potential for achievement in all athletics. The test consists of a battery of drills in the great sport of tennis. You will be instructed to serve, volley and groundstroke on the forehand and backhand sides. Your ability will be judged by tennis experts who have studied the fundamentals of tennis and know the skills it takes to succeed in tennis.”

I remember the heartsickness starting in the pit of my stomach. Then fear surged through me like a hot lace. Tennis!? I had never played in my life! I raised my hand and asked why tennis would be used. Ms. Givens replied:

“You have seen tennis on TV, right?”
“Yes.”
“The tennis players are in great shape, aren’t they?”
“Yes.”

“Theyir prime physical condition is a result of playing and training for tennis matches. They are also outstanding athletes who often are good at other sports and activities as well. Therefore, tennis can be used as an accurate measurement for all athletic ability. This was studied by experts in the field of testing and performance, experts who spent years developing this very fair and thorough test. Just do your best and we will see where you measure up.”
Wow, I thought, they are serious about this tennis thing. I glanced at Jamie, who appeared to be doing better with this information than I was. In fact, now he was the one doing the bouncing, right there at his desk. Tennis was his game. He played with his mom; he even beat her occasionally. I tried playing with them once, and was absolutely confounded by the game.

We took the test, which consisted of eight specific drills designed to test all the abilities it took to play tennis. I performed substandard at all of them, except the quickness and agility drill, where my natural athletic ability showed.

A few weeks later, I was heartbroken when I received my results from the judges. I was ruled unathletic. I performed horribly in the skill areas of the test. I was recommended to an NA course in the fundamentals of tennis that would start the following day. (I found out later that NA meant Non-Athletic. Ouch.)

I went home and cried. My mom assured me that I could become good at tennis. I vehemently claimed that I did not want to become good at tennis. I liked football and wrestling and baseball. I said it was unfair. Mom agreed and said that life is often unfair.

Jamie, however, had done well, and had received 22 candy offers and at least 5 fruit rollups from very pretty girls. He had nailed his forehand and backhand and been labeled one of the top athletes in the school. He was given a medal in a ceremony at the end of the day, and was positively beaming all the time.

The next day in the NA tennis course, I found that a lot of people in there were the children on my wrestling and football teams. About half the class had the pudgy look of inactive children, but the other half were truly good athletes, at least according to what I had seen them do in other sports. The teacher, a tennis instructor, said we would learn tennis by playing each other. First, we would use the test scores to pair people up, and then we would play tennis every day for the rest of the year.

I was puzzled. I asked, “Why would we play the actual game of tennis when the test was all drills and specific stuff? Why don’t we study the drills?”

The teacher carefully pondered and replied, “We want to train you as athletes. True, we measure that with tennis abilities. But if we teach the rich game of tennis as a whole, the test will be no problem for you. Besides, we cannot guarantee what particular drills will be in the next test.”

This was not the answer I wanted to hear, but I had no choice in the matter. So, I gritted my teeth and sat through the lecture on basic rules and strategies of the game. Then we paired up and started to play. In an effort to gain my athletic status back, I convinced myself that I could become a good tennis player. I was intensely determined to become an accomplished tennis player. I struck a deal with myself, and then I set out to become a really good tennis player.

There was an uproar among many parents in the town at the results of these tests. Parents, including my own, knew in their hearts that these tests were not what was best for the children in the town. They questioned what the tests were really measuring. They questioned the fairness. They demanded to speak about these tests in an open forum. An emergency town meeting was called to discuss what to do about this volatile situation.

There was a lot of support of the test in the town. There were the parents of children who did well on it. There were avid tennis players who loved the idea. The meeting was run by the town council, most of whom were in support of the test. They had brought in tennis experts who spoke brilliantly and eloquently about the benefits of a world that played tennis. They showed charts and statistics that showed that the drills in the tests measured athleticism. Physical experts gave persuasive speeches declaring tennis as a perfect gauge of athletic activity.

The room steamed with dissent, as parents fumed over the recent developments at school. One parent stood and raised the question all wanted answered: How could all these athletic children in our town be labeled non-athletes?

A senior town council member stood up and read this prepared statement:

“There has been a growing concern that our schools are not providing our students with the physical condition required for good health. American students get fatter and more out of shape every year. We have developed a way to get our children the athletic activity they need to better their lives. We need to be accountable to our performance in giving them these opportunities. That is where the test comes in. We have judges in the community who are expert in the area of tennis. You have heard experts give convincing arguments that tennis is a solid measure of
athletic activity. We will provide those who under-performed with tennis instruction to get their scores up and begin our country’s march towards athletic excellence.”

The town council held firm, and rounded up enough support to continue the testing program.

Parents of “Non-Athletic” students feared this label would stick to their children. They kept them in the mandatory tennis class at school. When this was not enough, they hired tennis tutors to give more personalized instruction.

Tennis activity surged over the next several years. All children whose parents could afford it were taking tennis lessons. Many of them did not like the sport, but feared the “Non-Athletic” label.

Soccer and football fields in my town were paved over with tennis courts. Tennis became an obsession. Local TV commercials were seen showing the now obvious link between tennis and athletic activity. “Got Tennis?” and “Tennis, for the Athlete in all of Us” were common slogans on billboards and the sides of town buses.

Soon “Athleticism” and “Tennis” became synonyms in the gossip and daily conversations around town, and in the talks of whether schools were performing up to the standards of the athletic improvement initiative.

Test scores went up. Even mine. By the next year, I had given up on wrestling and baseball, and took up tennis full time. I never really enjoyed tennis, but I did enjoy my test results and the attention I received for improving them. Jamie later confided in me that he knew all along that I was a good athlete. He also doubted his athletic ability in spite of the tests. Just because he played tennis well, he reasoned, did that mean he could play football? Or soccer? Or run cross-country? He could always soothe his fears somewhat by pulling out his results and reading his testing outcome, in bold print across the top of the printout: HIGHLY ATHLETIC.

A few years after the start of the testing, a teacher at my school started up an after school program to improve athletic test scores. This program achieved amazing results in short periods of time. Their philosophy was to forget the sport of tennis and focus directly on the tested drills. Children who had never played a solid set of tennis in their lives and who were on the verge of giving up received excellent scores after taking the program. The test makers eschewed the course as taking athletic shortcuts and not really benefiting the athleticism of its students. The company, called “Tennis Review” countered by showing the improvements in the test scores. Debate continues to this day. Should these “test beating” companies be allowed to teach students shortcuts? Does this defeat the purpose of the tests in the first place?

Criticism of the testing program continued from activist groups of parents and liberal educators. These saw the testing phenomenon as a farce. It was a waste of time, they reasoned, and it was making children’s athletic lives one-dimensional.

Unfortunately for the children in my town, these reformers were a minority. When they called for repeal of the tests, the education officials released an official statement, saying that the school needs something to measure athleticism, or there would be no way to measure progress. “We only have judges trained in measuring tennis performance, and we need a measure of accountability for the athleticism of our children. Therefore, tennis is the answer.”

