

The Magazine of Alternative Education

# Education Revolution

I s s u e   N u m b e r   F o r t y

Winter/Spring 2005

\$4.95 USA/



## Neill and Summerhill

also: Idec in  
India



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# Education Revolution

## The Magazine of Alternative Education

Fall 2004 - Issue Number Thirty Nine - [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org)

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

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

## Education Revolution

### The Magazine of Alternative Education

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**E-MAIL:  
IDEC IN  
INDIA**

Subject: more from michelle  
From: "michelle weiner"  
Date: Tue, 7 Dec 2004 05:11:33

Today was a work day, which means I went to workshops all day. Yet, the people who run the workshops and participate in them are so amazing and the material so engrossing that it was more like play than work.

This morning I went to Jinan's workshop about supporting children's natural exploration of the environment through their senses. He showed slides of children exploring found objects and making play things of them. This was very familiar to me and I was thinking of Jamie, Zak, Robin and Daniel using the rainwater in the gutter to make little sail boats, and all the little mud villages in the backyard made by Jamie, Zak and Stan.

Also he taught a great lesson on color using leaves they collected and then arranged according to color value and then they replicated the leaf colors with paint. Then they made pictures with leaves and paint. Hard to describe, but they were simply gorgeous.

I went to a presentation of a group from S. Korea who network with small alternative schools in Seoul... mostly serving kids who refuse to go to school or have dropped out because of school failure. They were so inspiring and I was thinking maybe I should look in to getting something going like that because there are so many kids who could use support in their learning process and the schools just aren't meeting their needs. This network gets public funding because the school system has acknowledged that they don't have an answer for this problem. I don't know if our greedy school system is ready to say they could give up and fork over any of the money they hoard and misappropriate. But it is something I might want to explore.

At lunch I sat with Ravi, from Nandi Foundation, and we made a plan to suggest at the morning meeting that all participants with DVDs arrange to make copies available.

In the afternoon I went to a workshop called WALK OUT WALK ON which aimed to open people up to the possibilities in life so that they don't see themselves as drop outs or losers, but as people with lots of possibilities and choices, who can self-educate and create their own unique path. The workshop leaders are Indians and their work is a response to an extremely pressureful educational system and fear of failure because of the high rate of unemployment.

Well, it would be nice to hear from you. Of course, I am in the email habit because of all the planning and support required for this trip. Maybe the rest of you aren't email junkies like I am.

bye for now.

Michelle

*Thanks to:  
Michelle Weiner Woolner  
Michmobile2000@yahoo.com  
Play Mountain Place  
Mentor Teacher*

*Welcome to the Education Revolution!*

*In this issue we have a short biography of Neill and his beloved Summerhill which I have been angling to get for you for the last couple of years. Enjoy.*

*Also you can catch up on the IDEC in India, in case you couldn't get a ticket. (page 5). On this page you can get the flavor of the event in Michel Weiner's e-mail home.*

albertlamb@bigfoot.com

*Albert*



## Testing time?

Check out **The Case Against Education** on page 32



## A Word from Jerry

A lot of exciting things are happening at AERO, but we still need all the support we can get from you, our readers, to be effective. You will read about the amazing IDEC in India and our visit to the Butterflies program in Delhi and the video documentary we have made of that visit. Now we are hard at work on the AERO Conference 2005, "A Spectrum of Alternatives." John Gatto, Alfie Kohn, Matt Hern, Tim Seldin of the Montessori Foundation, and Ann Cook of the Urban Academy in NYC will be keynoters. But those of you who have been to our conferences know there is much more to it than that. Please help us spread the word. It is only three months away. Hopefully I'll see you there!



# Looking for News

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with *Albert Lamb*

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## Funding Shell Game

A lot of traditional liberals liked the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) package of laws. At last the federal government was making a commitment to improving primary education, and promising a substantial increase in funding for education. Some people bought into the idea of High Stakes Testing because at least the federal government was going to increase its aid to America's cash-strapped schools.

With the latest proposed US budget that particular hope has evaporated. A third of the budget cuts in this new budget are in education. The NCLB has never actually been fully funded but the new budget will force a cut in real terms. Robert Gordon is worried about 'flat-funding', holding future spending to current levels:

(Bush's) No Child Left Behind request now falls \$12 billion short, fully one-third of the authorization level. Bush has flat-funded the charter schools that his own administration champions. He has flat-funded the afterschool and preschool programs that troubled kids need. And he has eliminated promising reforms like breaking up big, weak schools. At the very moment when reform's demands have climbed – when more schools must allow students to transfer, offer tutoring, or prepare to shut down – the gap between funding envisioned and funding offered for reform has widened into a chasm. *Robert Gordon "Failing Prospects" The American Prospect, Inc.*

The new budget looks kind of like the old shell game. Which shell is hiding the education money? It definitely looks like the middle one, but it's hard to be sure. Maybe it's the one over there that seems to be empty. Keep your eyes on the shells as they are whisked around the table.

Appearances seem to imply that money is leaving the early years and moving over to the high schools. High Stakes Testing in reading and math is now going to include the final two years of high school. Remedial reading for older kids will also get new funding. There's even a \$500 million fund to reward teachers who have students who do very well.

But, under another shell, the entire budget for high school vocational education, \$1.2 billion, is to be eliminated. In total, \$2 billion of popular high school programs are on the way out.

One more set of shells is on the education table: The whole set-up for funding college students is about to change. Who will benefit and who will lose out? Who knows? There is to be a slight increase in the Pell Grants, where the maximum grant will rise by \$100 per student, per year, (costing the government \$18 billion). But the largest single cut will be the elimination of the \$6 billion Perkins loan program.

So where do we stand? At the very least American students, schools and colleges are going to have to be shunted through another massive set of changes in how they do business, facing many substantial losses in funding. But maybe that is part of the purpose of the game. No sooner did the NCLB Act get schools scrambling to learn the new rules than the government, through altering the funding, changes the game. And maybe this was the real idea behind the whole game from the very beginning. Destabilize public education to the point where big business has to step in and take over.

Away from Education there is another, larger, funding table with another, bigger, shell game. This current budget includes substantial increases in spending on the military, the Department of Homeland Security and the intelligence and diplomatic services. Under one shell an increase of \$19 billion for the pentagon, almost the same as all the cuts from social programs. And the Energy Department will get an extra \$20 billion for nuclear weapons programs.

But what's this? Could this be some sort of invisible shell? The whole Pentagon budget, not including wars, is \$419 billion but Bush's budget apparently makes no appropriations for America's continuing involvement in Afghanistan or Iraq – or for the proposed Social Security privatization plan. In fact, in the opinion of the House Democratic leader:

"The president's budget is a hoax on the American people. The two issues that dominated the president's State of the Union address—Iraq and Social Security—are nowhere to be found in this budget." *Nancy Pelosi*

Will this administration get away with it? Will these changes in educational provision become law? Maybe. But this shell game is being played with a US Congress who is used to getting to make the spending decisions. They may feel that the game is just a kind of smokescreen for an administration that wants to keep all the power in its own hands. And the general public may not like seeing many popular programs slashed.

The ranking Democrat on the Senate education committee, Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, called for Congress to reject the education budget. "The administration is going to find out that people believe we need to invest in our children," he said. *The Associated Press*. February 7, 2005

## Secretary of NCLB

While looking at the big picture we might like to look at a patriotic little picture of the attractive new US Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings (see photo). In Bush's first term she was one of his advisors on domestic issues. Back when George W. Bush was Governor of Texas Margaret Spellings



was his senior advisor on education, where she helped him put together his school assessment and accountability program, the precursor to NCLB. Before that she was associate executive director of the Texas Association of School Boards.

Now that she is at the top table, she is going to have to deal with a variety of states rights issues and some very angry public school people:

**Educators Expect Flood of Lawsuits:** The federal No Child Left Behind Act threatens costly penalties for schools deemed failing to meet academic standards. In response, many educators have a threat of their own: A flood of lawsuits aimed at avoiding the sanctions. CNN <http://www.cnn.com/>

In the meantime dozens of states are trying to change the rules so that they can lower their standards before they get their schools closed or turned into charters:

**Lower Standards Aid School Progress in Pennsylvania:** More than twice as many schools would not have made what the state considers "adequate yearly progress" toward goals set under the federal No Child Left Behind Act if the rules had not been changed, *reports Dan Hardy*. The changes allowed schools with lower graduation rates, lower standardized test scores, or lower attendance than in previous years to win passing marks. Pennsylvania was among dozens of states allowed by the U.S. Department of Education to change the standards. Philadelphia Enquirer

It is not just with schools that standards are going down:

Since passage of Mr. Bush's signature education policy, student performance leveled-off or fell in 11 of the 15 states participating in the study, according to researchers at Stanford University and the University of California. Tracking achievement trends is proving difficult as state education officials switch to new tests and alter definitions of student "proficiency" to conform to new federal rules. But the university team compiled test results for the biggest states which have successfully tracked reading achievement over several years. These new findings will likely fuel debate over whether Mr. Bush's more aggressive regulation of local schools, along with new funding, is sparking gains in teacher effectiveness and student performance. The Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) at Arizona State University. Web: <http://edpolicylab.org>

Let the debate be sparked!

## IDEC in India

by Jerry Mintz

In 1993 I was invited to do a presentation at a large multicultural education conference in Israel. After the conference Yacov Hecht, founder of the Democratic School of Hadera, invited about a dozen of us who were involved in democratic education to come to his school for a meeting. We didn't know it at the time, but that was the beginning of the International Democratic Education Conference.

The next year David Gribble, a founder of the Sands School in England, invited a small group to his school to follow up on the Hadera meeting. I missed that one. For the next year or two David kept people in touch via a small newsletter.

The next year a group from Austria hosted the meeting in Vienna in a building called the Wuk. I made it to that one and have been to all the subsequent gatherings. At that point it was still called the Hadera Conference.

In 1997 things were revolutionized by two students from the Sands School, who organized the conference there. They were 16 and 17-year-old girls. They decided that the meeting should be in the summer, and much longer, long enough that the group could become a community. They used a system similar to Open Space Technology, in which workshops and activities are co-created at the conference itself. And they renamed the gathering the IDEC, International Democratic Education Conference.

Since the IDEC wasn't and still isn't an organization unto itself, we at AERO created a listserve so that IDEC attendees could communicate with each other during the year and plan subsequent conferences. At present we have over 225 subscribers to the listserve. (Let us know if you want to be subscribed to it. *JM*)

Subsequent IDECs have been in Israel, Ukraine, England at Summerhill, Japan, and New Zealand. In 2003, AERO and Albany Free School hosted the IDEC in the USA for the first time. 500 people attended from 25 states and 25 countries. \$60,000 was raised so that third world students and staff members could attend.



Amukta Mahapatra

This year the conference was hosted in Bhubaneshwar, India. It was organized by Amukta Mahapatra, who had attended IDECs in Japan, New Zealand and the USA. Among other things, in India she had worked with street children and had founded a Montessori school.

Amukta seemed to be everywhere, and always with a smile. She was registering people, introducing speakers, and back in the office with her dedicated staff members preparing for the next day late into the night.



*Youth meeting at the IDEC*

We had a beautiful opening ceremony with a group of dancer/acrobats blowing conch shells throughout their performance. The Minister of Education for the state of Assam was there as well as the great-grandson of Mahatma Gandhi; this is Arun Gandhi's son, Tushar. He made an irreverent crack that it was good that the Minister of Education was there because he's the one that makes sure that people take all these terrible tests and it's good he can learn something about democratic education! The guy made quite a face. When the Minister made his speech, he read it haltingly. Maybe his English wasn't that good. The next day Tushar again poked fun at "Ministers of Education who read speeches their secretary wrote for them." His talk was about what it was like to grow up a Gandhi, the burden of high expectations, etc. He now has a computer database processing company.

One of the main themes of this IDEC was non-formal education. This was embodied by representatives of the Concerned for Working Children, and Manish Jaine's Shikshantar group with its catch phrase, "Walking out and

walking on." ([www.swaraj.org/shikshantar](http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar)) The CWC has a program with over 20,000 working children in India, some of whom were presenters at the conference. The children made it clear that they want to be able to work, but in good conditions, and they also wanted to be able to study academically. ([www.workingchild.org](http://www.workingchild.org))

In his keynote speech Yacov Hecht paused to recollect the short history of the IDEC. "Who could believe," he said, "that in 2005 we now have an IDEC in India!" I thought that one of his most interesting points was that both Montessori and Steiner started teacher training programs within a short time of starting their work. He feels we need to do the same with democratic education, and, in fact, in Israel he has set up college level programs to prepare people to teach in democratic schools.

When I first visited the Democratic School of Hadera at that meeting in 1993 it had 300 students and an incredible 3000 on the waiting list. Subsequently Hecht had left Hadera to found the Institute for Democratic Education and has now helped to start 25 more democratic schools in Israel, and is now travelling to other countries to help them do the same. He spoke in a very big, beautiful, open sided bamboo-framed tent that was our main meeting place. The site was hosted by the Silicone Institute. Half of us stayed in its dorm rooms, and half in host houses and hostels off campus, about 300 people in all, from 19 countries.

The workshops were in the tent and in classrooms. There was an outdoor area for teaching crafts such as pottery and weaving. A professional Indian dance troupe not only performed but gave dance workshops throughout the week.

They even had two ping-pong tables for me to teach on in a fourth floor gym area. I taught about 35 children and adults from such places as Korea, Japan, Nepal, England, and India. I love teaching table tennis in such situations: It is an activity that goes beyond language, and is not academically

threatening.

We had helped fund the group of 13 who came from the Sri Aurobindu Ashram/orphanage in Nepal, led by Ramchandra. They had travelled for a day by bus to get out of Nepal, and four days by train to get to the conference. Most of them had never seen a train or the sea before. Later in the conference they put on a performance of Nepalese music and dance for the whole conference.

One of my assignments was to organize and work with the students in a democratic process. It turned out that we met almost every morning of the conference, resolving problems, finding resources and organizing workshops that were student led. One very popular one was organized by Luke Flegg, a recent graduate of Sands School in England. It was about comparative relationships between staff members and students at different alternative schools. Also out of the student group came the creation of a daily newspaper, written by students and distributed to attendees each morning with schedules, pictures and commentary.



In the student meetings the students from Abacus Montessori and Naama Shaale School said that they wanted to start the process of democratizing their schools. It turned out that the administrators were also very interested in this. So I did a demonstration of the democratic process with each group toward the end of the conference. They were very excited about the results and what came out of the process. For example, when the Abacus Principal and other administrators made it clear they wanted this process to go forward, the *students* said that it would be a difficult process, involving the education of the parents and other teachers. Subsequently the director of Naama Shaale said that their school had established an all-school democratic meeting, and had even demonstrated it to other interested schools at a Montessori conference.

Before the conference I had received a communication from Derek Sheppard of Booroobin School in Australia. They are in a bitter fight for recognition and survival, having been attacked by their local education authority for not teaching the national curriculum. Booroobin is based on Sudbury Valley School.

At their request, the IDEC discussed the situation and passed a resolution in support of Booroobin. In addition, they set up a special fund, to be administrated by AERO to support threatened alternative schools. Funds from an auction and craft sales by Abacus Montessori were contributed to start the fund. Contributions can be made through the AERO website. The IDEC meeting also passed a resolution proposed by Yacov about how future IDEC sites would be selected.