Over time, the test scores fluctuated. When they went down, town officials would institute “Back to Basics” fundamentals programs, where every child would be expected to spend extra time each day in the months leading up to the tests. What basketball nets were left in the town were removed until after testing day. Painted hopscotch grids were sandblasted away to take away the temptation to waste energy on frivolous pursuits.

What about children having fun, doing what they love? The experts replied that the tradeoff was minimal. The important part was whether or not the child was athletic, not what game they played. In other words, the end (tennis drill expertise) justifies the means (high stakes testing.)

Soon, the tests became an institution, and no one in the town could remember a time before the tests. Football? What is that? Soccer? Is that the game with all the kicking? Hockey? Something to do with ice, I think. What about hopscotch? Tag? Kick the can? Frivolous. Ludicrous. Pointless.

Pick up your racquets, sons and daughters, it’s time for your morning 25 serves!
Liberty Based Montessori
Sharon Caldwell

Nahoon Montessori Pre-primary School was started in April 1997 in South Africa.

We had moved to East London from King William’s Town for my son to begin Grade One at a school there. Within a few months, I began to see changes in my child, and slowly came to realize that school was (to use the words of John Taylor Gatto) “dumbing him down.” I am not going to include the litany of school problems which we encountered, but suffice it to say that it took 5½ years to reach the crisis which precipitated my search for alternatives.

I had previously visited a number of Montessori Primary Schools in Johannesburg and Cape Town, but was not at all enchanted with what I saw there. With one notable exception, I encountered children being compelled to perform the same sort of “busywork” tasks which one expects in regular schools, together with timetables and testing. Despite mixed-age classes, children were placed in graded groups for mathematics and reading. Some schools were using strictly managed control systems, or outside programs such as Kumon Maths. It appeared that the freedom of individual choice and development was being subverted in pursuit of measurable academic success, and in order to comply with external bureaucratic and market demands. I decided that if that was what Montessori primary was about, I was having none of it.

In a previous life (that is, before having children of my own) I taught History and Accounting at Kaffrarian Girls School in King William’s Town. Although my students achieved excellent results within that system, I was always something of a maverick in the system and read widely on alternative approaches. David Gribble’s book Considering Children, first introduced me to the concept of Democratic Education through his examination of Summerhill, Dartington Hall and Sands Schools. I wondered whether any of these schools still existed.

I had come to Montessori when I was unable to find a play-school for my son. Now I began the search anew, this time with the benefit of the internet. I stumbled across an organisation called AERO (The Alternative Education Resource Organisation) which introduced me to an Aladdin’s cave of educational variety. I found that Summerhill is not only still in existence, but is thriving after winning a major court victory against the British Education Department. I learned about Sudbury Valley, and literally hundreds of schools worldwide where children are not compelled by adults to do anything against their will. This notion of freedom for children, based on the integrity and inalienable rights of the individual were what had initially drawn me to Montessori.

I wondered if my assessment of Montessori in South Africa was true for other countries as well, and also wanted to learn more about other alternatives to regular schooling. Australia offered both a large number of Montessori schools, and a diverse cross section of independent alternatives fairly close together. I visited seven schools in and around Brisbane and Melbourne in March 2001. These included Montessori Schools and independent community schools. Not all of the independent schools could be termed “democratic” but they all deviated from both the traditional school model and Montessori. The time available here does not permit a full exploration of the diversity of workable alternatives I encountered. At these schools, however, my overriding impression was that they would all gain from the insights of Montessori.

It was at the last school I visited, Booroobin Sudbury School at Maleny, near Brisbane, that I had to confront a large number of my own preconceptions. What I saw was children and teenagers, aged between 5 and 18 years of age, working, learning and playing in freedom. The students and staff at the school have equal rights and share responsibility. Staff are employed by the school body (i.e. the students themselves) to aid, but never control, the learning process. Having taught at a regular high school, I was astonished by the confidence and responsible attitude of the teenagers at Booroobin.

I returned to restudy Montessori literature, more recent work on learning styles, multiple intelligence and brain development. I discovered a worldwide ground-swell opposition to conventional and compulsory schooling and a search for alternatives. It seemed that the so-
called Democratic or Free schools are more in keeping with the principles of Montessori than most of the schools which use the name. Montessori was, however, one of the first educators to suggest that children should have a choice in what they learn, and to put individual freedom at the heart of her educational method.

I read everything I could find on Democratic and Free schools. This is not a homogeneous system or movement. It has no one predecessor or “model school,” there is no founder or guiding light. Democratic education is, rather, a broad and eclectic approach which places the learner at the center of learning. It acknowledges the fundamental right of each individual to choose or direct his own learning. There is no consensus among schools as to exactly how this is to be achieved. Although some schools belong to larger groupings, such as the Sudbury Valley Schools, most tend to be highly individualistic.

Liberty-based education can be traced back to Homer Lane, whose innovative reformatory in England, the Little Commonwealth, inspired A. S. Neill to found Summerhill School. Many of the Democratic or Free schools have been based, loosely, on Summerhill, and acknowledge Neill as a strong influence on their philosophy and methodology. A large number of schools founded in the sixties and seventies, among them the Albany Free School, have contributed to the trend and one of the most influential in recent times has been the Sudbury Valley School near Boston. This trend has been fuelled and supported by research into how humans learn, and movements to promote self-directed, life-long learning.

As a method designed to enable a child to develop autonomy within a carefully prepared, structured, rich and varied educational environment, it occurred to me that Montessori and other approaches based on individual liberty could find common ground.

After discussion with parents and children, we determined to establish Nafoon Montessori School Primary section as a Democratic School, but to retain both the Montessori name and the Montessori concepts of the prepared environment, didactic materials and methods. This is what makes our school “new” and different to anything else in South Africa or even the world.

The school differs from the more traditional concept of Montessori, and from regular schools in a number of ways. We are based, first and foremost, on the principles of individual liberty within a democratic structure. Every person in our school has equal rights, whether you are aged five or fifty. We have no externally imposed timetable, no child is compelled to do any activity at all if that is not what he or she wishes to do.

We interpret work, learning, and playing as integral and indivisible parts of the same concept, growing. Our children play a lot. Through this normal, everyday interaction (that is often regulated out of existence in most educational settings), the children encounter real problems to solve, real conflicts to resolve, real learning in real situations.

Playing is learning and, in an encouraging environment, learning is also playing … Playing without learning is boring, so you stop doing it. Working without learning, however, is an all-too-common feature of conventional education. Children are often obliged to spend hours doing things that they find incomprehensible or pointless. The teachers try hard to instruct, but actually waste the children’s time.

I’ll give an example of how children use play as a tool for learning. One day some girls brought their Barbie dolls to school. The morning started with two children playing quietly with their dolls, but soon some others joined, using dolls we keep in the school. My own son ran home to fetch his Action Man. Soon they left the dolls for a while to go to the woodworking bench and make some furniture. What interested me was the level of the conversation between the “dolls” - and the social situations which were being enacted. It was directly supportive of Lev Vygotsky’s assertion in *Mind and Society* that during play children operate at a level above their own normal behavior.

The game continued for four days. During this time the dolls traveled to Australia (another mat) and discussion involved time zones and suitable times to phone someone on another continent. This necessitated references to the globe and atlas.

Ken and Action Man set off to climb Everest, which resulted in much discussion as to why Barbie was not invited to join the expedition. A pulley system was set up to enable the now non-discriminatory team to abseil off the balcony. There was a discussion over whether Everest is actually the tallest mountain. This led some to read and discuss a magazine article on Edmund Hillary. One child asked me a question about various routes up Everest, which led to a rather formal lesson on glaciers (which a four year old and one parent joined). Parents sometimes wonder how their children learn when they play so much. Our understanding is they learn *because* they play so much.

I have discussed this learning/play issue with the children, who often take a lot of flack from grandparents who think they should be in “proper school.” I asked one child why she says she plays all day when her grandmother asks her what she did at school. Her reply was “well, we enjoy what we’re doing – we are doing what we want to do, so it is playing. Even when I do a maths worksheet it feels like playing, because I choose to do it.”
The children are able to acknowledge their own passions without having to first complete assigned tasks. Hence a twelve-year old fascinated by computers is able to work for weeks on end perfecting a web-page, or a highly creative ten-year-old can structure her learning around craft projects. Having no timetables or bells means children are able to finish things (especially games and discussions) in their own time. All those problems and conflicts that make us human can be dealt with meaningfully, and in context. Hence our children become skilled negotiators and mediators.

Every time an adult solves a problem for a child, the child is deprived of an opportunity to learn. It is one of the myths of conventional education that people (including children) need to be taught in order to learn. Our staff spend a lot of time just observing. In fact, we use this as a sort of barometer of whether we are interfering too much. A minimum amount of time is spent in direct teaching. This does not imply that the adult is redundant, or that the children are left entirely to their own devices. If we find that a child is showing an interest in a particular area, a staff member will help that child find the necessary resources or equipment. We also often just do things ourselves, like craft or cooking or reading, or working in the common space we share with the children. Children often ask what we are doing, or if they can do it too.

It is also incumbent on the staff to ensure that the environment is maintained in a way that encourages and supports the natural needs of the children. This entails providing suitable materials, and making sure that they are accessible to the children who would need to or want to use them. We do not work on preconceived notions of what is appropriate to what age, in the sense that we do not prevent any child from exploring those topics which interest him or her. But we do acknowledge the Montessori concept of Planes of Development and Sensitive Periods. This is an understanding that children differ significantly from adults in the way they learn, and that at different stages their needs and the way they seek to satisfy them change.

These different needs are met through the prepared environment, which offers a wide variety of materials and resources. Children are free to choose whatever satisfies their own personal developmental needs. In this rich environment we find many of our children spontaneously reading at about 4 or 5 without any direct teaching whatsoever (although some only do this at eight or nine). Our children develop into unique individuals with a vast variety of learning styles and interests. They own their learning.

At NMS we have thirty children ranging in age from 2½ to 12. We have two rooms and a large outside area with the normal climbing equipment, swings and so on, but also including a flower, herb and vegetable garden.

One room is set up and maintained for the 3–6-year olds. Everything is child-sized and conforms to what one would expect in any Montessori classroom. It is very orderly and structured.

The second room is set up for the 6–12 year olds, but in this case the children themselves play a far larger role than I have seen in other Montessori schools. In addition to a selection of regular Montessori materials the room includes a kitchen area, a sewing machine, a computer, various toys, a library, a science and technology workbench, musical instruments, radio, Dacta kits, lots of art and craft materials, and anything else the children wish to bring.

There is no segregation between the rooms, but the youngest children seem to prefer the calm atmosphere in the Cycle 1 room to the high level of activity in the Cycle 2 room.

The democracy of our school is to be found in the structures by which the children regulate the day-to-day running of the school. Some aspects, such as staffing and financing are still controlled by me, as the school is a sole-proprietorship and is physically attached to our family home. This is not ideal, and is an aspect we hope to be able to remedy in the not too distant future.

All decisions which affect the children are made in our weekly meeting, run by the children. All rules are proposed and voted on in these meetings. Each member has one vote (that means each child has a vote, each staff member has a vote). Staff have no veto rights (with the obvious exception at this stage of matters which affect our family and private property). The children under 6 years of age do not display much interest in the meeting or
heavily on The New School, a Liberty-based school in Delaware, USA.

Initially, I discussed ideas of democracy, human rights and responsibilities with the children. We formulated some ground rules which outlined the type of system the children wanted. As about half of our Primary group had come from regular school there was a heavy emphasis on preventing bullying and violence.

We soon found, however, that the children began to debate the meaning of these rules, and it became necessary to formulate more specific rules to deal with particular situations. Even the rules for running the meetings came under discussion.

Initially we had no mechanism for dealing with infringements of rules, due in part to my own aversion to punishment, which was also heavily supported by the children who had come from regular school. After a few months we were faced with some problems which did not appear to be able to be resolved by our normal methods of mediation or discussion in meeting, and it was decided to try out the Sudbury-type method of Judicial Committee, which I had seen in action at Booroobin.

Our JC has never been as successful as it appears to be in other schools, and this could be due to a number of reasons. It is not, however, the efficacy of the system which is important to us, but the process by which it was established, and through which we grapple with improving it. One of the notable features of our rules is their flexibility, and the way in which the children use them to maintain the type of learning environment they want. They have clearly come to see rules as a tool by which free people can regulate their environment, not as a way of controlling and manipulating others.

At NMS we are providing an environment where the children design their own curriculum. To put it into the words of one of our 10-year-old students “I told my granny I am going to school to learn to be a human being. Human beings can learn maths whenever they want.”

Our journey has not been without its pitfalls. We have to work constantly at helping parents, the Education Department and the general public to understand our approach. We constantly have to guard against being sucked into a cycle of either defending what we do, or compromising to accommodate the contradictory demands placed upon us. We nonetheless feel that we are steadily moving towards our goal of being a fully democratic school, with the complete support of both the parents and the community at large. We are currently working on establishing a school for learners over 12 years of age, and have some ideas which incorporate aspects of the Montessori “Erkinder” concept, home-school or community resource center and inspirations from The New School.

Around the world, as in South Africa, children are rejecting imposed schooling, but without a clear understanding of either what they are rejecting, or of what, if any, alternatives are available to them. They resort to vandalism and violence in extreme cases, or sink into despair and depression in others. My research over the past few years, and the experience at Naahoo Montessori School have convinced me that the traditional schooling system, designed in Prussia in the early nineteenth century, is long past it’s sell-by date. Tinkering with curriculum (both in terms of delivery methods and content) cannot significantly change a system which was intentionally designed to destroy individual thought and suppress personal liberty.