The conference was almost overwhelming. After the conference people went in various directions. I went back to visit the Butterflies program in Delhi. Many flew home. Some others chose to travel in India. The Nepalese group, seven teachers and six children, went to visit their spiritual home, the Sri Aurobindu Ashram in Pondicherry, by the sea. Every day the children joyfully went swimming in the ocean. On December 26, on the last day before boarding the train to return to Nepal, they decided to go to the zoo instead of swimming. On that day 100 people were killed by the Tsunami on the beach where they would have been. Amazingly, after a 12-hour wait, their train did leave for Nepal. It took them five days to get to Nepal. It then took them several more days of evading the Maoist rebels in Nepal to get home to the orphanage.



*Luke Flegg's workshop at the IDEC*

# Booroobin

By Derek Sheppard



The Booroobin Sudbury School - A Centre of Learning was a community based independent school established by founders who included young people, their parents, teachers and friends.

The school was founded according to education needs expressed by people in a small rural community in Australia. An Educational Needs Analysis was undertaken to establish what people wanted from education. It was a ground up approach, not top down. No one person had "the vision" that was comprehensive.

The first meeting was in late 1993, and a search began to find a model of education that fitted the democratic ideals and practical outcomes sought by the group. Books, videos, literature, brochures, and first hand information were assembled, disseminated and reviewed about different models of education including Montessori, Steiner, Summerhill, various alternative schools and the Sudbury Valley School. It became overwhelmingly clear that Sudbury Valley School most closely, and almost precisely, reflected the needs and wishes of the people.

Two years of hard, determined work, making decisions by consensus, resulted in the opening of our school on February 7, 1996. By the time the school opened a number of public meetings were held and the right land was found and purchased. An application with long term land use plans was lodged with local government (including school buildings, facilities and accommodation, organic farming and reforestation to create a village like atmosphere). The first staff (a mix of parents, teachers and others) were agreed; applications together with financial and enrolment projections provided to Queensland State and Australian Federal governments, and approvals received.

Democratic values of freedom, responsibility and justice permeate all the processes and practices in Booroobin. Young people have rights equal to those of adults and they manage the justice system. Young people have the majority of the votes. Play is regarded as central to learning.

Qualified staff are elected with no tenure and long probationary periods, subject to specific Terms and

Conditions of Employment, to support students in preparing themselves for life and to keep the business of Booroobin running smoothly. Everyone is subject to the same rules. Freedom enables free thinking, individual effort and co-operation to achieve joint objectives.

It is important to understand that the school has always seen itself in the context of a custodian of the land upon which we are located. The land provides an ideal natural environment to enable self-directed learning by people of all ages. It consists of 40 acres of land high in the hills of the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast in south eastern Queensland. Although it has no ground water, it has volcanic soils, ideal growing conditions, trees of up to 250 years old, a farmhouse, cow milking bales, an old carport and a tool shed. None of these are large. The aim is sustainability. Long term plans were devised and agreed by students, staff and parents in 1997.

Voluntary effort, and that includes the staff (who decided in April 1998 not to take wages), has resulted in the almost complete rebuilding of the house for use by the school. Planting of fruit and indigenous trees, digging the vegetable gardens, and erecting fencing to contain a small dairy herd have been undertaken by hand and with low impact tools and equipment.

In terms of its planned operation as a school, The Booroobin Sudbury School has been successful. Students *do* pursue their interests with support, but they do this mostly by and for themselves.

There has never been lots of money to spend. The school was and is, (although operating under a new name) still achieving what it set out to do – to provide a supportive, natural, democratic environment in which young people can prepare themselves for life as effective adults. It has always been a small school with no more than 26 students between the ages of 4 and 19. We would like more students but have never sought growth over the quality of the relationships and the culture of respect.

Up to 2003, all long term students (those who have attended for three or more years) as graduates have either followed their interests developed at Booroobin into further education or have created their own self-employment or found employment. None rely on government financial support. Every one of these past students follow different interests, from fine art, computer graphics, web site development, farming, ceramics, motor vehicles, to hospitality but all remain in contact with each other and Booroobin and contribute to the human and social capital of the world.

In Australia, the state governments must approve non-state schools. Almost all non-state schools receive recurrent funding from both the state government and the federal government.

All through its relatively short life of eight years as a school, the Queensland state government undertook continuous inspections and assessments that became intolerable intrusions into the day-to-day operation of the school. State intrusion has



resulted in the school's campus being sold twice and repurchased once by the school. Inspections and assessments of Booroobin were undertaken in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001. The Booroobin Sudbury Democratic Centre of Learning now rents its campus from friendly owners. We are happy to say that the father of one of the owners was one of the first students of A.S. Neill at

Summerhill and the other owner, his wife, has been a Montessori teacher. Booroobin intends to repurchase the campus at some time in the future when it can raise the funds.

In April 2003, using new legislation, and based on a complaint, the Queensland government's Non-State Schools Accreditation Board launched its latest assessment of Booroobin. Two weeks notice was given. The assessors were present on campus for four hours and were given complete and free access to the facilities, students and staff and records. Booroobin had previously reviewed the new legislation and found it to be ignorant of internationally agreed human rights legislation, highly prescriptive in terms of curricula requirements and very controlling.

A Freedom of Information application was made to find out the details of the complaint. Such searches take at least 45 days. We finally learnt that the complaint was from the non-custodial, not locally resident father of a happily enrolled student (and now a graduate) whose mother (the complainant's former partner) was and is an elected staff of the school.

A Show Cause Notice was issued following a decision by the board which required the School to show cause in writing why its accreditation should not be cancelled for stated reasons. Those reasons revolved around three issues:

- (1) Teachers were not programming and directing students in an age and developmentally appropriate manner according to the Queensland State Curriculum.
- (2) We did not arrange for the "ascertainment" of students who may have disabilities. (That is arranging for a student to be taken to an 'expert' to ascertain if they have a disability.)
- (3) The written policies, or Rules of the School, did not state in writing that students should report any inappropriate interference to two nominated staff.

Booroobin regarded this as yet another attack. The whole approach by the board was heavy handed, autocratic, negative and lacked respect for the school and anyone associated with it. Booroobin was never invited to have input into the choice of assessors or their qualifications or knowledge of democratic Schools. We wondered at the time if the outcome was predetermined.

A submission comprising some 300 pages from the school, its five staff and all its parents, comprising information on the basis of the school's philosophy, including international human rights conventions supporting Booroobin's practices, and evidence of learning at the school was hand delivered to the board, on time.



The board decided to cancel the school's accreditation. The only appeal under the legislation was to the Queensland Minister for Education. Booroobin declared it would appeal. The appeal and further documentation was lodged, also on time.

After a long delay, the Minister wrote and advised of her decision to convene an independent panel to review documents and the decisions of the board, to assist in her arriving at a decision. We were invited to submit any further documents. We did submit further documents and we provided the requested information.

The Minister agreed with the board and cancelled the school's accreditation.

We were very appreciative of the resolution passed by IDEC 2003. It was wonderful to see the names and signatures of so many of the people who we know by reputation, or whose names we had read in e-mails, whom we have great respect for because of their pioneering work and their courage. The petition was hand delivered to the Queensland (State) Minister for Education at Parliament House in Brisbane by students from the age of five-years, with staff, parents and friends, who walked 100kms for 24 hours from Booroobin to Brisbane.

The resolution and the petition, along with dozens of letters and e-mails of support from people in Queensland, elsewhere in Australia, and around the world, seemed to have little obvious impact on the Minister for Education or the Queensland Government. Submissions from all our students, all the staff, and all the parents, few as we are, similarly had no noticeable impact.

The Minister cancelled the accreditation of Booroobin on December 4, 2003. The letter was received on the last day of the school year. Everyone in the school had hoped this would not happen. It shocked and saddened everyone. But, to an extent, those of us who had been there from the first meeting in 1993, and present during every previous inspection, were not surprised.

The new legislation, the composition of the board, the selection of the assessors, and worst of all our democratic, very different school were all set against us, and therefore the loss of accreditation did not completely surprise us. Of course, cancellation meant the cessation of government funding, greatly reduced income, the potential loss of students (due to compulsory education laws requiring school aged students to attend a school) and an inability to enrol overseas students. There was no cash on hand at the end of the year, and no equity in property.

A wide-ranging search commenced to locate solicitors, and a barrister agreed to attend to the work pro bono. He arranged for representation by a firm of solicitors. Documentation was prepared and an application made to the Supreme Court of Queensland. Under a discovery process, the documents we had requested the board to provide us in April 2003, the assessors' reports, were delivered at 6.30pm on the night before the matter was due to be heard in court in late January. We had

only that night to review the documents and prepare affidavits (written statements) about what we found for production in the court the next day.

There wasn't enough time but did find inconsistencies between the assessors' reports and the documentation and notices issued by the board. It was also clear that had we been given access to the assessors' reports, we would have responded in a different manner. We had been denied natural justice, and procedural fairness. The court was requested, by our barrister, to reinstate the school's accreditation until a case against the Minister and the board, alleging denials of natural justice and procedural fairness, was heard. The judge declined to reinstate accreditation, but agreed there may be a case to be answered by the Minister and board. Every student, every long term past student and every graduate, along with parents and all staff attended court in Brisbane, 100kms from Booroobin. We filled the public area of the court. It was very inspiring.

To proceed with the case, the barrister and solicitors advised that the legal costs would be in the vicinity of and could be a minimum of \$10,000.00 (Australian dollars). We knew we didn't



have the money and would have to fundraise but decided that the case was too important, not just for Booroobin but for other potential democratic schools in Queensland and Australia, for it not to continue.

We decided also to prepare a complaint of breaches of human rights conventions and treaties against the children, their parents, our teachers and the school by the Queensland Government. That complaint is almost ready to be lodged.

On the first day of the school year, continuing students, their parents and staff met and made the following decisions: To form a fundraising committee to raise enough money to keep the school running (and to pay the legal costs) and to change the school's name, because the education legislation only permitted accredited non-state schools to use the word 'school' in their name. It was agreed to change the name to The Booroobin Sudbury Democratic Centre of Learning. We think the name more aptly describes what we do.

Many people may not regard \$10,000 as a lot of money, but to Booroobin, located in a rural area with only nine enrolled students from five families, five staff (three of whom are parents of enrolled students and graduates), it is very hard. We knew that from the beginning. In addition there were bills held over from 2003, which we were intent on paying.

Recently the Queensland Minister for Education increased the pressure a few notches by writing and threatening to take criminal action and financially penalize our directors, because she claims Booroobin may be holding itself out to be a school – and by offering courses to overseas students, in contravention of two Queensland Acts. We have denied the allegations. We now have a final Queensland Supreme Court Hearing date of March 21, 2005, for which we will still need to increase awareness and our fundraising efforts.

We still need support. Check the new updates to our web site. Help us by signing the petition attached to our web site. The new domain name is simply: [www.booroobin.com](http://www.booroobin.com)

# Being There

*with Jerry Mintz*

## Butterflies

It seems to me as a Westerner that going to India is stepping into a different reality. The first thing that struck me was the traffic. I used to think that Manhattan traffic was congested. No more. It is like child's play compared to the streets of Mumbai, Calcutta or Delhi.

Parwez, a social worker at Butterflies, a democratic program for street and working children, came to the Delhi YMCA to pick us up in the morning. We had arrived in the middle of the night on Air India, on our way to the International Democratic Education Conference in Bhubanishwar, scheduled to start two days later.

Riding in the taxi he had hired, going the 10 kilometers to the Butterflies office is like looking at a movie of a third world we could barely imagine. We are dis-

oriented to begin with because we are driving on the left, but some traffic goes on both sides of the road! On each side of the street, going as fast as they can and driving primarily with their horn and their brakes, are trucks, busses, other taxis, motorcycles, and mopeds. There are also swarms of motorized, triangular rickshaws, running on something like lawn mower engines, vying for every inch of space they can find, spewing clouds of gray exhaust. There are also bicycles, bicycle rickshaws, horse drawn cargo carts, bicycle drawn carts piled with boxes, pedestrians, and cows! Each is fighting for every inch of space,

weaving back and forth, honking their horns and hitting their brakes, and almost continuously moving, stopping for nothing. There are even signs on many bumpers *asking* people to use their horn. When traffic slows, beggars from the slum-lined streets walk up to the windows of the taxi, pointing to their mouths to indicate hunger, including many women carrying babies.

This is winter but it is still warm here. The sun is out, but a haze of smog coats the skies. After a 45-minute ride the taxi stops. The door is opened, and we step out—into our new reality.

Parwez led us through the street to the Butterflies office. It was on two floors of a residential building. On one floor was a crisis center. On the floor above are the Butterfly offices. There we met Rita Paniker, who founded Butterflies in 1997. I had



*Rita Paniker, Butterflies director*

originally met her in 2000 at the Japanese IDEC.

When I met her in Japan she brought with her Amin, a 15-year-old working street-child from Delhi. He had been living in the Delhi train station since he left home at age 11. But he was also an organizer of a working children's union, a speaker at the Japanese IDEC (Rita translated), and clearly self-confident and full of life and ambition. Just meeting Amin peaked my interest in Butterflies. We became friends and have communicated since then. What kind of program could have such a child? Was he an aberration, or were the other



children as confident, independent and open? I was about to find out.

In the Butterflies office we saw a powerpoint presentation which showed their four shelters, 12 contact points for education programs for street kids, accredited by the government's Open School. We saw some of their international funding sources. They work with 1000 children around New Delhi, with about 250 sleeping in their shelters every night. They have 62 staff members. If the child has parents nearby, Butterflies uses its resources to try to reunite the child with his or her family. All the children it serves on a continuing basis are not living with parents but on their own. Most of the street children are boys.

We left the office and Parwez took us to their largest shelter in the middle of Delhi. After walking through an alleyway we came to the shelter, a building with a central open area and a smaller back space with some computers. 90 children had slept there the night before, in mats on the floor.

We had a meeting with about 15 of the children, mostly boys, with Parwez translating. During the meeting the children said they were all working. They ranged from age 8-15. Some are waiters; some work at parties (it is marriage season); many are rag pickers—that is, they find cloth, plastic and other recyclables and sell them to recyclers and merchants. One eight year old we met there was about to go out and sell a stack of pressed rice cakes. When I saw him later he had sold most of them. He then paid Butterflies for his food, lodging and classes and puts the rest in the student bank!

They consider themselves to be working children, not beggars. When they asked me if there was any program similar to Butterflies in New York City, I said that I hadn't seen anything like it. But I said I had seen children begging for money. Their immediate reaction was that they thought that was quite demeaning. The children at Butterflies take some of the money they earn, about



*Two Butterflies students, age 17 and 10  
Living on their own*

5 rupees a day (about 10 cents), and pay that to Butterflies for their food, education, and sleeping.

There is an education program right at the shelter, and 12 others around Delhi. In that program the students can learn math, English, Hindi, Science, etc. They get credit through India's Open School. They can take any class they want or none. They can also choose to go to the government school, and 14 have done that. They can take tests to go on to higher learning. Butterflies is accredited to run programs that go through the equivalent of 8<sup>th</sup> grade. So they can have their classes right there and graduate 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Beyond that, they can take tests to continue their education and some of them do that.