If we are to remedy the educational crisis we have to give ownership back where it belongs. The learners, with the support of their own communities, need to regain control of learning.

Many of our children at NMS have come from schools where they have experienced learning as traumatic. They have had to subsume their individuality under the pressure of the demands of a standardised system. These children require time to learn how to play. They need time to learn how to do nothing. Then they begin to learn how to learn the way they learnt before they were first taught. They learn how to follow passion. They learn how to explore and take risks. They learn how to make mistakes without shame. They learn who they are.

Schools and curricula need to be redesigned to fit the needs of the students, instead of being designed to mould the children to fit a generalized idea of what they need to become. Naahoo Montessori School is, to the best of my knowledge, the only school in South Africa which gives its learners the opportunity to control their own lives. We need a lot more schools which do this.

We also all need to begin to examine some of the assumptions which have clouded our understanding of education and schooling. And we need to ensure that individuals and communities, in the spirit of individual liberty and by democratic means, can have the opportunity to design and adapt the best systems available to suit local and individual needs and conditions.
It’s fine
to have a large democratic
school if you have good communications
and a good way to get everybody involved
in the meetings. You must have a
comfortable room that’s big enough to
contain everybody. That is the limiting
factor in a school. It has to be the same
place where you can have your meetings
every time and it has to be big enough so
that everybody can come if they want to.
Otherwise, the physical plant itself is
limiting democracy.

When I went to the Home Education
Festival in England, 900 people were
there. When we held our meetings,
eventually several hundred kids were able
to come into the tent very comfortably to
participate in the meeting.

At Shaker Mountain we never had a
limit on who could speak or for how long.
I used to keep track, though, and I found
that generally speaking at our school the
kids spoke about 60 percent of the time
and the staff about 40 percent. That varied
a lot according to the issues. As time went
on, the kids were able to hold their own,
and I don’t know if that situation would
have been improved in any way if the staff
had bitten their tongues and stopped
themselves from speaking.

Everybody who had an opinion was
able to express it. It was up to the
chairperson, however, if he or she felt
someone had been talking too much to
point that out to the person, or simply to
call on more people to get a more
balanced discussion going.

Some people worry that adults have
more natural authority, so that kids will
just blindly listen and follow them. That
did not happen when I was at Shaker
Mountain. A new kid might be influenced
that way, but in general the students in the
school would look at everything
independently and would not be very
influenced by what an adult had to say.
On the other hand, some adults were
respected because they had a good track
record and people had found the things
they said useful and believable.

An important stage that students
would get to in the school was when they
were able to criticize their friends in a
meeting, if they felt a friend had done
something that was not the right thing.
This is an important point of maturity for
anybody to get to, to be able to do this.

When the meeting was functioning
well, people had no qualms about doing
that and they knew they would still be
friends with that person after the meeting.
This is something that is not easy to
achieve in a new democracy. When that
happens, that’s when you know that your
democracy is working well.

At some schools—Summerhill is one
of them—the Director and the staff have
power to make certain decisions that
involve health and safety. At Shaker
Mountain we found that our community
was so sensible that whatever situation
was brought up, the students would make
good decisions about it. If anything, they
almost tended to go beyond what we
thought was possible.

For example, when it came to the
question of drug rules, the kids understood
that one of the most important things to

How to Run a Meeting
From No Homework and Recess All Day
the new book by
Jerry Mintz

Problems with drugs and sexual issues
were sometimes brought up in the
meetings. If something was brought up
and people thought it would be difficult
for the parties involved to talk about it in
a meeting, they could propose that we
establish a small group of volunteers who
wanted to work with the person or persons
involved in that issue. The people
involved had a right to reject anybody
who volunteered, so the group would be
people who were acceptable to the parties
involved. Then, if necessary, the small group would come up with proposals to make to the meeting. This is how we dealt with things that we needed to go into in more depth than we could in the meeting itself. This could be for anything, but was usually employed when an individual student didn’t feel like they could talk to the whole meeting about something.

Generally speaking, at Shaker Mountain, we were not allowed to have a meeting business about someone who was not actually there. The person had to at least be informed that there was going to be a meeting about them. However, if students were informed that the meeting was going to be about them, and they still did not come, then the meeting could make whatever decision it wanted to.

Almost no issue was too sensitive to talk about at our meetings; we talked about anything people wanted to bring up. Even things that would not ordinarily be brought to a school meeting, but to a board of trustees, were brought up, such as whether or not to buy a certain building. That was something we had a meeting about that was kind of a combination of the school meeting and the board of trustees. At Shaker Mountain five of the ten trustees were students in the school. This was something that was recommended to us originally by Harvey Scribner, then the Commissioner of Education in Vermont. So half of our trustees through all the years were students in the school.

Early on at Shaker Mountain it was passed that a meeting could not be held unless somebody was willing to take the logbook. It could be anybody, but somebody had to take the responsibility of recording what was discussed and what decisions were made in our blank, bound volume. To read these logbooks now is very interesting because whoever was taking the log would write his or her own editorial comments and draw funny pictures; students were allowed to do that as long as they got the basic information down about what was being discussed and what was proposed, what passed and didn’t pass.

It is crucial to have a meeting record so that when people at a school want to look back and see what decisions have been made they can do so. Kids would often look back at the logbook to see, for example, whether somebody had a warning or a strong warning. It’s interesting that at Shaker Mountain warnings were often debated very seriously. If you got a warning it would mean that if you did it again you could still get a strong warning, but if you got a strong warning and you violated that subsequently, then the meeting would have no choice but to take some kind of action against you in relationship to that violation of the school rules. There’d be a lot of discussion about whether somebody should get a warning or a strong warning and people would often look it up in the logbook to see what happened.

In a democratic meeting the chairperson has a crucial role. He or she really needs to know how to listen, and needs the reflexes of an athlete to do it right because there should be no time between one person finishing speaking and the next person being called on. The chairperson should also be aware of the order in which people have requested to speak. There are various ways of doing this; some people make a speaker’s list. But I think it’s better if the chairperson has more leeway; for example, they should be able to pick somebody who hasn’t had anything to say yet rather than let the same few people who have been speaking keep on going back and forth. They need to be aware of how to keep the flow going and how to stay on topic, and should stop people immediately if they go off topic. At our school, where we had as many as 25 things on the agenda at a time, it was imperative to stay on topic. The chairperson needs to be able to stop somebody immediately and say, “Okay, this is not the subject we’re talking about, but if you want we can add it to the agenda.” It will sometimes happen just that way.

Because we had so many meetings and in so many different circumstances—on trips, at the boarding part of the school, and so on—people felt it was necessary for everyone to know how to chair a meeting. So when some new student would come in, she’d almost immediately be put to the test and she would get feedback and help on how to be a central part of this process. The majority of the students in the school eventually learned how to run a meeting well. Usually the students ran the meetings, and they could run them better than the staff.

Our younger students were some of the best chairpersons. They were usually the fairest and the quickest, and knew if something was going off topic. The interesting thing is that even at the Boys and Girls Club, one of the very youngest students is the most aware of sticking to the subject and making proper decisions.

Some schools run their meetings with the agenda decided in advance, others make it up right there. I believe you should have a combination; in other words, if people have something that they need discussed to be put on the agenda, that should be put on in advance and people should know about it. On the other hand I don’t think it’s right for people to have to wait too long to have something that they want to talk about come up. Some say you can’t add to the agenda once it’s set; I think people should be able to do that. If you have a community that has the will to make the best right decision about every subject that comes up, you can get through them fast enough.

The many schools that have been established on the Sudbury Valley model use a set system, the well-established Robert’s Rules of Order. We did not really follow Robert’s Rules of Order; we evolved our own system. This was largely influenced by our interaction and early communication with the Lewis-Wadhams School and later the Iroquois Confederacy, the Mohawk Tribe in particular.

One of the greatest influences on me was working at Lewis-Wadhams School, in the 60’s, which was based on Summerhill in England. In Summerhill meetings, for example, they are allowed to have proposals against other proposals. Very often they’ll have two or three proposals against each other. And sometimes they’d do “all against all” which means that if the majority of people are against all the proposals, then nothing passes. We used to do the same thing at Shaker Mountain School. If two proposals could legitimately be against each other, we could have them both on there. Or if they were not necessarily related to each other directly, so that they could stand alone, we could have several different proposals at a time and vote on them all at once, one at a time, rather than wait, as Robert’s Rules says, for the next item to come up.

Personally, I think it’s important that meetings be well structured and that they follow the structure consistently. Whatever structure is decided on,
whatever has evolved, people need to be well versed in it. The meeting must be taken seriously. It should be quiet during the meeting so everybody can hear. One thing I found really useful when I had meetings with a very large group of students is a portable microphone so that even those with soft voices could be heard. I just heard about a fairly large charter school that is doing democratic process that has been using the portable microphone idea.

The way Summerhill controls noise is that the chairperson has the power to warn people and to fine them or kick them out of the meeting if they’re being disruptive. I think that’s up to each organization. At Shaker Mountain we never fined anyone because nobody had any money in our school, but people did get warnings and were asked to leave the meeting for a certain period of time if they had been disruptive. Then they could come back later if they chose. We do the same thing, by the way, in the table tennis meetings.

At Shaker Mountain we briefly tried having a separate meeting to discuss issues like bullying or stealing. Nobody liked it. Everybody wanted things to run through the regular meeting. So all of our decisions were either made that way or through a small group that would make recommendations to the meeting or try to resolve any disputes.

It’s up to each organization or each school to decide how it wants to deal with these things. Some communities don’t want to spend a lot of time dealing with petty disputes between people, or rather with disputes they consider to be petty. On the other hand, some people think it’s important to understand what the community feels about whatever is going on, positive or negative.

Sometimes a child can benefit greatly from just sitting in a meeting and listening. One of the things that disturbs me about some big democratic schools is that such a small percentage of kids actually go to the meetings. They can say, “Yes, we’re a democracy and people have the right to go to meetings.” But it seems to me that if a school is so big that only a minority of the kids can get into the meetings, I think the school is too big.

Not that I believe in mandatory meetings, generally speaking. At Shaker Mountain meetings were not mandatory. However, if a particular issue came up about which it was felt that everyone in the school needed to be in on a decision, or to be aware of a particular situation, somebody could propose that the meeting become a “super meeting”; if the proposal passed, everybody who was in the school building needed to come to the meeting until it was voted that it was no longer a super meeting. Usually super meetings would not last too long and would be about some issue having to do with health or safety or something of that sort.

In our early years in Shaker Mountain, in our involvement with the Iroquois, we discovered an alternative to the usual “tyranny of the majority” type of democratic process. What we learned from them was that it was important to honor the minority. We would poll the minority after a vote and if they wished to say something more, they could express why it was that they voted in opposition. Then either they or anybody else in the school community could call for a revote. A revote would mean “with discussion” so it opened the subject up again and it was possible to make a new proposal and drop the original one or put a new proposal up against it. We found that this process was more thorough and that when we made a decision we were usually confident that we would not have to come back and revisit the subject. Only very, very rarely did we ever have to do that.

In my own experiences with communities using consensus instead of majority rule, I found it to be manipulative, and it sometimes prevented minority opinions from being expressed, whereas the minority opinion might become the majority opinion if people were able to say what was on their mind. I think ideally consensus can work well, but I’ve seen the process abused.

On the other hand, in a pure majority rule process, you often do not hear what the minority has in mind. People will say, “They had the chance during the discussion to speak their mind,” but sometimes people just don’t work like that. The vote gets taken, and all of a sudden it comes out that someone had a negative opinion but hadn’t verbalized it.

With our Iroquois system, people who are unhappy with a vote get a chance to say what it is that is bothering them about it, or they can bring up another facet of the situation that hasn’t been thought of. In this way we found that we often made decisions that nobody would have thought of in the first place. This is the great power of the meeting and it’s this interactive process that is “more than the sum of its parts.”

The Iroquois democratic process uses the best aspects of majority rule and of consensus. But in the end, at Shaker Mountain, when the vote was finally taken, it would be okay if a decision were made by 25 votes to 23. If nobody in the 23 felt they needed to say why they voted the way they did, or if nobody felt they needed to call for a revote, then what it really meant was that those 23 were doing what the Quakers call “standing aside.” They could live with the majority’s decision and didn’t feel the need to continue the discussion. But it also meant that the minority didn’t have to pretend that they agreed with everybody. They could even eventually say, “I told you so,” if whatever the majority had decided didn’t work out well.

Our Iroquois process did take longer than the usual democratic meeting. For example, I’m always a little stunned when I go to the Summerhill meetings and see how quickly they make decisions. One of the things they tell me is that if they make a decision that is not the best one, they can then bring it up at a subsequent meeting and reverse it, and this does happen. It’s not all that different, but our process I found was pretty thorough. We spent a lot of time in meetings, but it was my opinion that the meeting process was the most important educational process that happened at the school.

All kinds of real-life situations were brought into it and among other things, students had to develop a good vocabulary to understand what everyone was saying, and they had to develop good logical processes and look, for example, at the potential consequences of certain kinds of actions.
The Lie Behind The Ivy
Is College A Good Investment?
Arnold Greenberg

In this age of accountability, when government mandates for standardized testing are costing school districts across the country millions of dollars to measure how well schools are doing, there is virtually no accountability for colleges. In the past two decades, the cost of a college education has skyrocketed, forcing many parents to get second mortgages on their homes and students to take out huge loans that will take years to pay back. Is it worth it?

The message perpetuated by colleges that the average graduate will earn hundreds of thousands of dollars more over a lifetime than students who do not go to college is a misleading statistic. It’s misleading because if you look at the pool of students who go to college, they are usually brighter, more motivated, have more education-fostering parents than the pool of students who don’t go to college. It’s likely that if those young people who go to college were locked in a closet for four years, they would still earn much more money than the pool who did not go to college.