The children were attentive, curious, confident, and seemed happy and healthy. They look you directly in the eye. They respond seriously to any questions asked. At one point I told them about Summerhill School, which we had just visited in England. I explained that all decisions were made democratically and that students could choose to go to any classes they wanted, or none at all. They looked at each other, nodded, and said, "Yes, that's the same as our situation here!" That comment stunned me a bit. Suddenly Butterflies seemed like a sort of very low cost democratic boarding school for 8-15 year olds living on their own! In fact, I found that Butterflies has sometimes arranged for some children to go to boarding schools. Guess where

they go on their vacations?—back to their Butterflies family! The same is sometimes true of their graduates. Amin, the boy I met in Japan, is now 19 and is training to be a Butterflies staff member.

The working children, with help from Butterflies, have organized a working children's union, to protect other working children. For example, when a child works for someone and doesn't get paid, a group of children from the union will pay a visit to the employer. That's usually all it takes. It's rare that an adult has to get involved.

On our return trip to Butterflies on our last day in India we met a 14-year-old boy, Bablu, who is a union official. He has been living at the shelter for a year and is taking classes there through the Open School. He recently took a trip to Bangladesh to help organize a union for working children there who were doing difficult work with iron and steel. They have an elected head of the union who at the moment is a 15-year-old kid. As soon as he was elected he created a board, using the four other kids who ran against him. So he's already a smart politician. Right now he's in Nairobi, Kenya, and then he's going to Bangladesh so I didn't get a chance to meet him. Once a month, there's a meeting the representatives of all of the groups around Delhi. They have five representatives of each group at these meetings. They make basic policy decisions for the union.

The children have also organized a bank so that working children do not have to always carry their savings with them and risk being robbed. They have many branches around Delhi and beyond.

On our second trip to Butterflies, we were met by Ashfaq, a Butterflies Coordinator who has a Masters in Social work and is working on a Masters in Business so he can help with that aspect of Butterflies. We did several videotape interviews with the children there. The main reasons why the children came to street life were that they were being beaten or abused at home, had no



educational help, or their families had been broken up or were too poor to take care of them. Some had run away by stowing away on a train, coming from distant rural areas, mainly to go someplace where they could get an education, having no educational options in their villages.

When we needed more tape, Depak, 13, volunteered to take us to the market to buy a cassette. We went by motorized rickshaw. He quickly located the right shop and we bought the cassette. Then we went to several other shops. Depak took my hand and gently dragged us out of one after another when he felt the prices weren't right, until we got what we wanted at the right price. I wanted to buy a cricket bat for Butterflies, because the kids there play a lot of cricket in a nearby field. He rejected many of them, found a good quality one but said it was overpriced. Finally we negotiated a high quality one in which the shopkeeper came down from 760 to 500 rupees, or about \$12. We then went back by bicycle rickshaw, a ride I won't soon forget!

When we got back, Sharon Caldwell, from Mahoon School in South Africa, and another teacher from Los Angeles had just finished a visit. They had also come from the IDEC and we planned to meet there. We all went to lunch and I invited Depak to join us. We walked to a Delhi equivalent of an Indian fast food restaurant, but it was quite nice. By the way, both Depak and Bablu want to become doctors, and I wouldn't want to discount their chances of making it.

Each Butterflies subgroup has its own democracy, and therefore the rules vary. For example, at one shelter the kids have outlawed inhalant drugs inside the shelter, but not outside the shelter, since it is common among street children. At the shelter we were visiting the children have outlawed any drug use inside or outside the shelter, including smoking. According to a staff member, peer pressure is quite strong and the kids consider it a privilege to be a part of

*Depak at lunch*



One of the boys, 10 years old, said that his family had lived in a slum. When the government cleared the slum, it broke up his family and he was on his own. The oldest in



*Educational help at contact point.*

Butterflies. If someone breaks a rule in some way, they'll have a consequence of being fined some

money, of being excluded from the place for two or three days, of having their locker locked for two or three days, etc. The consequence is up to the kids. The meeting can even fire staff members, and has done so on some occasions.

I asked the kids about how they felt about the freedom they have. They felt it is very important to them and it's one of the reasons why they like this lifestyle. I asked Ashfaque if people ever came there wanting to adopt these children. He said that the children have tried parents and decided it wasn't such a good idea and don't really want any other parents. They're basically happy with their lives. But the kids said they didn't like having to go out and do rag picking and stuff like that. They would like more dignified work if they could get it. When we were leaving the youngest boy said he wanted to go with us, but he was just kidding.

After leaving the shelter, Ashfaque took us by motorized rickshaw to one of the Butterflies educational contact points. It was in a field near a Hindu temple. There, in the middle of the field was a group of street and working children in a circle, talking and playing games with two Butterflies staff members. We joined them and gave mutual introductions.

These children did not live at shelters, but on their own. In this case, they slept on the grounds of the Hindu temple. There, nobody bothered them. But they said they got beat up almost daily by the police. They took on similar jobs to the ones the kids had at the shelter.

the group was 17. They seem to take care of and nurture each other.

The children asked us if there was police brutality toward children in New York. Asfaque told us about a case where a Butterflies student was brutally beaten by a policeman and left unconscious. He was rescued by a group of children who brought him to the shelter and from there to a hospital. When he recovered, the children and Butterflies made an official complaint and brought the story to the newspapers. It became big news. The policeman was fired. They hope that this kind of action will make things better for the children. Nevertheless, the children we met said they were basically happy with their lives and their independence and their chance to get education through the Butterflies program. They were happy taking care of each other. Again, they each seemed to have lofty ambitions

Visiting Butterflies has given me a lot to ponder. I always wondered if children with such ultimate freedom would flourish if given support. The answer seems to be yes. After thinking a while about the children's question, as to whether there was a similar program in New York, I realized that such a program would be impossible. People in New York, or in London or Tokyo, for that matter, would simply send a child of that age to social services and to a foster home and public school. They would never believe that children of that age could live independently and take control of their own lives. What we saw at Butterflies was unique, important, and requires much more examination.

We have just finished editing a 42-minute DVD documentary on our visit to Butterflies. For more information on obtaining it, call the AERO office at 800 769-4171 (in USA), check [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org), or write to [jerryaero@aol.com](mailto:jerryaero@aol.com)

# Mail & Communications

Edited by Carol Morley

Hello Everyone: *Pat Montgomery* here. I am leaving today (February 25) for Tokyo to participate in the Tokyo Shure Symposium this weekend. It marks the TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY of the **founding of Tokyo Shure**. I carry with me greetings and best wishes from the NCACS, and I will gladly convey IDEC's congratulations as well. When Keiko Okuchi started Tokyo Shure many naysayers predicted that it wouldn't last because it wasn't "the Japanese way" to start such a venture. It flew in the face of convention. But Keiko san and Kageki san and all of Tokyo Shure's devoted group has proven that the true Japanese way is to care lovingly, humanely for ALL Japan's children. To raise voices of cheer on this auspicious occasion, send messages to [univ@shure.or.jp](mailto:univ@shure.or.jp).

**SVS to China:** I have just returned from China, still a bit jet lagged. I presented two lectures to Chinese instructors, mostly chemistry and physics teachers, all non-English speaking. China is deeply rooted in the "teach to the test" and "teach by lecture". If the teacher deviates and test scores go down then there is in fear of a loss of job. It looks like China was the model for how our states and the feds are now modeling our US schools. My presentations were on how projects get done at Big Rock Sudbury School. I ran over in both of my presentations and instead of people leaving more kept coming in. A great deal of time was spent answering questions. I also participated in a discussion group where I made the statement "The model that China's teachers follows is great for producing good technicians and factory workers but not industry leaders, business owner, or inventors." There was no dissension to that statement. Besides the Chinese teachers, there were an executive from both IBM and Lego in my group, and they were very much in agreement. I was later introduced to a person who I was told was the head of curriculum development for the Chinese government, and he was very pleased with my presentations. 11:00 pm the last night I was packing up to leave and there was a knock at my dorm room door. I was a bit surprised to have my room filled with the staff from one of the schools. The headmaster of the school was extending an invitation to me to come to his school for two weeks. The point of my whole discussion here is that China, whom the US seems is modeling our "test well or die methodology," is seriously interested in a diametrically conflicting pedagogical model. Brian King.

**Sudbury Valley School** has just published a new book, which is an in-depth study of the quality of life, the value systems, and the life styles of alumni who had spent their formative years at Sudbury Valley School. The book's name is *The Pursuit of Happiness*, and it is

available at [www.sudval.org](http://www.sudval.org) for all those interested in learning more about what happens to students who have been in schools where they are in charge of their own lives.

After the IDEC, on my last day in India, I went to visit **Loreta Day School** (aka Rainbow School) in Calcutta. It was possibly the most amazing experience I had over the whole trip. I went with Tarin (from Village School, Minnesota) who'd been before, and he introduced me to Sister Cyril, an Irish nun, who runs the place. She explained how Loreta (named after the founders, the Loreta Sisters) had an open-

door policy, allowing all street-children ('rainbows') to come in. Lessons are not compulsory, and the school can be used as a shelter for homeless or orphaned children, so they can just come and eat and sleep there, for free. The school is half fee-paying students. These 700 students provide much of the income, along with sponsorships and grants, since they are quite well established, having been going for 140 years. Loreta, serves as a preparation level school for its street children, offering the students basic reading, writing and communication skills. I was moved by the atmosphere there. Most of the children I had seen in India looked like hardened grown-ups, with empty faces and worked hands. Rainbow school felt like Sands school – happy children, playing basketball and

ping pong, and skipping and generally running about. All the children we met were endearingly mischievous and playful, and polite too. They have many outreach programs, like job-seeking programs for the parents of street kids, so they can get a secure income for their family, and they operate teacher-training in 400 centers around the world. There is actually one in England. *Luke Flegg*

STORK (Aist) Family School, Ukraine, and the CLEMI (Ministry for Education-Mass Media Link Center), France, invite you to participate in the next issue of **FAX! magazine**, which is an international children's magazine compiled within 24 hours by students aged 6 to 18, who send their materials by e-mail from different countries. The current issue's topic is **FAMILY**. Read more about Fax! at: [www.clemi.org](http://www.clemi.org). Contact us in Ukraine at STORK (AIST) Family School: [aist@sovamua.com](mailto:aist@sovamua.com) and [zverinina@svitonline.com](mailto:zverinina@svitonline.com) (Contact person: Elena Zverinina). French contact at CLEMI: [m.poulain@clemi.org](mailto:m.poulain@clemi.org). Contact person: Marie-Francoise Poulain Read more about Fax! at: [www.clemi.org](http://www.clemi.org)

**Firm cancels student ID deal:** (In New Mexico) the Sutter County school that required students to wear identification badges that tracked their movement on campus stopped the controversial program Tuesday





*"Don't get too close to Daddy's food, Esme!"*

night when the creators of the technology abruptly pulled the plug on the deal. Brittan Elementary, a K-8 school west of Yuba City, got the badges for free from InCom, a small Sutter City start-up whose owners have ties to the school district. Brittan's seventh- and eighth-graders had been required to wear badges with the technology – called RFID, or radio frequency identification devices – on lanyards around their necks, and school officials said the badges were scanned and used to take attendance easily. But some parents were outraged that the badges were given to children without their knowledge or consent. The American Civil Liberties Union publicized the concerns, and before long, news crews from Germany and elsewhere arrived at the 600-student campus. *San Jose Mercury News* February 2005

Tim Seldin writes: this US story is significant because it is one of the first times a Montessori charter (an independent publicly funded) Montessori school has come under such direct attack. **School officials, parents differ over Montessori statistics** By *Eben Harrell* From the Aspen (Colorado) Times January 17, 2005: As a group of parents attempt to found a new alternative education school in Carbondale, school district officials are calling attention to statistics indicating that Montessori education fails to prepare students for standardized reading and writing tests. Data returned from the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) show Montessori students at Carbondale Elementary School lagging their traditional counterparts. Advocates of a new Montessori school refute the district's data, arguing that the sample is too small and that the results included students who had only been in the Montessori program for less than a year. But district officials question whether the Montessori approach fails to instill basic reading skills at a pace acceptable to state requirements. An application to found a new Montessori school in Carbondale has been submitted to the state.

**BUSH CUTS SMALL SCHOOLS FROM THE ED BUDGET** Well here we go again (*says Mike Klonsky*). The new education budget has been gutted. Smaller Learning Communities – gone. Voc ed – gone. Gear up – gone. Just about every program designed to leave no child behind has been gutted or shifted into the administration's new 'School Intervention' (read testing and punishing) program. The administration claims that this program is 'research based' and that all these other programs, including SLCs are 'ineffective.' So once again it looks like we have to contact our representatives and become lobbyists. We also have to continue to make our case in the area of research.

**From US High School Graduation Rates Continue to Fall; Race Gaps Remain Large:** A new study released concludes that high school graduation rates in the U.S. continue to decline and graduation rates for black and Hispanic students lag substantially behind those

of white students. Published in the scholarly peer-reviewed journal Education Policy Analysis Archives (<http://epaa.asu.edu/>), the study, "High School Graduation Rates: Alternative Methods and Implications", by Jing Miao and Walt Haney of Boston College, reviews literature on and practices in reporting high school graduation rates. "Our report highlights an ongoing crisis in American education. Declining graduation rates mean that if young people do not even graduate from high school, their employment and other social opportunities are sharply curtailed," study co-author Walt Haney added "While much public attention has focused on achievement gaps in test scores, a much more serious problem, is the 20% gap in graduation rates between white and minority students. Additionally, the increasing dropout rate for minorities appears to make the test score gap to be decreasing among students who remain in school. The reality, however, is that the racial divide in educational attainment among all young people – in and out of school – has actually been widening." <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n55/>.

**Major Gates Foundation Grants to Support Small High Schools,** Education Week: Of the \$2.2 billion in education-related grants made by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in the past five years, about \$647 million has gone to support the creation of smaller, more personalized high schools. This does not include \$66.3 million the foundation has spent on policy, research, and evaluation projects related to the reform of secondary education.

**The Online Communities Directory** is a free searchable database of intentional communities. You can browse through the alphabetical community list or search for communities based on location, keyword, and various aspects of community living that are important to community seekers. Communities from around the world are already updating their listings via a web-based interface and new communities are being added daily to the list so that seekers can have the most up-to-date information possible. If you live in an intentional community come to <http://directory.ic.org> to add or update your listing. There is no charge of any kind for this service. Email: [directory@ic.org](mailto:directory@ic.org).

**The Garrison Institute and the Fetzer Institute** are currently conducting a project to map the status of school-based programs that utilize contemplative practices and/or help foster love and forgiveness. If you would be willing to tell us about your school's use of such a program, or if you know of any existing programs of this type, please contact Deborah at [deborah@garrisoninstitute.org](mailto:deborah@garrisoninstitute.org). Correspondence will be kept confidential. However, at your request, participating schools can receive a free copy of the project's final report.

**Behind That Blank Expression,** NY Times, January 16, 2005: So what's the adjective most commonly used by teenagers to describe how they feel about school? "Bored," according to a Gallup Poll report. In a recent online survey, Gallup asked 785 students ages 13 to 17 to look over a list of adjectives and choose the three that best describe "how you usually feel at school." "Bored" was the clear winner, named by half the students, beating out "tired," which was picked by 42 percent. Girls and boys were equally uninterested, and 16- and 17-year-olds were more often bored and tired and less often happy in school than the 13- to 15-year-olds.

**Kids skip class – and parents go to jail,** By *Stacy A. Teicher*: The headlines read like a version of "Scared Straight" for adults: "Parents arrested over truant kids." The roundups in the past six weeks - 11 arrests in Detroit, four in New Mexico, and 19 in Knox County, Tenn. - are the most eye-catching aspect of a get-tough approach to school attendance. But the goal is to get students back to school, not to put their parents behind bars, school and law enforcement officials say. While some parents have served short jail terms for contributing to their children's truancy, most are sentenced to perform community



service or pay fines if they fail to respond to less-punitive measures. The Christian Science Monitor Feb. 17 2005

**The International Association for Learning Alternatives** for the past 35 years has promoted giving parents choices of programs. The mission of the nonprofit International Association for Learning Alternatives is to lead, promote and support learning alternatives in education. This mission is to see that parents and learners have choices of educational programs to meet their needs, interests, learning styles and intelligences. We believe that one-size education program does not fit everyone and that education is best served by having choices for all. For more information go to [www.learningalternatives.net](http://www.learningalternatives.net). You can also sign up for the free monthly email news on alternatives.

**If Repeating a Grade Doesn't Help Kids, Why Do We Make Them Do It?** Making students repeat a grade hasn't worked for 100 years, so why is it still happening? And why do government officials, school leaders, and teachers persist in recommending retention as a remedy for low student achievement – even when researchers call it a failed intervention? *Linda Darling-Hammond*, executive director of Columbia University's National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, has a one-word answer: assumptions. Many schools, she says, operate on the assumption that failing students motivates them to try harder, gives them another chance to "get it right," and raises their self-esteem. Those claims aren't true, Darling-Hammond maintains. The widespread trust in retention is uncritical and unwarranted, she says. It ignores several decades of research showing that, for most children, retention: (1) Fails to improve low achievement in reading, math, and other subjects; (2) Fails to inspire students to buckle down and behave better; (3) Fails to develop students' social adjustment and self-concept. Darling-Hammond concedes that grade retention might benefit some students in the short term, but in the long term, holding students back puts them at risk. More often than not, students who are retained never catch up academically. Many eventually drop out, and some end up in the juvenile justice system. The belief that students, as well as their parents, are to blame for low achievement plays into most retention decisions, writes Susan Black. But teachers and principals seldom accept their share of blame for inept instruction, lackluster lessons, low expectations, and other school factors that contribute to students' academic disengagement and behavior problems, Darling-Hammond says. <http://www.asbj.com/current/research.html>

**How Smart is Advanced Placement?** As ambitious students load up on Advanced Placement (AP) classes, critics question their quality, reports Claudia Wallis and Carolina A. Miranda. The thirst to stand out in the brutal college-admissions game is driving a kind of AP-mania all across the U.S. Some educators are worried that AP, which was created as a way to give bright high school seniors a taste of college, is turning into something it was never meant to be: a kind of alternative high school curriculum for ambitious students that teaches to the test instead of encouraging the best young minds to think more creatively. And as AP expands, some educators have begun to question the integrity of the programs and ask whether the classes are truly offering students an extra boost or merely giving them filigree for their college applications. <http://www.time.com/>

I just came back from the **World Religion Parliament** in Barcelona where I volunteered as a circle facilitator on refugees. I spent the weekend with a group of Palestinian students from Jerusalem, Arab students from Israel and Jewish students from my area. It is a new program. I am involved with an Arab and a Palestinian teacher from Ramalah who got special permission to cross the checkpoint because

of his extended relationships. The weekend was full of excitement and activities. Last night the students were so happy dancing and jumping to Arab and Hebrew music. I sat in a corner of the room and contemplated these kids' energy and fresh chains they made. This was a miracle. I wonder how different their life could be without the adults' stories and prejudice they are hearing since they were born. Today we went through activities that included writing our first statements on human rights about "freedom of expression and talk." Our decision was made in a mini-parliament assembly where the kids could experience a democratic way of freedom of speech and decision. Mara List, learner and educator for peace, Israel.

**From KnowledgeWorks Foundation Collaborates With Districts Across Ohio to Open 53 New Small High Schools:** 10 school districts across Ohio will be opening 51 new small, autonomous high schools. As part of the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI) KnowledgeWorks Foundation is working with a total of 20 large, traditional high schools which have transformed into autonomous small schools. The Early College High School, another KnowledgeWorks Foundation small school initiative, will also open two small high schools this year. "These schools are part of the most intensive high school conversion effort in the country," said Chad P. Wick, president & CEO, KnowledgeWorks Foundation. "In Ohio and across the country, we are working with communities to create smaller, more personalized high schools, which emphasize the new 3Rs, rigorous academic coursework, supportive relationships to ensure that students can meet high standards and relevant learning opportunities where they can apply their knowledge in real-world settings," said Tom Vander Ark, executive director of education, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has invested more than \$745 million to support the creation of more than 1,900 high schools in 45 states. In the fall of 2005 KnowledgeWorks Foundation anticipates the opening of 24 additional small schools for OHSTI and five for Early College. Learn more about KnowledgeWorks Foundation at <http://www.kwfdn.org>.



**A new way of learning**, by *Blair Reynolds*, Sun Newspapers: When classes begin this fall at River Heights Charter School at 60 W. Marie Ave. in West St. Paul (Minn.), students who choose to attend the new public school will experience a different approach to attaining a high school diploma. As the area's first EdVisions School, River Heights will try to break the mold of what people think of when they imagine a high school class because at River Heights, there aren't traditional classes. The EdVisions model was created in 1993 and developed at Minnesota New Country School in Henderson, Minn. The EdVisions concept of project-based learning has recently been teamed with the monetary power of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. As a teacher-owned and teacher-operated venture, Zimmewicz and fellow co-founders Jill Wohlman, Alex Liuzzi and Shannon Dahmes will strive to provide students with tools that will ready them for life after high school. For more information on River Heights Charter School go to [www.riverheightscharter.org](http://www.riverheightscharter.org) or call 651-457-7427. <http://www.mnsun.com>.

**Pacific High School** (Sitka, AK) is a small school situated in the Tongass National Forest on a mountainous island in southeast Alaska. Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) is used as the school model. It emphasizes learning by doing, with a particular focus on character growth, teamwork, reflection, and literacy. Teachers connect high quality academic learning to adventure, service, and character development. Courses are taught through challenging projects that are connected to real-world experiences. Our students learn the value

of contributing selflessly to their community, while the service leaders share their knowledge and experience. Pacific High will develop lifelong learners with strong community connections who have a desire, purpose, and ability to learn and succeed in life. Pacific High School, 509 Lincoln Street, Sitka, Alaska 99835. Tel: (907) 747-0525. Web: [www.pacifichigh.org](http://www.pacifichigh.org). E-mail: [pacific@mail.ssd.k12.ak.us](mailto:pacific@mail.ssd.k12.ak.us).

We at **Puget Sound Community School** have entered our 11th year. We are no longer a homeschool co-op but are a state-approved private school. We made this switch in January 2003. The reason for the change was pretty simple – being an approved private school allows us to grant high school credit and state-approved high school diplomas. To gain our state-approval we needed to acquire a site so we are now housed in the University Heights Community Center, a 100+ year-old former elementary school in Seattle's University District. Students are free to choose all their activities. On Thursdays we meet "across the lake" in the city of Kirkland, using a teen center, vacant during the school day, as our home. We no longer offer part-time enrollment as we found that to be eroding our sense of community and made it hard for the part-timers to feel fully involved. If anyone is in Seattle and would like to check us out, drop me a line. *Andy Smallman*. Email: [andy@pscs.org](mailto:andy@pscs.org).



*"Are you tagged broadband or mainframe?"*

**Stonesoup School** has broken ground on new facilities. The campus will have state-of-the-art classroom facilities, a professional kitchen/dining area, new recreation rooms, and four large dorms for student/staff accommodations. Mark Jacob recently assumed the role of Executive Director. Carrie Straub, MS will continue to direct the educational program, along with coordinating school referrals. Web: [www.stonesoupschool.org](http://www.stonesoupschool.org). Email: [info@stonesoupschool.org](mailto:info@stonesoupschool.org). Tel: (386) 698-4595.

## Home Education

**The Homeschoolers' College** (our working title) will accept students from ages 14-19 for part-time undergraduate study. It will offer opportunities for independent, self-designed study earning up to 8 credits per semester. (Full-time study normally earns 15 credits.) Students would attend a 3-day residency on campus, and during this time they would meet their faculty advisor and other students and design their personal study plan for the semester. Tentative dates are Sept. 9-11 and March 3-5 (2006). In addition, we are considering holding a conference at Goddard during the weekend of June 18-19 to explore homeschoolers' college options and share students' experiences of these different options. Please contact me with any questions or

comments. If you would like to be put on our mailing list, I will let you know when the program is approved and will send more details about it. Ron Miller, Ph.D., Goddard College, Plainfield, Vermont 05667 [millerr@goddard.edu](mailto:millerr@goddard.edu)

**All Sports and Event Management (ASEM)** is excited to announce the first annual National Homeschool Olympics. This event will take place May 19 through May 26, 2005, in Cocoa Beach Florida. The purpose of this event is to provide the homeschool student/athlete a National platform to compete with only other homeschool student/athletes. ASEM has selected events that will allow students to compete in three age divisions. The three age divisions are 12-under, 15-under and 18-under. The athletic events that have been selected basketball, bowling, beach volleyball, decathlon, golf, iron man/woman, ping pong, pitch/hit/throw, punt/pass/kick, putt putt golf, racquetball, soccer, surfing, swimming (no diving), tennis, and track and field. Academic events will be brain bowl, chess, geography bee, and spelling bee. Medals for 1st, 2nd 3rd place will be awarded in each event and category per age division. For further information please contact ASEM at [allsportsmgmt@aol.com](mailto:allsportsmgmt@aol.com) or contact event coordinator Ace Young at (321) 636-1511. Web: <http://www.asem16.com>.

**From Homeschooling Up 29 Percent Since 1999:** Almost 1.1 million students were homeschooled last year, their numbers pushed higher by parents frustrated over school conditions and wanting to include morality and religion with English and math. The estimated number of students taught at home has grown 29 percent since 1999, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, part of the Education Department. In surveys, parents offered two main reasons for choosing homeschooling: 31 percent cited concerns about the environment of regular schools, and 30 percent wanted the flexibility to teach religious or moral lessons. A distant third, at 16 percent, was dissatisfaction with academic instruction at schools, reports Ben Feller. The 1.1 million homeschooled students account for 2.2 percent of the school-age population in the United States, young people ages 5 through 17. <http://seattletimes.nwsources.com>.

**Who Should Monitor Children's Education?** Babette Hankin of Croyden, Pa., likes to show off her home-schooling program. Not only do her seven children stay occupied all day, but the five of school age seem to thrive in her regimented rotation covering earth science, reading, math, and even piano practice. Yet despite pride in the program, Mrs. Hankin is suing the Bristol Township School District for requiring a yearly review. At dispute is the question of who owns the children, and who therefore should oversee their education – the parents, the state, or God? Hankin's is one of two landmark cases pending in Pennsylvania courts. In each, home-schooling families are using a new religious freedom law to fight what they see as state interference. Twelve states have recently passed similar laws, putting a potentially powerful tool in the hands of those who educate the nation's 1.1 million home-schooled children. G. Jeffrey MacDonald, <http://www.csmonitor.com/>

**Homeschooling in Australia:** omMThe alternative for our children, after the freedom and democratic values of Booroobin is very dark. An example of this is this Queensland Government is intending to register every homeschooling parent, requiring them to report results every year to the Director General of Education with samples of work, and if they get it right, then they can continue homeschooling for the following year, and will be subject to increased fines for not enrolling their children somewhere. All of this flies in the face of recommendations of a Homeschooling Committee. 85% of parents in Queensland who currently homeschool have not sought the required dispensation from the Minister to homeschool their children. Another example is that every student will be allocated at age 16 a unique

student “identifier” (as if their name was not enough) and an “account” with a central Queensland Studies Authority so their results from state and non-state schools, and arranged work experience, can be “banked” for inclusion on a report card. Homework is about to be legislated. And it goes on. And all of this is from a Labor (for US residents, equal to a Democrat) government. *Derek Sheppard*

## Public Alternatives

From **The Little Class that Could**, by *Danna Harman*, The Christian Science Monitor: This weekend, Deon Milton will graduate from high school. A slight kid with an easy grin, Deon will attend Hiram College in Ohio next year. It was his second choice, actually, but he is psyched. He has a full scholarship, a place on the basketball team, and lots of plans. Nationwide, only about 45 percent of public high school graduates this month will go on to a four-year college, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics. But Deon’s story is a very different one. He attends the SEED school - a highly unusual public school that requires that its city students live on campus. Deon and his 20 classmates are about to become the school’s first graduating class. The success of these students would be noteworthy under any circumstances. One hundred percent of the class is going to college next year. SEED’s Class of 2004, like the rest of the school’s 300 Grade 7-12 students, is fairly typical of the public school population of southeast D.C. Ninety-eight percent are African-American, 2 percent are Hispanic. Ninety percent come from homes below the poverty line; 88 percent come from single parent or no parent households, and 93 percent are the first generation in their families to go to college. All students were selected by a lottery system, and most were two grade levels behind in academic performance when they began seventh grade, says John Ciccone, assistant head of the school. Typically, some 30 percent of each class has to repeat a “growth year” before moving into high school. But these days, SEED’s students are scoring higher on standardized tests than their counterparts at other public schools in DC, staying in school (the national public high school graduation rate is 63 percent, here it is almost 100 percent) and getting into colleges across the country. [www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com).

**Chicago’s contract schools** began about 3 years ago when local businessman and school reformer, Mike Koldyke, decided to open a public school called the National Teacher Academy without going through a competitive charter school process for the limited number of charters available. The school was given to him as a contract school or in-district charter. Then CEO Arne Duncan used the contract school idea to create new small schools in the closed-down Dodge and Williams Elementary Schools. These schools just completed their first year and while there isn’t much in the way of documentation, they all have had promising, if troubled starts. Our Workshop is presently housed in one of these schools. It started with only 30 freshman students and two teachers (advisors). The strong personal connections made with these mainly Latino kids accounts for the fact that nearly all are returning for their 10th grade year – unheard of in other heavily Latino high schools. The contract had a dual role. Positively, it gave Big Picture an opportunity to innovate and personalize. Negatively, it set the school up as a target from some bureaucrats and deprived them of some early facilities support. Contract schools will figure heavily in the district’s long-range strategic plan and they will be much more carefully defined as in-district

charter schools, as city leaders try to figure out a way to attract the middle class back into the city and into public schools. Contracts figure to be a central piece in areas where public housing is coming down and new mixed-income developments are going up. *Mike Klonsky*

## International News

### AUSTRALIA

Painting for sale **to assist Booroobin** with its legal costs (See page 6). The original painting by Australian landscape artist, Ken Wenzel, is of one of south east Queensland’s Glasshouse Mountains, Mr Coonowrin (or Crookneck), so named by Capt James Cook when he sailed down the east coast of Australia in 1770. The painting is dated July 1975. The painting has been donated by one of Booroobin’s Founding families. \$AUD2,300 (or \$US 1,725 or 1,350 EUR) + delivery costs. Contact Booroobin to arrange purchase [www.booroobin.com](http://www.booroobin.com)

### BELGIUM

Our school project is running like a train, really amazing. Our website is up and running: [www.sudbury.be](http://www.sudbury.be), but needs more info and is only in Dutch for the moment. We scheduled four info evenings and our group in Ghent is getting bigger very fast. Tomorrow we meet with all the people in Ghent who want to help in setting up the school here.