College should be about getting an education, not necessarily about earning power, but the quality of the education also is questionable. A four-year education at one of the “brand-name” colleges averages $135,000. A state college might be closer to $70,000. The predominant mode of instruction is the lecture—usually to a group of 100 to 200 students in a large lecture hall. Evidence shows that it is the least effective way of learning because people, according to studies, usually remember 10 to 20 percent of what they heard. But college is a business and lectures are the most cost-effective way of offering a course.

The quality of teaching at most colleges is mediocre, at best, because most colleges pressure their teachers to do research and publish articles and books. Many teachers find having to teach a distraction from their research. Graduate assistants do much of the teaching to undergraduates, and if you are fortunate enough to have a distinguished scholar, it is likely they do not put much effort into preparation. The “publish or perish” pressure is still prevalent at most colleges and is a requirement for tenure.

Unless a student plans to go on to graduate school to become a lawyer, doctor, engineer or some other specialized profession, an undergraduate degree does not amount to much. How many students who majored in journalism, anthropology, geology, biology, zoology, mathematics, actually make a living in the field they majored in? How many college graduates are working as waiters and waitresses, carpenters, landscapers and are burdened with huge loans to pay off?

If you asked all the college graduates you know whether they were making a living doing what they majored in, you would find a small percentage who said they were. If students in high school college preparatory classes were not getting accepted to colleges, the high schools would be held accountable. Why aren’t colleges held accountable for the small percentage of college graduates who actually do what they majored in?

The percentage of high school graduates who go to college is significantly higher than it was 30 or 40 years ago, even though the cost is much higher. Students are “programmed” to go to college because they think that’s the “next step.” This social engineering raises complex questions. Could our economy provide jobs for all high school graduates who choose not to go to college? It barely can provide jobs for college graduates who do not go to graduate school.

High schools brag about the percentage of their graduates who get accepted to college, but do not reveal the percentage who do not make it past Thanksgiving. Until recently, there were not many studies of the percentage of freshman in college who actually graduate. Recent reports show that fewer than 50 percent who start actually finish. These young people end up without a degree and years of loans to pay off. Also, of those who do graduate, a high percentage took five or six years rather than four.

If we measure the success of a manufacturer by the percentage of its products made well enough to be sold, shouldn’t we also expect colleges to be accountable in some way? Certainly, if
a manufacturer had a rejection rate of 50 percent, it would be in trouble. For some reason, our universities and colleges are considered “social icons” that can do no wrong. They can charge tuitions seven and eight times the rate of inflation and it’s not questioned.

Colleges have a slick marketing tactic that enables them to charge $30,000 a year. They say they get 20,000 applicants for a freshman class of 1000. It makes the college appear selective and makes acceptance a prestigious honor. What they don’t say is actually accept 8,000 to 10,000 applicants, knowing a good percentage will go to other colleges. Their hope is that of the 10,000 they accept, 1,000 will actually enroll in their college. It creates an image that they are a precious commodity worth the $30,000.

College can provide a good experience for a young person. The opportunity to meet people from all over the country and other cultures is exciting. College can expose young people to ideas, give them social independence, though not financial (usually someone else is paying for it), and can be a stimulating time in their lives.

At the same time, next to buying a home or a car, college is one of the biggest investments of a lifetime. Certainly, one would consult a consumer report before buying a car and would have a house fully inspected prior to buying it, but we seem to be more casual about buying a college education.

College can be a transformational experience, but it can also be disappointing educationally and financially. There is a good chance you will not get a good return on your investment. There are many excellent small colleges that are dedicated to teaching and providing remarkable educational experiences. There are also alternative learning experiences available that can provide a perspective and the time to think about the directions of your lives.

I am not advocating against college. I’m concerned that young people are programmed and pressured to go to college without questioning the value to them. It’s a huge investment and the mystique of many colleges lures students to apply for the wrong reasons. The old saying, “Buyer beware” should be taken seriously when choosing a college.
staff—the kids generally carry out the cleaning willingly and well.
“T don’t like cleaning and you can’t make me!” William proclaims defiantly to Janine, his unlucky boss.

This proud young warrior isn’t about to take orders from any girl. But little does he know that Janine is a no-nonsense 12-year-old who has had plenty of practice dealing with recalcitrant younger siblings at home.

At first it’s all a big joke to William. Flashing the same wide grin that at other times is irresistibly charming, he gets Janine to chase him around one of the unwiped tables a few times. Not the least bit amused, she halts and says to him, “Listen, William, everybody has to help clean up here. So come on; it’ll just take a few minutes if you quit messing around and get busy.”

“No! I won’t do it!”

When Janine closes in on William, he suddenly spits at her. “If you do that again, I’ll have to sit on you,” she warns.

William laughs and manages to get off one last goober before he finds out that Janine meant exactly what she said. Careful not to hurt him, Janine grabs William by both shoulders and lowers him to the floor. Then she glares down at him and says, “I’ll let you up when you stop spitting at me and promise to do your job.”

William keeps a smirking game face on for an impressively long time. Clearly, he’s no stranger to passive resistance.

Solely in the interest of seeing the cleanup get done sooner rather than later, I say to Janine, “Well, it looks like you may have to sit on him all afternoon. But don’t worry, if you get hungry or thirsty, I’ll bring you a little snack whenever you need one.”

For dramatic effect, and with nods and winks between us that William fails to notice, Janine and I discuss her favorite junk foods. This does the trick. William’s stubborn posture quickly crumbles, and he begins to thrash and yell with raging indignation. When the tantrum reaches its crescendo, William vomits, which immediately brings him back to himself. Like a kind big sister, Janine helps him clean himself up, and when she asks him again if he will do his job, he nods and heads straight for the bucket and sponge so that he can wipe off the table the rest of the crew has left for him.

Twenty minutes later I see William, for the first time, happily playing outside with a group of kids his own age.

Some may question my allowing Janine to deal with William in such an abrupt, physical way. Had I any sense that William was being harmed, either physically or psychologically, I would have intervened immediately. But it was evident that Janine was going only as far as she needed to limit effectively William’s blatant disrespect for her. It was only after every attempt at reason had failed that she spoke to William in a language every 6-year-old can understand, careful not to hurt him in the process. William, for his part, knew he was wrong and was relieved to be set straight so firmly and compassionately, as was evidenced by his genuinely happy demeanor immediately following the incident. I should note that William and Janine later became friends and that he did his job more or less faithfully every week.

I should also note that children sitting on each other, a technique Free School founder Mary Leue came up with as a way for children to set limits without anyone getting hurt, is not an everyday occurrence. It is a technique of last resort employed only with inordinately willful children who are in the habit of overstepping reasonable bounds, and it is an effective alternative to the adult intervention to which such children quickly grow immune.

The significance of William and Janine’s exchange is that William didn’t butt heads with a rule or a policy but rather with another person—whose response was not to punish or in some way label him. He came around so quickly, I suspect, because the person establishing limits was another child, not an adult authority figure.

William’s confrontation with Janine brings us to the critical issue of “structure.” Sadly, the conventional classroom is so crushingly saddled with standards-driven curricula that it’s become a place of confinement, where learning tasks are broken down into repetitive bits devoid of excitement or meaning and where there is little room for individual differences. In such a setting, an energetic, highly intelligent, and capable child like William was bouncing off the walls from understimulation. To him, the structure of his previous school was akin to a large cage—the teacher related to him as though he were a wild animal whose impulses had to be guarded against and controlled.

Meanwhile, a common misconception about our school is that we are unstructured. What a great many uninformed observers don’t realize is that the reason they can’t perceive our structure is because they are looking in the wrong places. When they don’t see the desks, textbooks, and all the other accouterments of structure to which our society is accustomed, they make the false, but easily understood, assumption that we have no structure.

“After you moved out Mom digitally removed you from all the old photographs.”
Nothing could be further from the truth. The Free School has a very definite structure; it’s just that we try to keep it fluid and individualized so that we can meet the unique needs of every child. For instance, instead of a single standardized curriculum, we have 50 “curricula,” each one based on the student’s own interests and passions as well as his or her own rhythm and pace. At the same time, we try to let individual situations and individual children dictate the necessary limits and boundaries rather than relying on a set of predetermined rules and regulations.

Freedom, a cornerstone of our structure, means being able to chart your own course and negotiate your own terms. It does not mean getting to do whatever you want whenever you feel like it. That, as A.S. Neill—who founded a freedom-based residential school in England in the 1920s known as Summerhill—was careful to emphasize, is called license. Freedom always includes being held accountable for the effects of your actions on those around you.

The structure of the Free School, more than anything else, is a matrix of relationships—student with teacher, student with student, teacher with teacher. A great deal of the learning that takes place does so within those relationships. And many of the most important lessons end up occurring spontaneously, as in the case of William, and not according to a scripted lesson plan.

The irony of the structure of the conventional classroom is that all too often, it causes the very problem it was designed to prevent. When disorder is viewed as an enemy that must be fought off by structuring every moment of every day, it’s inevitable that spirited children will fight back. Some do so overtly, as William did in kindergarten, by mouthing off and by other forms of defiance. Others will engage in passive resistance by not paying attention, forgetting what they’ve been taught, and constantly losing their things.

In either case, the children who either can’t or won’t conform to classroom routine become the enemy, too, and the conventional classroom’s response is increasingly resolute. If William were still in his old school, or in one similar, he would currently be on Ritalin and quite possibly other bio-psychiatric drugs—whatever it would take to squelch pharmaceutically his boundless curiosity, his ardently self-centered point of view, and his creative ability to avoid anything he doesn’t think he should have to do. The net effect of these so-called medications, an Orwellian term if ever there was one in this context, would be to internalize that school’s structure. William would find himself in a chemical straitjacket, one from which even an artful dodger like him could not escape.
THE HIBERNATOR

Captain Bear was a Captain of Industry, but he wasn’t completely happy. He was the famous and important president of a huge company, called Bear Necessities, that made everything from toothpaste to televisions. One chilly autumn day, during a board meeting, Captain Bear looked out at the leaves falling off the trees and he suddenly felt very sleepy. Something wasn’t quite right.

When Captain Bear got home he told Mrs. Bear that he was feeling tired. “Maybe we should go away for a couple of weeks,” said Mrs. Bear. “We could go to a tropical island and rest up on a beach.”

“I was thinking,” said Captain Bear, “that I’d like to stay home and hibernate this winter.”

“Bears don’t hibernate anymore, Captain,” said Mrs. Bear. “And I certainly don’t like the idea of you lying around the house sleeping all winter!”

The next day Captain Bear went to see his company doctor. “Hibernation?” said Dr. Cat, “I suppose it would be possible for a Bear to hibernate these days. At least I don’t see why not, though it is many years since I heard of a Bear sleeping through the winter. However, if you want me to prescribe a season of hibernation I will.”

That night Captain Bear said to Mrs. Bear, “I’m thinking of spending the winter hibernating at the Metro Hotel.”

Mrs. Bear looked alarmed. “Who will look after your company? Who will run Bear Necessities?”

“I thought maybe you could look in on them now and again,” said Captain Bear. “You can attend my meetings.”

When the day came for Captain Bear to move into the Hotel Metro there was a lot of media interest. Reporters from the newspapers and the television stations came to watch him check in. Everyone was surprised that such an important Bear planned to spend the winter hibernating.

Captain Bear was very pleased with his room at the Metro. He had asked the owner of the hotel to let the Metro’s headwaiter, Joe Penguin, look after him. He’d also asked for a small refrigerator to be put in his room, in case he didn’t feel like ringing for room service.

Joe helped Captain Bear unpack and he closed the big velvet curtains for him so the room was dark. Then he left him alone.

Captain Bear put on his pajamas. Joe Penguin had left a half bottle of champagne and some smoked salmon on a tray and Captain Bear had a bite to eat. Then he lay down. Now that he had organized his hibernation he wasn’t very tired and he lay there for a long time. Finally, late that night, he turned on the radio and listened to some music. When the news came on he turned the radio off. “I don’t want to hear any news this winter,” he said to himself. Eventually he fell asleep.

Captain Bear slept for only a week and then woke up. “This hibernating business is not so easy,” he thought. “I figured I’d sleep until spring!”

After going to the bathroom he called room service and asked if Joe Penguin could bring him up some mackerel pate and a stick of French bread. After having a bite to eat he listened to some nice music on the radio. “The announcer is a bit of an idiot but I like the music,” he said to himself. Then he fell into a deep sleep.

A week later Captain Bear woke up again. “I’m certainly having trouble hibernating properly,” he moaned. He ate some crackers and honey and drank a cold beer from the fridge and looked out his window into the night. He could see that all the big shops had their Christmas decorations lit up. “Pretty,” he said. Then he went back to bed and they were playing some old rock and roll on the radio. “I remember that song!” he said to himself. “I just wish the announcer wouldn’t talk such drivel.” And he fell asleep.

Two weeks later he woke up again and lay in his bed looking up at the ceiling in the dark, wondering if Christmas had passed. He turned on the radio and listened to some late night music but he wasn’t feeling sleepy. He went to the bathroom and when he came back into his room he heard a song that he had always liked playing on the radio. He started swaying his hips to the music and was surprised to find himself dancing around the room.
Suddenly he felt happier than he had felt in years. Everything seemed wonderful! He went back to bed and went straight to sleep.

When Captain Bear woke up it was springtime. He went down and thanked Joe Penguin and the owner of the hotel and he paid his bill. The television cameras came to photograph him leaving the hotel and reporters asked him what it was like for such a famous Bear to hibernate. “It was restful,” he told them, “I feel very refreshed.”

When he got home he asked his wife how things were going at Bear Necessities. “I’ve been going to meetings every day,” said Mrs. Bear. “All I ever think about are mergers and acquisitions.”