We also spoke with the former minister of education and she was very positive; she gave us more useful contacts and was even going to contact some people herself! *Maaïke Eggermont*. Email: [maaike\\_eggermont@hotmail.com](mailto:maaike_eggermont@hotmail.com)



### FRANCE

**High school students demonstrate against education “reforms”** By a WSWS reporting team, 17 February 2005: One hundred thousand French high school students struck and demonstrated on February 10 to oppose the law on education reform introduced by François Fillon, education minister in the right-wing government of Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin. The number of students participating is even more significant given that

nearly half the high schools in the country are currently closed for vacation. The issue highlighted by the students, a reform of the high school graduation diploma, the *baccalauréat* or “bac,” is just one element in a package of measures that was to be placed before the National Assembly on February 15. In response to the mass demonstrations, Education Minister Fillon immediately suspended the reform of the “bac” and withdrew it from the parliamentary debate. He confirmed, however, his determination to go ahead with the rest of his proposals. *World Socialist Website*.

### GERMANY

**Life With Big Brother**, by *Ron Strom*, WorldNetDaily.com: Seven homeschooling fathers in Germany recently spent several days in jail for refusing to pay fines that were imposed on them for failing to send their children to government schools. The fathers, who are part of the Twelve Tribes Community in Klosterzimmern, Germany, were forced to spend between six and 16 days in what the group’s website translates as “coercive jail.” According to the group’s website, which includes a chronology of its battle with the government, the men initially refused to go to jail. The police then picked them up and brought them to a lock-up in Augsburg, Bavaria, on Oct. 18. “The authorities want to ‘bend’ the parents’ will so they will pay their fines, stop homeschooling their children and instead send them to public schools. The mothers (three have small, nursing children) are



supposed to go to jail later,” states the group’s website. According to Hal Young, president of North Carolinians for Home Education, who has followed the plight of the German families, the media in Germany have given the homeschoolers favorable coverage. As WorldNetDaily reported, some German families have escaped the nation to prevent the state from taking custody of their children. Those wishing to help the cause of homeschooling in Germany can contact a legal defense organization there, Schulunterricht Zu Hause E.V.

**Germany’s No. 1 Boarding School Throws Down a Gauntlet:** Salem, the most famous boarding school in Germany, seeks a dissenting voice in the U.S. education media and journalists covering the education beat with the temerity genuinely to question received ideas. Salem, which is the only boarding school in Germany to offer education in English, is profoundly different from similar institutions in the U.S. of which the School’s leadership is critical. Preoccupation with university admissions is strongly discouraged in favor of a holistic approach to education and learning for its own sake. At Salem College, the campus for the equivalent of the School’s juniors and seniors, the running of the boarding community is heavily in the hands of students. Boarding community rules cannot be changed without the consent of a student parliament. Those who break these rules are judged by the elected leaders of the student body. For further information, including censorship-free campus visits and student interviews, contact Dr. James Bloom, [ir@saalem-net.de](mailto:ir@saalem-net.de). Tel: 49-7553-919-389.

#### NETHERLANDS

Sudbury Valley was known by the founders of the first **Iederwijs** in the Netherlands. They had been meeting already for some years and discussed how their ideal school should look like, and then they came across the book “Free at Last”. It was then that they realized that these stories had so much in common with their own ideas that it became a major source of inspiration. After discovering it they noticed some minor differences, not in the philosophy but in practice, for which they probably chose to keep the name and build it out. The school uses the sociocratic decision-making model. Decisions are based on the principle of ‘consent’, which means that there are no argued and paramount objections against the proposal. The school meeting is held every week, and they decide about all school running activities and funds, staff etc. In Soest, we have a Judiciary Committee up and running. It runs exactly the same as Sudbury Schools, with written complaints etc. *Christel A. Hartkamp*, Iederwijs Soest “de Ruimte”, Insingerstraat 39-53, 3766 MA Soest, The Netherlands. [www.iederwijsssoest.nl](http://www.iederwijsssoest.nl)



*“And no toast, please. I have a yeast allergy.”*

#### NORWAY

I am a member of a Norwegian group called “**Forum ny skole**” (new school). We are working to start up a free democratic school in Oslo. We have gotten permission from the government so the school, though private, will be funded primarily by the government (85%). The leader of the group is Mosse Jørgensen, she is 83 years old and was one of the founder of “Forsøksgymnaset” that started in 1966. Forsøksgymnaset is the only democratic school in Norway. It is one high school level for kids 16-19 years old. I recently came back from Minnesota, where I was interning at the Village School of Northfield. My group has also been working together with a Sweden school called “Friskolan i seffle” (Free school of Seffle). Before I went to the US I also worked in another Sweden school called “Solvikskolan,” this is the only free, but not totally democratic, Waldorf school in the world. Jostein Strømme. Email: [diskujon@nrkpost.no](mailto:diskujon@nrkpost.no). Web: <http://nyskole.org/>.

#### UNITED KINGDOM

**Brits Moving to Hogwarts-Style House System in High Schools,** BBC: Every secondary school in England is being urged to become an independent specialist under the government’s five-year plan for learning. It wants them all to be specialising in at least one subject by 2008. They will be urged to adopt foundation status - taking control of their own land, buildings and other assets and employing their own staff. All schools will be encouraged to have uniforms and house systems, as part of a traditional ethos aimed at wooing middle-class parents. The plans have already provoked disquiet on Labour’s back benches, with 32 MPs registering their opposition to ‘foundation schools’. Former Health Secretary Frank Dobson is among those complaining that local education authorities will not have a say in running the new-look schools. The Tories have proposed giving every school grant-maintained status - controlling their own budgets and admissions policies - and giving parents more choice over which school their children go to.

**Cheap private education in the UK:** There was a news item late last night on how a middle-eastern business is developing cheap private schools pricing an education at £5,000 which is the same figure as that floated by the conservative party two years ago as the value of educational vouchers they intend to give to parents for their child’s education. We now have this chain opening 20 schools around the country, an educational think tank in north London creating another, and someone in south Wales creating an online school also on a similar basis. They clearly see that there is a profit to make here. These organizations would not be setting up these businesses unless they were confident that a future government will offer vouchers. I think that education in the UK as about to undergo a major shift in direction. The effect upon society is going to be dramatic. Mike Fortune-Wood.

**Blair woos private sector to run new state schools** The Business, March 6/7 2005: Tony Blair is drawing up a radical plan to use the private sector to run a new breed of English state school. The Business has learned that Britain’s Prime Minister is considering approaching Sunny Varkey, a Dubai-based education tycoon, who is planning to open a chain of independent schools in Britain with fees starting at £5,000 a head, considerably less than most existing private schools. Varkey believes that British education market is ripe for competition. Blair is considering a proposal to persuade Varkey to work for the government and focus on inner cities to set up in competition with sink schools. *Fraser Nelson*

## Conferences

April 6 – 8 **IALA 2005 Annual Conference** The 2005 annual International Association for Learning Alternatives conference (our 35th) will be in Waterloo, Iowa with a fine line up of keynoters and an outstanding mix of small group sessions as described in the conference brochure. You might consider making a presentation. If so, the website has information and a brief form to complete. Ignore the date, as they will continue accepting presenter forms until early March. There will be area highlights and school visits. Lodging is \$65 per night at the Ramada adjacent to the conference center. Other questions can be addressed to Rachelle Brown at Expo High School, 319-433-1930 or [rachexpo@hotmail.com](mailto:rachexpo@hotmail.com)

April 21 – 24, 2005: **Tomorrow's Children, Tomorrow's Schools** at the beautiful ocean-side Asilomar Conference Center on the Monterey Peninsula in California. This will be the inaugural meeting of the Montessori Foundation's new Center For Partnership Education. The conference theme will be how to build on the connection between Partnership Education and Montessori, Holistic education, Waldorf, and other progressive approaches. To download the conference brochure and information about the symposium, please go to [http://www.montessori.org/sitefiles/asilomar\\_flier.pdf](http://www.montessori.org/sitefiles/asilomar_flier.pdf) or call the Montessori Foundation at 1-800- 632-4121

May 12-15, 2005: **The 2005 NCACS Conference** in Chicago, IL at the International Conference Center, 4750 North Sheridan Rd. The Forum School for Creative Study is organizing the conference with help from Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School and Dorothy Werner. The conference center will sleep approximately 175 people in dorm, single, and double rooms. We are hoping to keep conference costs about the same as last year with adults at \$200 and students at \$150. The exact cost and the program will be confirmed later. Further information will be sent out as it becomes available. But, put these dates on your calendars and start making plans to attend! Muffie Connelly is coordinating the conference while Jan Favia is out of the country. Muffie can be reached at: [muffieconnelly@yahoo.com](mailto:muffieconnelly@yahoo.com) or 708 293 0777.

May 14 – 21, 2005: HES FES, The World's Biggest Gathering of Home Educators, Manor Farm, Charmouth, England. This will be the tenth such event in eight years and will once again see people attending from all over the UK as well as the USA, Finland, Sweden, France, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Poland, Germany and elsewhere. A packed week of workshops, music, events, conferences and lots more. Web: [www.hesfes.co.uk](http://www.hesfes.co.uk).

June 16 - 20, 2005 **The 6th International Soul in Education**

**Conference:** "Creating a Compassionate Future" will be held in Boulder, Colorado, at Boulder High School, hosted by the Alliance for Compassionate Education (ACE). There will be inspiring world-renowned speakers, interactive workshops, panels, discussions, multi-cultural presentations and performances for educators

Our circular designs appeared as crop circles on the English landscape, in Wiltshire, during the summer of 2004. Their origin is entirely mysterious. These diagrams, made by Rob Seaman, come from the Crop Circle Calendar of 2005, published by the Wiltshire Crop Circle Study Group



in all levels and settings, parents, and the community. Featured speakers will include: John Benghu; John Taylor Gatto; Rachael Kessler; Alfie Kohn; Iyanla Vanzant; and Neale Donald Walsch. For more information/registration: [www.soulineducation.org](http://www.soulineducation.org) or contact: [ann.kane@bvsd.org](mailto:ann.kane@bvsd.org)

June 19, 2005: **Teach Your Own: An Unschooling Seminar** by Pat Farenga, Ethical Humanist Society, 38 Old Country Road, Garden City, NY 11530. To register for a seminar please download a registration form from [www.holtgws.com](http://www.holtgws.com). Pat Farenga, Holt Associates Inc., PO Box 89, Wakefield, MA 01880. Tel: (781) 395-8508. Fax: (781) 874-1053.

June 22 – 26, 2005 **AERO Conference** Russell Sage College, Troy, NY. Join educators, students, and parents from across the U.S. to challenge the status quo in education and explore the possibilities of educational alternatives. Read our ad on the back page and visit our website: [www.EducationRevolution.org](http://www.EducationRevolution.org)

July 21 – July 24, 2005: The **National Coalition of Education Activists** (NCEA) national conference, **The Real Mandate: Educate and Fight for Social Justice**, St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia, PA. Join parents, teachers and other educators, community activists, and child advocates at our national conference: Share organizing strategies for the coming period; Build ongoing networks with public school activists; Share materials and models for public school change. Contact MaryBeth Griffin at [marybeth@edactivists.org](mailto:marybeth@edactivists.org).

July 30 – Aug. 7, 2005: **International Democratic Education Conference** IDEC 2005 Berlin The 13th IDEC will take place in Germany in Berlin. After a six-year gap the IDEC is coming back to Europe. We are looking forward to meeting many friends and everyone who comes. From this moment on you can register on line. The number of participants is limited to 300 (plus 200 for the two-day public conference in Humboldt University). <http://en.idec2005.org/registration/> we hope and recommend that everyone who is interested signs up for our newsletter: <http://en.idec2005.org/newsletter/> In

order to enable as many people as possible to participate in the conference, we are very grateful for relevant hints and suggestions or also for direct financial help. The essential information about aims, content and practical details is to be found here: <http://www.idec2005.org/>

## Jobs and Internships

**The Organization for Education and Science Integration** ([www.oedsi.org](http://www.oedsi.org)) is currently seeking volunteers to assist them in the areas of fund-raising, accounting, design, P/R and technical services for their current project working with schools in NYS and a scientific project in the Pacific. The purpose of OEDSI is to integrate education about sustainability into school curricula by creating partnerships between scientists in the global community and schools within the United States using science, technology, international dialogue and in-school projects. For more information please contact [samantha@oedsi.org](mailto:samantha@oedsi.org).

**The Highland School** - a democratic school with daily activities based on students' individual interests - is currently accepting

applications for an internship position for the 2005-2006 school year. The internship provides room and \$250 per month stipend. For more information on The Highland School, visit our NEW website at [www.thehighlandschool.org](http://www.thehighlandschool.org) or call us at 304-869-3250.

Director wanted for **The Cloud Forest School**, a non-profit, private, non-denominational educational and environmental organization in Costa Rica. We are also looking for pre-school, elementary, special education, and high school teachers to start in July 2005. We offer our students a creative, bilingual, environmentally focused education. We have 208 students in preschool through high school, with over half receiving scholarships due to financial need. With land stewardship classes on our 106-acre campus, small teacher to student ratio, and a large volunteer/intern program, our students receive a unique educational experience. Bilingual-Spanish/English strongly preferred. For more information, contact Rebecca Goertzel at [director@cloudforestschool.org](mailto:director@cloudforestschool.org)

**Golden Independent School**, a small, progressive, private elementary school in beautiful Golden, Colorado, is looking for a full-time teacher beginning in August 2005. This is not your average teaching job! As a start-up school entering our 3rd academic year, we are looking for someone with experience in: teaching in multi-age classrooms (e.g. 2nd through 5th grade); challenging advanced and highly gifted students; collecting and developing hands-on learning activities; using portfolio assessment to demonstrate student progress, etc. Feel free to explore our school website at: [www.goldenindependent.org](http://www.goldenindependent.org) Please send a cover letter and resume

via email or to the address below, including your salary requirements, and we will contact you: Dr. Erika Sueker, Director, Golden Independent School, 1280 Golden Circle, Golden, CO 80401

**The Ridge and Valley Charter School** We Are A K-8 Public School of Choice Located in Warren County, NJ We have: Ecologically sustainable, environmental focus on curriculum & programs; Experiential, child-centered, multi-aged, individualized learning; Non-hierarchical, consensus school governance. We are currently seeking caring, experienced educators for: Academic Coordinator/Lead Teacher (NJ Principal/Supervisor Certification and experience desired); NJ Certified School Nurse; Teacher/Guides ; Support Staff. 1234 State Route 94, Blairstown, NJ 07825 Phone: (908) 362-1114 email: [ridgeandvalley@earthlink.net](mailto:ridgeandvalley@earthlink.net) [www.ridgeandvalley.org](http://www.ridgeandvalley.org)

**Don McKelvey.** *I love kids, I love to teach, and I come free.* (That is, I am retired, with enough income that I don't need a salary.) Though a "volunteer," I want to be a fully engaged member of the teaching group, and of the wider school community. I have varied experience — the graphic arts (typesetting, layout, running a printing press), computer programming, editing, office managing. And for the past 30 years I've been very successful at youth soccer refereeing, which I see primarily as an opportunity for teaching. I don't care about location - I expect to move to wherever I can find a school to work with. I have a brief resume and other materials, especially parent recommendations, that I can send you. I would love to visit. Please contact me at [DonMcKelvey@Earthlink.net](mailto:DonMcKelvey@Earthlink.net), or (617) 327-9366.

# DVD

## AERO's Butterflies DVD

Here is our exciting 42-minute documentary of our visit to Butterflies, a democratic program for homeless street and working children in Delhi.



*Vijay, 11, with Butterflies staff member Parwez, in the shelter*

To order the Butterflies video, go to the AERO website and click on 'videos,' or call the AERO office at 800 769-4171, or send \$20 plus \$3 postage to the AERO address (if you are in the USA).

"The Butterflies DVD is wonderful! When I first put it in I actually stood in front of the TV for about 15 minutes before I sat down! I really like the entire rawness & spontaneity of the questions, reactions, answers and reactions again!" D.F., FL



## Revolutionary Times

### An Education Collaborative?

It Can be Done  
BUT *Be Careful!*

See Page 28

The Case  
Against  
Education!



Page 32

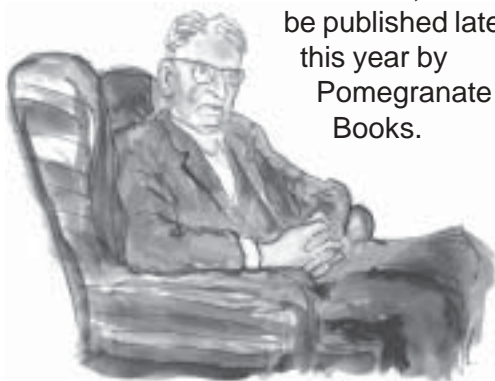


## Neill and Summerhill

By HUSSEIN LUCAS

In *Neill and Summerhill* Hussein Lucas tells the story of the man and his famous school and sets this story in the context of amazing changes in education and politics, during the first 70 years of the 20th Century. Hussein's book of interviews, provisionally titled *After*

*Summerhill*, will be published later this year by Pomegranate Books.



**Alexander Sutherland Neill** was born in Kingsmuir, Scotland in 1893, the third of eight surviving children of the village schoolmaster, or dominie. After a rather unhappy and academically inauspicious childhood he left school at 14 to work firstly as a clerk, then as a draper's assistant. Neither of these jobs proving a success, he was taken on by his father as a pupil teacher – that is, giving lessons to younger children in return for further education for himself. Neill continued in this mode until 1908 when, at the age of 25, he gained a place at Edinburgh University from which he graduated with an MA in English. A burgeoning career in publishing and journalism was cut short in 1918 by the outbreak of war.

Having failed the army medical, Neill was appointed acting head of Gretna village school. Here he was able to put into practice and develop his increasingly innovative ideas on education. Out of this experience came the first of his 20 books, *A Dominie's Log* (published 1916), which became an immediate best seller and made Neill, if not famous, very well-known.

A subsequent army medical examination passed Neill as fit for general military service and he was called up for training in 1917. Whilst on leave he met and came under the influence of Homer Lane who ran his Little Commonwealth for delinquent boys and girls using a system of self-government. This had a profound effect



*Summerhill's totem pole*

on shaping Neill's approach to the community aspect of education. Lane also introduced him to the work of Freud and other psychoanalysts. Neill's second book, *A Dominie Dismissed*, was published that year and like its predecessor sold well.

It was agreed that Neill would join the staff of Lane's community as soon as the war had ended, but before he could do so the Little Commonwealth was closed down.

Neill's third book, *The Booming of Bunkie*, was published in 1919. In that same year – the opportunity of working directly with Lane having been denied him (though the relationship continued) – Neill joined the staff of King Alfred School, in London, at that time the most progressive school in England. It was not progressive enough – or perhaps radical enough – for Neill however, and he left after five terms following a disagreement over self-government. One of the children in his class at King Alfred was Walter Neustatter whose mother, Lilian, an Australian married to a German eye surgeon, had been visiting her sister in England when war broke out and decided to stay on. She was impressed by this unusual man and his ideas about education, and on her return to Germany invited him to stay with her and her husband Otto.

In 1921, whilst staying with the Neustatters in Hellerau, a suburb of

Dresden, Neill visited the nearby Dalcroze School which had been founded before the war by Jacques Dalcroze as a center for the teaching of Eurhythmics. Christine Baer, an American and former pupil of Dalcroze, who now ran the center, was also taken with Neill's education ideas and suggested he should start an international school in an unused wing of the building. A limited liability company was formed and Neill invested what savings he had in what was to be the first 'Summerhill'. That year also saw the publication of his fourth and fifth books, *A Dominie in Doubt* and *Carrotty Broom*. Neill was thus already comparatively famous as a writer and thinker by the time he started his great adventure in education.

In 1923 a series of crises precipitated by the French army's occupation of the Ruhr, in an attempt to force German war reparations, resulted in the exchange rate from sterling to mark becoming extremely unfavourable, and Neill was impelled to look elsewhere to continue his educational experiment.

After several weeks' search in Austria he found a hostel on top of a mountain called Sonntagsberg, not far from Vienna. Lilian Neustatter – Frau Doctor – left her husband and went with him, as did Derrick Boyd and his younger brother Donald and a handful of other adults and pupils from Hellerau. New

ones joined. Mary Artner and Inge Foerstol, who came as pupils and later evolved into housemothers, and Bronwen Jones (Jonesie) a young mathematician who also taught photography and astronomy, were to remain as part of the Summerhill community for many years.

In Austria Neill completed the last of his five *Dominie* books, *A Dominie's Five* (pub. 1924), a children's adventure story in which the pupils featured as the principal characters. The stories were originally improvised in the presence of the children, a practice he would continue occasionally into his old age. A later collection, featuring a different generation, was published as *The Last Man*

*Alive*.

In June 1924 financial disaster struck again when the bank in which Neill had all his savings collapsed. He returned to England and with the help of Lilian Neustatter's sister found a house on the South West coast, in Lyme Regis, called Summer Hill.

Keeping the school in Lyme going was a tremendous struggle. Paying guests were taken in during the holidays, and for three years Lilian Neustatter worked without a break. Neill paid tribute later to her determination that the school should succeed. "Her optimism and energy were so great that neither of us ever thought of failure."

In 1926 *The Problem Child* was published, more serious in tone than its *Dominie* predecessors, in which Neill made plain that his interest was directed far more to the understanding of the psychology of children than to educational methodology. Certainly after its publication the number of children with more obvious problems who joined the School began to increase, though parents would often take them away as soon as they felt a cure had been effected.

In this book Neill showed himself to be one of the few educational writers prepared to discuss frankly and non-moralistically the importance of sex in the life of a child. He had already written in *A Dominie's Log*, "Most of us realise

that there is something wrong with our views about sex. The present attitude of education is to ignore sex, and the result is that sex remains a conspiracy of silence.” In *The Problem Child* he was more explicit. “I write it without blasphemy – that a child is nearer to God in masturbating than in repenting.” A remark that many would find shocking today, let alone almost 80 years ago.

But sexual honesty alone would not bring about the free person. There was also the matter of power. To his earlier observation “Freud showed that every neurosis is founded on sex repression,” he added, “Too little importance is attached to the power theories of Alfred Adler,” and expressed his belief that the motivation for delinquency lay in “trying to express power that has been suppressed... the anti-social boy, the leader of a gang of stone-throwers, becomes, under freedom, a strong supporter of law and order.”

*The Problem Child* sold well and after eight years was in its fourth edition. In 1927 two significant events occurred: Neill and Mrs Lins (who was 12 years his senior) were married and the lease on the Lyme building expired. Just outside the small town of Leiston in Suffolk, on the East coast 90 miles above London, the Neills found a house which, apart from a brief exodus during the war, was to establish Summerhill permanently on the world map of education.

The 30’s are sometimes looked on as a kind of golden age in the history of Summerhill. Many exceptionally gifted pupils and teachers were there during this time; the School began to gain some approval in the outside world; its fame spread. It was certainly Neill’s most prolific period as an author: five books were published between the beginning and end of the decade as well as numerous articles; earlier books were translated into Japanese and Scandinavian. Neill went on an extensive lecture tour in South Africa and also spoke in the USA, Scandinavia and several European countries as well as at home.

He found supporters in other schools and amongst the intelligentsia. In the same year that Summerhill moved to Leiston, Bertrand and Dora Russell

opened Beacon Hill School. Although Bertrand Russell placed rather too much emphasis on intellectual development for Neill’s liking they had much in common. But it was after Russell left Beacon Hill in 1931 that Neill found Dora Russell to be one of his few soul mates in the educational sphere. Indeed by the middle of the 30’s Neill referred to them both as “the only educators.” At least one other educator was to gain Neill’s approval: Bill Curry who in 1931 was appointed head of Dartington, even though Dartington itself Neill felt was too large for real self-government.

Neill was to become increasingly aware of the gap between himself and the progressive educators. In 1932 the New Education Fellowship established an association of progressive schools. Neill attended one meeting and spoke, but, as Dora Russell wrote, “A.S. Neill and I were regarded as so far to the left, educationally speaking, as to be almost beyond the pale.” Neill saw the progressive schools as having only one thing in common, “a dissatisfaction with conventional schooling,” whereas his concern was radical education based on “self-government and freedom from moral teaching.” The progressives were merely sugaring the authoritarian pill. In 1934 he formally resigned from the NEF group.

Outside of Curry and Dora Russell Neill felt he had few friends and indeed the decade started with a shock when the Committee on Private Schools seemed about to recommend stricter control of schools outside the state system. He foresaw “a few stupid inspectors demanding why Tommy can’t read,” and advocated that “we must fight to keep Whitehall out of our schools.”



“Beat it, pond life!”

The Problem Parent, 1932, expressed the view that Neill was to hold all his life: “There is never a problem child; there is only a problem parent. That may not be the whole truth, but it is nearly the whole truth.” Parents were a damned nuisance. “I am getting weary of clearing up the mess that parents make.”

But it was about this time that a new wave of parents, mostly left-wing intellectuals, began to send their ‘non-problem’ children to Summerhill, because of a positive belief in Neill’s methods rather than as a last resort or feeling of failure. Among the first were the scientist J.D. Bernal and his wife Eileen.

Although when he grew up, their son, Mike Bernal, was almost sure that his father never was a member of the Communist Party, several parents and teachers at Summerhill in the 30’s certainly were. In those days the discrepancy between educational freedom and the totalitarianism of communism was not so apparent as it later became. In the UK at this time Communism and left-wing politics in general tended to be mixed up with pre-war new-ageism in all its variety – the Men’s Dress Reform Society, the New Health Society, the World League for Sexual Reform... and Summerhill.

Most of the adults at Summerhill at this time, including Neill, fell into the ‘bohemian’ category – pipe smoking ‘lefties’ in open-neck shirts and corduroy trousers, nude sunbathing and ‘cranky’ diets. Mrs Lins, under the influence of a Swiss dietician, ensured a plentiful supply of fresh fruit, raw greens and wholemeal bread – Summerhill had its own vegetable garden and full-time gardener – and Neill coined his maxim that far more important than the three R’s were the three F’s: Freedom, fresh air and fresh food.

Although he never allied himself to any political party, Neill had strong left-wing sympathies at this time and made several favourable references to the ‘brave experiment’ of Communist Russia. In 1937 he spoke of it as a ‘creative civilization.’ However, later that year his suspicions were aroused when his visa application was turned down by the Soviet authorities without explanation.



Also, it was a matter of principle with him that, just as no child should be subjected to religious or moral propaganda, so it should be free from political molding. He tolerated and accepted Communist Party membership and activity amongst his staff but did not approve of them involving the children – in distributing the *Daily Worker* for example. In fact, many children were strongly influenced and several of them subsequently became Communist Party members or sympathizers – at least for a time.

With the advance of fascism and nazism, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, it would have been impossible to keep politics out of Summerhill, especially as Spanish and German refugees began arriving at the School and several parents were actively involved in anti right-wing organizations, one being killed in Spain.

In 1939 four air-raid shelters were constructed in the ground of Summerhill, though it was some time before the bombing raids commenced and they began to be used in earnest. The Garrett Engineering works in Leiston had put Summerhill in a potential target area. As late as Dunkirk Neill was still unsure whether or not to evacuate when the army took the matter out of his hands by requisitioning his property.

Neill looked back on the five years spent at Ffestiniog as the most miserable period of his life. He disliked the dampness and isolation of North Wales;

the narrowness and chapel fundamentalism of the locals reminded him of the village he grew up in; the war and its aftermath filled him with pessimism; and finally the drawn-out decline and subsequent death of his wife was a sad and depressing culmination to an active 24 year partnership.

For the first and only time in its life Summerhill was full to overflowing, and with a waiting list which could have doubled its roll overnight. But this was because of the war and the desire of parents to get their children out of range of the bombing. It also seemed to have been the chief motivation of some of the adults who found their way there together with refugees who needed a home and whom Neill found it difficult to turn away.

On top of everything else there was the scarcity of supplies caused by the war and the chronic shortage of cash. Luckily for Neill a parent of one of the younger children, Ena Wood, followed them to Wales to act as their cook and she was able, as Mrs. Lins' health deteriorated, to act as a sort of School Matron. Ena had trained as a nurse and was extremely practical and hard working. She declared the whole school vegetarian in order to secure them a better deal on their rations.

Apart from Neill's unwavering belief in the natural goodness and commonsense of children when left free to govern their own lives, perhaps the brightest spot in this period was his

friendship with the Austrian psychoanalyst, Wilhelm Reich. This had begun in 1935 when Reich attended a lecture Neill was giving at Oslo University. Neill had been reading Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* on the voyage over, and thought it the greatest book he had ever read.

Reich had developed a system which he called vegetotherapy – a combination of analysis and massage – to treat 'character armouring'. Neill had several sessions with him between 1937 and 1939 and obtained considerable emotional release from them as well as ridding himself of the stiff necks and headaches that had often plagued him. The two continued to correspond throughout the war years and after.

Neill was able to confide in Reich in a manner which he was unable to with any other adult. In fact he found many of the adults who joined Summerhill at this time extremely troublesome and was able to grumble about them in his letters to Reich. Most important of all he was able to express his deep sadness at his wife's decline.

Shortly after the move to Wales Mrs Lins suffered a slight stroke, which initiated mental deterioration. Neill wrote to Reich, "My wife fails fast and is most pathetic to see... it is a grim life to see one who was so energetic and capable go downhill like that."

Mrs Lins spent the last year of her life in a mental home in Harlech, where she died in April 1944. Neill, who had visited her regularly throughout this period, wrote a moving memorial concluding, "Her epitaph might well be: 'She belonged to tomorrow, to youth, to hope.'"