“I knew you’d do a good job,” said Captain Bear. “If you don’t mind, I’d like you to continue looking after things. I’ve decided I want to do something new.”

The next morning he went in and asked one of the vice-presidents, “Do we own any radio stations?”

“Yes,” said the vice-president, “we own several.”

“Good,” said Captain Bear. “I want to visit the one I listened to while I was hibernating.”

Captain Bear went downtown to talk to the manager of the radio station. “I would like to work here,” he said, “and I want your late night announcer to be my assistant.”

That night, at midnight, listeners were surprised to hear a new announcer on the radio. “Hello,” said the new voice, “This is Captain Bear, the Hibernator, and I’ll be here with you until morning, helping you stay up or go to sleep. Whichever you wish.” And all night whenever one of his favorite songs came on Captain Bear would get up and dance around the studio. He was now a completely happy bear.

Write to Albert with your own story:
albertlamb@bigfoot.com

Books etc.

**Teen Bill of Responsibilities**, by Steven Smoke: I’m a teenager and I’m reading this book as a teenager. I liked the rights and responsibilities, and I thought it was interesting to read. They talked about Myself, My Life, My Beliefs, My Body, My Family, My Friends, My School, and My Neighborhood, Community and Country. People do have the right to believe they have the only true religion, for example, but I don’t. Most of the kids that I know would know these rights, but maybe some kids wouldn’t know them. I think it would be a good book to read, even if you know your rights. By A. C.

**No Homework and Recess All Day** is one of the best accounts of the alternative school movement that I’ve ever read! Jerry Mintz has been an integral part of educational reform in America for decades and shares in a warm and inviting way his stories of contacts with key thinkers, pioneering schools, and active and curious kids in a way that makes me wonder how there could be so much widespread stupidity in American education today with so many beacons of hope as evidenced in his wonderful book. *Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D. (Author of In Their Own Way, and The Myth of the A.D.D. Child)* Available now at: www.educationrevolution.org

**Homeschooling and the Voyage of Self-Discovery A Journey of Original Seeking** by David H. Albert www.commoncouragepress.com Not a memoir, not a how-to, not a homeschooling curriculum, but a call to nurture and celebrate the magical uniqueness of every child. By turns gentle and passionate, practical and visionary, Homeschooling and the Voyage of Self-Discovery confronts head-on the anxieties parents may have in setting forth on what can become a life-transforming journey. “Encourages and empowers the reader to consider life-changing ideas, to
step away from the confines of group-think, herd mentalities, and other schoolish notions ingrained from a tender age. One should be prepared to have familiar and comfortable views and assumptions challenged, poked, and dissected, and to have a few sacred cows neatly skewered. I end up reading his writings with a satisfied smile, ready to roll up my sleeves and get to work. What more could one ask of an author?” Helen Hegener, Editor and Publisher, Home Education Magazine. Book is available online at: www.educationrevolution.org

Teaching the Restless: One School’s Remarkable No-Ritalin Approach to Helping Children Learn and Succeed by Chris Mercogliano Teaching the Restless is a book with a message -Children should not be drugged into submission. From the perspective of a highly experienced teacher, Teaching tells the stories of nine children (six boys, three girls) that were either labeled and drugged in their previous school or would have been had they not encountered the Free School. The Free School, the school at which these stories take place, has a strict policy against the labeling and drugging of children. Through love, community, touch, validation of the child as a unique person, and the basic understanding that each child lives/learns at their own distinct pace, Mercogliano has found that even the most trying child seems to find success and solace at this freedom-based inner-city school. Teaching is a book that will leave you questioning the archaic practices of the “one size fits all” approach to education, which has helped to incite the prescribing and systematic drugging of America’s children through biopsychiatric medications. If there were to be a list of prerequisites to parenthood, I would not only nominate this book, but give it my full endorsement. No parent or educator should be without. Isaac R. Graves 256 pages / Hardcover / Available now at: www.educationrevolution.org

In Bill Ayers’ On the Side of the Child; Summerhill Revisited (Teachers College Press, 2003), Ayers makes a strong case for greater freedom for students and teachers in our schools, enlightens our conception of what education really is and offering scathing criticism of some recently enacted school policies, which amount to nothing more than social control. Ayers, has this to say on the subject of zero tolerance: “The cultural policy of zero tolerance is a knife in the heart of education. Education extends opportunities and makes connections. Education opens minds and opens doors. Education is relational—its tone, intimate: its basic gesture, embrace: its discourse, dialogue. Education demands assent, participation and reexamination.” And this: “Education lives an excruciating paradox precisely because of its association with and location in schools.”

The book is broken out into two basic components: the first half is Ayers’ “Summerhill Revisited: The Challenge of Freedom,” and the second half are selections reprinted from the original Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing.” It is always a positive experience for parents, educators and others interested in the future of our children to read and reflect again on Neill’s teachings and relate them to our present state of affairs. Ayers accomplishes this by juxtaposing these teachings with other great writers and thinkers and extracts new lessons for present leaders to follow, with a particular emphasis on how education has failed children and divided the country by class and race. Take this one excerpt that Ayers includes of Annie Stein’s from 1971, speaking of the educational “strategies of failure:”

‘This is a massive accomplishment...It took the effort of...teachers, administrators, scholars, and social scientists, and the expenditures of billions to achieve. Alone, however, the “professional”
educators could not have done it. They needed the active support of all the forces of business, real estate interests, trade unions, willing politicians, city officials, the police, and the courts…Perhaps an even greater achievement of the schools has been their ability to place the responsibility for this extraordinary record of failure upon the children themselves, their families, and their communities. Social scientists engage in learned disputes as to whether it is heredity or environment that makes the child of poverty an inferior form of humankind—but the assumption of his inferiority is not disputed, except by his parents and by the child himself.”

The book is filled with such gems from a variety of sources, including insightful and powerful observations and analyses of twentieth-century writers and intellectuals such as Doris Lessing, Kenzoburo Oe, W.E.B. Dubois, Jonathon Kozol, Hannah Arendt, and James Baldwin. This is a valuable addition to the rapidly growing canon dedicated to more freedom and a greater child-centered approach in education.

As you may have heard, we put so much into the IDEC that we almost ran completely out of funds in its aftermath. But the Foundation for Educational Renewal offered us a $7000 matching fund, which we matched with $8000 in donations from 75 people. This got us through the rest of 2003. Jerry

Our thanks to the following people for helping us:


Kathleen Clinesmith, lower school director of the Calhoun School, who set up Yaacov Hecht’s NY lecture series. Page 10
Come & Experience the Revolution that is . . .

Alternative Education

“Setting the Agenda for the Education Revolution”
AERO’s 15th Anniversary Conference & Celebration

Jerry Mintz
Author, No Homework & Recess All Day

Chris Mercogliano
Author, Teaching the Restless

June 25-27, 2004  I  Russell Sage College  I  Troy, NY

www.EducationRevolution.org