But if the 40's were the dark ages for Neill, for many of those pupils attending Summerhill for the first time it was still the golden age. Many of them even preferred the rugged wilds of Wales to the flat world of Summerhill in Suffolk.

Early in the summer of 1945, on a morning just a few days after the war ended, Neill and his dark-eyed attractive Ena Wood were married quietly in a London Registry Office. Neill wrote of his return to Leiston at this time that it was "maybe the most joyous day of my life." With Wales and his pessimism about the war behind him, and a young and vigorous wife beside him, he felt he



"Now scrape!"

had been given a new lease of life. On top of this he became for the first time, at the age of 63, a father, and was able to travel to the USA to see his beloved friend Reich. "Ena says I look years younger and happier since I came home from Maine (Reich's home)," he wrote after returning from his visit in 1947.

After the war Neill published two new books in the 40's, *Hearts not Heads in the School*, 1945, and *The Problem Family*, 1949, and one in the 50's, *The Free Child*, 1953. It was to be nearly a decade before his next book appeared.

His continuous financial worries were relieved by a group of parents who formed a committee to raise money for the School, (which they achieved largely by calling in overdue fees). A dreaded school inspection in 1949 turned out a largely favorable report. John Blackie, on the of the two inspectors, recalled his colleague, an old Etonian, remarking, "Yes, Neill, well I think this is rather a pleasant place: you know, it's almost as free as Eton." Neill was taken aback, and from that moment realized he had nothing to fear. Indeed he published the full report in *The Free Child*.

However, he received a shattering blow in 1950 when, whilst preparing for his third post-war visit to Reich, his visa application was rejected on the ground of his supposed communist sympathies. This was the era of the McCarthy communist which-hunts, but it is particularly ironic in that before the war Neill had been refused entry to the Soviet Union, presumably for being insufficiently sympathetic to Communism. In October 1950 he wrote to Reich, "More than ever I feel ALONE." They continued to correspond until Reich's death in 1957, but he was never again to see the one person who could give him "anything new."

The initial post-war euphoria had ebbed away: School numbers had started to dwindle and in the country at large the

new Education Act and desire to build a fairer and more democratic society had failed to take any account of Neill's educational concerns. But Summerhill remained a haven of sanity and life-affirming experiences for those fortunate enough to go there.

Sometime after Zoe's birth the Neills moved into the Cottage, a house at the

edge of Summerhill which had previously been sleeping accommodation for the youngest children. This gave them the possibility of at least some measure of private life. At the age of five Neill and Ena's daughter, Zoe, moved into the main house as a boarder.

Throughout the 50's Neill continued to lecture to parents and teachers, many

*The Big Beech*







“She’s multitasking.”

of whom were very sympathetic to his ideas and remember him as a brilliant speaker. But the climate of the new socialism of Britain’s welfare state was not favourable to independent initiatives. In Scandinavia Neill found the culture more responsive to notions of Freedom. His reception there was that of a VIP rather than an eccentric on the fringe of society.

In 1957 it was decreed that all private schools were to be registered. An inspection found the facilities at Summerhill to be well below ministry standards. That year the parent’s committee established itself as the Summerhill Society with the aim of forming “an organized body of opinion to support Mr Neill in his dealings with public authorities” as well as to raise funds to improve amenities.

In 1959 a further inspection found the School ‘drab, Spartan and comfortless,’ as well as being critical of much of the teaching. There were 44 children on roll at the time of the inspection. A year later this had fallen to 24. Many parents preferred rather more organized schools inspired by Summerhill such as New Sherwood and Kilquhanity House. “Like Summerhill used to be.” There was a feeling that Neill was now too old and losing his touch. Some told Neill they would send their children to Summerhill if he made lessons compulsory in the mornings. Neill was not prepared to compromise and just after his 77<sup>th</sup>

birthday, in a letter to a former housemother, he wrote, “Hardly any parents want freedom for their kids now,” however; help was at hand from an unexpected quarter. The New World was about to discover Summerhill.

In a letter to Reich shortly after his first post-war visit to the US, in 1947, Neill wrote about himself: “Neill, you are cheating yourself. USA doesn’t really care a damn if you come or stay at home.” And at the time he was right.

The US had a much larger and stronger progressive school movement that Great Britain, and its own education guru, John Dewey. It didn’t want another. *The Problem Child* had been published in the US before the war, but had attracted scant interest, and *The Problem Teacher*, published in 1946 did little better. Neill gave one public lecture in New York in 1947 and several throughout the States on his second visit in 1949 following publication of *The Problem Family* but, with one or two exceptions, made little impact. One person who was impressed by Neill was the child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, probably best-known in the UK for his book, *A Good Enough Parent*.

The 50’s ushered in a conservative backlash against progressive education, fostered by McCarthyism and the arms race with the Soviet Union, and anyway Neill was an undesirable alien, denied an entry visa. But in 1958 a New York

publisher, Harold Hart, perhaps sensing that the pendulum was about to swing again, wrote to Neill with the suggestion that he prepare a compilation of four of his earlier books. *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* was published in the same week John Kennedy was elected president. The timing was perfect: it became an immediate best seller – though in a small way. By the end of the decade it would become a phenomenal best seller, notching up over two million copies in the US alone.

In 1961 the American invasion began and the School roll doubled virtually overnight. Summerhill, at 40 years of age, was saved. Within a couple more years, by Neill’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1963, both he and it suddenly became ‘modern’.

Philip Larkin, in his poem, *Annus Mirabilis*, wrote:

Sexual intercourse began  
In nineteen sixty-three  
(Which was rather late for me) –  
Between the end of the Chatterly ban  
And the Beatles’ first LP.

This “annus mirabilis” which ushered in the Swinging 60’s and the permissive society was peculiarly receptive to the freedom which Summerhill symbolized. And even more so when it evolved into the hippy era. As Freer Spreckly, an English ex-pupil, found when he visited California, copies of Summerhill were everywhere and he was accorded celebrity status when he revealed he had been there. In fact many middle-aged people remember Summerhill as a 60’s phenomenon, and are surprised to learn it is still around or that it existed much before that decade.

There was a rush to open free schools in both the US and UK. Most of them were short lived. Freedom was a much more difficult and complicated business that people cared to think. Few people took the trouble to visit Summerhill to see how it worked. Most took what they wanted from the book, ignoring Neill’s oft-repeated warning that freedom should not be confused with licence, or that defining 60’s word ‘permissiveness’.

Like Dr. Spock, with his *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, before him Neill was to find his message distorted and misinterpreted. Perhaps



because of this Hart persuaded him to produce a book, called *Freedom Not Licence!*, consisting of a selection of questions from his huge fan mail, together with his replies. In the same year, 1966, a rather different set of questions and answers appeared in the UK under the title: *Talking About Summerhill* – one of his best books.

Neill refused to endorse any school simply because it acknowledged him in its prospectus. He was happy to be an influence for the good, but not to be the founder of a movement. “Let your school founders stand on their own feet,” he urged.

Nevertheless he seems to have enjoyed his celebrity status and accepted numerous invitations to appear on TV and radio, where he became a popular broadcasting personality and talked on a wide range of subjects other than education. He also found a wider outlet than hitherto in newspapers and magazines and joined the advisory panel of ‘Children’s Rights’, remaining there until the magazine folded in 1972.

In 1968 he visited America once more and appeared on the NBC *Tonight* show in front of his largest ever audience. Fifteen million people saw him, the presenter Orson Bean later called “the best guest the Tonight show ever had.” The US had forgiven Neill for his supposed Communist tendencies, though he had continued to be a vociferous protester against the Bomb. He had joined the Committee of 100 at the request of his old friend Bertrand Russell and in 1961 took part in a sit-down demonstration at the Polaris missile base in Holy Loch. After a 30 hours’ stint in a police cell he was fined ten pounds. Though he was not to repeat this experience he remained a supporter of the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament till the end of his days.

Academic recognition, in the form of honorary doctorates from three universities, came late for Neill and that it came at all is surprising and was only made possible by the tenor of the times in that decade when freedom fever gripped so many.

Though by no means all. In 1968 he was once again faced with his old enemies the school inspectors, and as usual feared the worst. Though the inspectors proved tougher than their predecessors their criticisms were mostly concerned with the state of the buildings. Improvements were demanded and made. They also commented on the poor standard of much of the teaching, and Neill saw some justification in this.

In 1969 a translation of *Summerhill* appeared in Germany under the title *The Theory and Practice of Anti-Authoritarian Education*. It caused a considerable stir, selling over a million copies in three years and precipitating the German invasion of pupils throughout the 70’s, when they replaced Americans as the largest minority group – to be followed in the 80’s by a wave of new pupils from Japan.

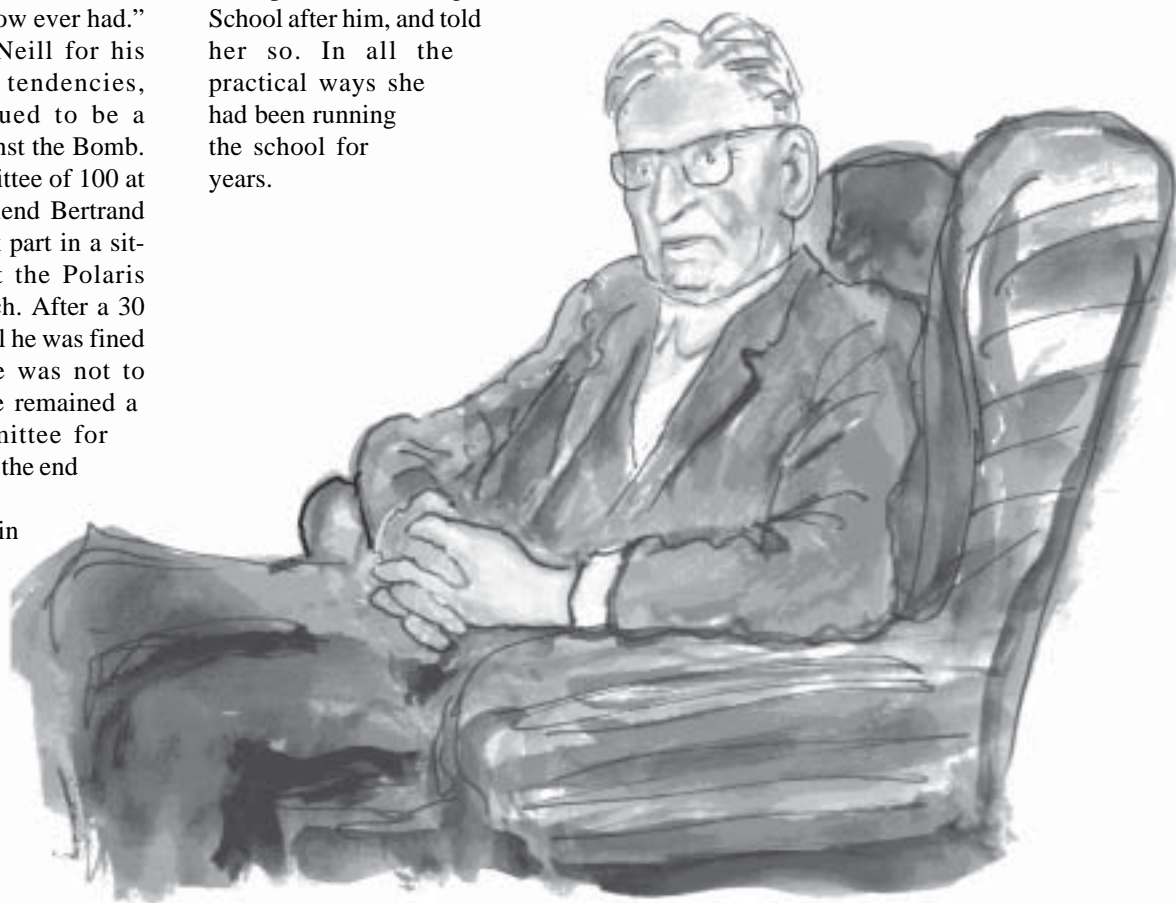
In 1971 Neill suffered a heart attack and had to spend a short period in hospital. For all of his later life he had wondered who would succeed him, or whether indeed Summerhill would survive his passing. Now the issue became more pressing. He made up his mind that his wife Ena would be capable of running the School after him, and told her so. In all the practical ways she had been running the school for years.

Neill’s last book, *Neill! Neill! Orange Peel!* was published in the US in 1972. The first half consisted of his autobiography which had been completed in 1939. The second half, covering the next 30 years, contained general reflections on Summerhill, education and life.

The next year saw its publication, in an English version, in the UK by which time Neill was writing, “I have suddenly grown very old and think more of painkillers than schools;” though he was still able to take pleasure in his first grandchild born in 1972.

In the summer of 1973 he had to go into hospital in Ipswich. After a short return to Summerhill he moved to the cottage hospital in nearby Aldeburgh where, on 22 September, he died peacefully sitting in a chair, just 25 days short of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. An obituary appeared in the Times.

A few days later children returned to Summerhill for the start of the new term, with Ena in charge.



# Woodstock Education Collaborative 2003 - 2004

By Lincoln Stoller

*Ever wanted to set up your own  
educational cooperative?  
Before you do you should read this  
splendid account of the pleasures and  
pitfalls that could be waiting for you.*

## Development

In the winter of 2003 a few families in the Woodstock, NY area met to discuss options for schooling our 4 and 5 year old children who were coming of kindergarten age. Most of the people in our group had a background in the arts and limited experience in education. Everyone in the group was parenting an only child, twins in one case. By the time spring arrived we had a group of 6 families, consisting of 10 parents and 7 kids.

Members of our group shared a suspicion of conventional education and its emphasis on uniform performance, lack of individual attention, and social indoctrination. We were interested in starting our own education group so that our kids would be supported as individuals. Our plan was to hire a facilitator whom we liked and trusted, and to have them meet with our children for 6 hours a day, three days each week for the coming school year. Aside from this we had no agenda.

We held a dozen organizational meetings to discuss logistics. We interviewed two facilitators, both young women who were child care providers and who were interested in careers in education. We choose the person with

teacher certification who demonstrated the clearest activities plan. While none of the parents were set on particular curriculum goals, some wanted to see their kids meet conventional age-based standards.

We agreed that we all trusted our facilitator's judgment and that we would let her design and conduct a program that was responsive to our kids needs. We expected that parents would be involved with the facilitator to "tune" the program. These were idealistic and heady times during which members of the group built stronger relations between their families and kids. We dealt with conflicts as they arose and we resolved the following issues:

### *Location:*

In an attempt to contain costs, retain control of our space, and draw as little public attention as possible we rented a large apartment that would function as both our facilitator's home and our group's meeting place. The location needed to be affordable, safe, centrally located, properly sized, inconspicuous, and with a supportive landlord. We were lucky to find such a place. In retrospect, we might have done better by renting space in a local church or community

center and spending more of our time and energy on organizational issues.

### *Insurance:*

We found an agent who could issue our group liability coverage. The cost depended on the number of kids and the amount of time they would be together. The whole policy cost about \$1,000 for the school year.

### *Accounting:*

We opened a bank account, decided upon a tuition structure and established a payment schedule. Parents would pay roughly \$25/day per child, and could enroll their child for either a 2 or a 3-day week. We had a supplies account, funded by a contribution of \$75 from each family, that would be replenished as necessary. The group paid for insurance and supplies separately, all other monies went directly to the facilitator, who was responsible for paying for rent, telephone, and utilities.

### *Commitment:*

Because our facilitator was depending on us to cover her cost of living, each family made a one-year commitment to the program. Tuition was divided into four "quarters" with the first and the last being paid before the program began. We planned out a school year, complete with vacation days for the group, and an allowance for sick and make-up days for the facilitator. Families could choose their own vacation schedules, but they would not get a refund if they choose to be absent when the group was in session.

### *Parent Helper:*

We agreed that one parent would be in attendance to help the facilitator every day. This would be a rotating obligation and parents would sign up on a calendar in advance. We did this to ensure that each family would be informed and involved. We also knew that a helper would be needed at certain times, such as when the kids were playing outside. The facilitator was charged with bring a snack for the group. Being a helper also provided parents with the opportunity to share their skills with the group.

### *State Regulation:*

We considered New York State regulations that apply to schools and



*Woodstock Education Collaborative Art - Chogi's Guitar Painting*

daycare centers. We spoke to daycare, and pre-school operators, and home school parents. Without making our plans clear we consulted representatives of the various NY State agencies: the Department of Education, who oversees education, and Child Protective Services, who oversees daycare operations.

We discussed how we wanted to present ourselves to the state, and whether we wanted to register ourselves at all. We decided not to register as either an educational program or a daycare for three reasons:

- 1) We did not feel this was required.
- 2) We did not want to bear the burden of state regulation.
- 3) We felt that if the state should require us to register, then we would meet their requirements at that time.

While forming our group some of us, myself included, were involved with the legal defense of another independent education program in our neighborhood. This other group was under assault from Child Protective Services who claimed they were operating an illegal daycare and was threatening the group stiff fines and penalties.

That case was still developing at the time we were getting started. We did not know which side would prevail, but what we saw soured us to the prospect of dealing with state agencies. The issue eventually went to court and Child Protective Services soundly lost its case. Nevertheless, state policy at that agency remains unchanged and the threat of unjustified harassment remains real to this day. As it turned out, the problems our group encountered came from a totally different direction — one that we did not anticipate.

The area where we spent the least energy was program development and

decision-making within our organization. We merely agreed to decide all issues by unanimous vote, and to empower our facilitator to make all program-related decisions. We would meet monthly, or more frequently if necessary, to review our progress, resolve problems, and develop new ideas.

Things proceeded smoothly through the summer and everyone's spirits remained high. None of us had organized anything of this kind. I think we were all amazed at how well everything was going. We shared a utopian faith in our process. If you have been involved in independent community organizations, then perhaps you can see the problems that lay ahead.

## Too Much Structure

Our program began smoothly enough. Some kids were more comfortable than others. Some parents spent more time



during drop-off so that their kids would become at ease and then transition into the day's activities. However, not all kids were equally receptive to the program.

Two of the kids, twin brothers, were familiar with a third boy who had been their playmate. These three had been cared for by our facilitator and had developed their own dynamic with her and with each other. Old rivalries arose that manifested as issues of hitting, biting, and crying. The facilitator tried to defuse the tensions by providing individual attention, but it seemed that the problems had more to do with the way the group was organized, and how this organization brought out conflict.

Our son was disruptive. He refused to follow the facilitator's plan of when to change topics. He wanted to maintain his focus on certain projects for longer periods. He did not like the "circle time" when the facilitator tried to focus the kids' attention on problems pertaining to the group. He had trouble subduing his energy at this time of the day, and he may have felt uninvolved, threatened or misrepresented. He expressed his frustration, as I would have at his age, by tuning out.

The more active, independent, and less verbal kids were rebelling. Some parents felt that the facilitator was

conducting overly organized, or inappropriately organized program. They met with the facilitator and reorganized daily activities according to a more flexible routine. The space was reorganized to allow more simultaneous, separate activities. The result was uniformly appreciated by the kids and largely resolved the conflicts.

## Too Much Parent Interference

The three girls in the group formed a clique that provided them with a private community away from the frenzied activities of the four boys. One girl expressed her frustration at the gun and swordplay. Another pressed her dominance in the clique in a way that intimidated the youngest girl. The parent-helper intervened. After review, some parents felt the helper's action was heavy handed.

There were other problems with parent helpers. The facilitator was not aggressive in circumscribing the parents' role. On the other hand, it had not been made clear that she had such power. Some of the parent helpers may have, or appeared to have exercised executive

oversight at the same time that they were supposed to be supporting the facilitator. Kids different behavior in the presence of their parents undermined the standards set by the facilitator.

After a few months the role of the parent helper was scaled back. The new plan was that the helper would be there only during drop-off, and during snack and the subsequent free-play period. At other times parents were asked to leave the kids alone under the facilitator's supervision. This was a positive change.

## A Real Battle Over Weapon Play

The issue of the boys' aggressive play-fighting continued to rankle certain parents. They felt that this aggressive and noisy play was intimidating their girls. They insisted that their kids were suffering and a new policy against this kind of behavior should be put into place. Parents lined up on opposite sides of this issue with the parents of the girls advocating limits on play fighting, and the parents of the boys insisting that it had an important developmental role.

The facilitator listened to the parents dispute this issue and said that she and the kids would address it themselves. She implemented a policy of no gun or sword-play while inside, except as part of an inclusive activity such as a drama, or during a period explicitly devoted to play of this kind. Some parents insisted the facilitator follow a harder line against weapon play, and that it was their right as parents and group organizers to set this policy. The parents' faith in the facilitator was being tested, and the facilitator's autonomy was at issue.

One group felt that it was disrespectful to subject kids to the pressure of having to resolve this issue after they had already asked for our help. They felt that it was their obligation as parents to protect the interests of their kids. The second group, to which I belonged, felt that the facilitator and the kids should be given the chance to define and resolve the problem themselves. We felt that an executive decision was disrespectful to the facilitator and to the kids who were learning how to control their environment.

*Woodstock Education Collaborative Art - Kiri's Heart*



Our parent meetings became fractious. Some parents were more concerned with their own issues, than the orderly operations of the group. We could not reach a consensus and we had no protocol on how to proceed without one. Because we had no group leader, no rules of order, and no limits on discussion our meetings amplified our differences rather than resolved them.

## A Fundamental Conflict Over Group Control

I found the events that were unfolding to be fascinating. The central issues were those of decision-making and control. Dealing with these issues is essential to both personal and community development. Most other parents found the events disturbing and unproductive. Some saw these struggles as evidence that the collaborative was not working.

During this struggle the facilitator was pulled in different directions. Each parent took a different role, and each had some claim to authority. Some offered to work with our facilitator, some tried to convince her to act on their behalf, and some insisted that their needs were paramount. At the same time our facilitator had to plan her program, address the kids' needs, redress individual problems, act as the advocate for the kids, and act as her own advocate in creating the program. And while a parent who felt burned-out could take a break, the facilitator could not.

## Issues Reach An Impasse

Our group meetings degenerated into hostile arguments over abstract issues. There were accusations of insensitivity and disingenuity. Frustrated parents stopped attending the meetings. Subgroups met with each other privately in order to clarify their position and solidify their base of support. Once this came to light there were others who wanted the private meetings to cease, arguing that things were being said behind their backs. Still other parents attempted to play the role of peacemaker, but these efforts backfired and the group became completely polarized. The issue of weapon play, which was the pretense

for much of the discussion, appeared to be of greater importance to the parents than it was to the kids.

A breaking point was reached when some parents became angry and accused others of being deceptive and manipulative. Some people were offended and broke off further discussion. Group meetings stopped. During this time the kids continued to meet normally with the facilitator, and the facilitator worked with the kids to address their problems. During this final period the kids had some of their best times together.

For the last 2 months of the year the two groups of parents largely avoided each other. At most we exchanged pleasantries when we dropped our kids off. Some of us were concerned that the kids would be infected by the negativity of their parents. As far as I could tell this did not happen.

Once the school year ended it was clear that the group would not reconvene. Not only were the parents unwilling, but the facilitator also had no desire to continue with the program.

## Some Conclusions

It is now 9 months after the end of our experiment. Our kids have gone in different directions: some to private school, some to public school, and some are being home schooled. Two of the boys, including ours, now attend the local Sudbury Valley School. The other two boys go to public school. All of them say they are having a good time at their respective schools and they remain close friends.

I cannot gauge the effect that our short-lived group had on the development of our kids. I doubt there will ever be a consensus about our experiment. I do know that our son is now more enthusiastic about attending the Sudbury Valley school than he has been about attending any other program in the past: he wants to get to school each day, and will spend as much time there as he can.

What transpired between the parents had nothing to do with their kids' education. In gaining what was probably our first opportunity to revisit our own conflicted and unhappy past, some of us were

swept away by our feelings. We started what we thought was an education collaborative for our kids, but what we really poured our hearts into was an education collaborative for ourselves. And to this degree I feel we achieved something truly spontaneous, unprecedented, and deeply therapeutic. I'm glad that our kids survived unscathed.

## Some Advice

This project taught me why organizations, even small ones, develop written plans for governance. All those tedious rules of order could have saved our group from spinning out of control. I'm referring to things like regular meetings, assigning the roles of chairman and secretary, electing a president, having an agenda, taking and approving minutes, passing motions, and following written guidelines.

I have since spoken to experienced organizers, people who have organized successful schools. They listen to my story with knowing smiles. They've been there – it's familiar terrain. They confirm that organizational structure is the key to keeping everyone focused on the goals of the organization.

Had we followed this approach we would have had a more successful program, and we would have saved our facilitator much anguish. But this is all we could have had, and it's my feeling that the implosion that we experienced will do more for us as adults, and probably more for our kids, than anything we could have planned.

## Blattitudes



*Some people live under protest.*

# The Case Against Education!

by Simon  
Robinson

I have been a teacher (well, an Assistant Language Teacher anyway) for the last seven years in Japan, and as such I have had a lot of time to think about what I am doing and where I am doing it.

The conclusion I have come to is that these schools that I found myself teaching in are fundamentally flawed in the most profound respects. Nowadays I look around myself while at school and I see little but a systemized attempt to crush the humanity out of my students.

I wish to make absolutely clear that I am talking about all schools, or more specifically all compulsory schooling, including that which I had inflicted upon me in my own childhood. People, both Japanese and Westerners, often ask me what the differences are between schooling in England and Japan. I do not find that there are any major significant differences in the *nature* of the schooling being practiced in the two countries.

As John Holt said, "If the medicine is making you sick, stop taking the medicine." The way we educate our young, the way I was educated and the way I now find myself educating, is fundamentally flawed. The problems we see in schools are very much created by the schools themselves.

Not only are our schools inappropriate but the way we as individuals and as a society view learning and education is fundamentally flawed and the very terms in which we define the discourse are flawed. Remember: everyone goes to school, and so everyone has been colored by its influence and its values. In order to assess, and if necessary get away from those values, we are first going to have to understand what they are.

## (1) Everyone goes to school

Everyone goes to school. You went, I went, and everyone we know went or is currently going. Think about that fact for a minute. Virtually one hundred percent of the population of our society

goes to school. Everybody. That fact alone should give you pause for thought. Whilst on the face of it this would seem very reassuring ("Since everybody goes, it must be okay"), in fact this should make you start to think, "What if it is wrong?" Since school is so ubiquitous, since everybody goes, we had better be damn sure that the theories it is based on are correct, because otherwise we could be committing a very serious error indeed.

## (2) Children need to learn this stuff

The second assumption behind the ideology of compulsory schooling is one so obvious that it needs to be stated before we really realize that it is there. It is this: children need to learn the stuff we are making them go to school to learn. This is taken as truth and gospel by virtually everyone in our society.

This assumption is actually very closely related to the first, in fact is merely a qualification of it. If the first assumption was that "children would never learn anything if we did not make them," then this second assumption is that "okay, so they would learn *something*, but they would not learn *the things that they need*."

I am not trying to claim that much of what is learned in schools is a waste of time – far from it – most of the knowledge taught in schools is extremely useful, often vital, in the areas in which it applies.

## (3) The students will learn if we make them

You cannot compel someone to learn, because any true learning requires energy, thought, and active participation on the part of the learner – to the extent that she finds herself thinking about it in random moments as she tries to grasp and understand the concepts and connections. This can only happen when a learner *wants* to learn and understand. The absolute minimum requirement is willingness, though really you need enthusiasm.

Timothy Reagan, in his study of non-western educational traditions, *Non-Western Educational Traditions – Alternative Approaches to Educational Thought and Practice*, notes that historically compulsory education has been a feature always of highly stratified societies, i.e. of societies where the lower orders are controlled by the higher orders. This is because compulsory schooling sets up power relationships of dominance, thereby getting children used to being subordinate, and so they grow up accepting that role in society. In effect, they are socialized and indoctrinated to be obedient and respectful at best, or if this is not possible then they are at least afraid of the authority that stands over them.

John Taylor Gatto expands on this hypothesis. Compulsory schooling produces students who are less creative, and more obedient and subservient, less confident, less self-sufficient and more accepting of societies status quo. Paulo Freire wrote a whole book, called *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, about how compulsory schooling serves to keep the lower orders in place. Those students of course make up the next generation of society, which will be correspondingly accepting of the status quo and of its place as workers working for the ruling class.

Compelling students damages the self-esteem of the unwilling, creating negative attitudes to learning anything at all, and instilling both a fear of and anger towards teachers, adults in general, and authority figures. It also denies that freedom should be a basic human right. A person should be able to decide how they spend their time, whether a six-year-old or a sixty-year-old. Anyone of any age who is oppressed will feel the same way (unless they have been indoctrinated not to).

Why do we have democracy in our society? One reason in the prevention of abuse by those in power. Another reason is because autonomy is one of the things humans need to be happy, and



at base level the idea of democracy is about the idea of the right of each person to be happy, to live in freedom and to live as they choose to live. Studies show that giving people control over their working lives, involving them intimately and meaningfully in the decision-making process, is the most significant thing you can do to improve people's overall levels of satisfaction. This applies no matter how unpleasant or tedious the work might be – one study involved dustbin men who were allowed to decide for themselves how they divided themselves up into teams and went about covering the routes they needed to cover.

It is curious that we do not usually grant this right to choose to children. Somehow we as a culture do not consider the need for a sense of autonomy to be important in children, as if they were somehow less than human, only half-humans until they grow up. Of course, we do much of this because we think it is in the child's best interest,

Here is the problem: Yes, our stated purpose now is to produce able, independent, thinking people, but we are still using to that end a tool that was fashioned a hundred years ago for a very different purpose: compulsory schooling was designed to *dumb down*, not *educate*, and hence we see this tragic gap between the way people really learn and the way we are schooling them. Gatto argues that this is part of the beauty of the design – since it indoctrinates each new generation with the same set of values, each successive generation is hamstrung from making any new choices.

However, to Gatto's thesis I would also add that a patriarchal attitude to children is a part of a larger worldview stemming from the Victorian and Puritan ideas of "man as a savage whose natural urges must be tamed," an idea that has its roots in the biblical doctrine of original sin and is thus in many ways central to the western philosophical view of the world.

Compulsory schooling kills the love of learning that could potentially advance a persons standing beyond being 'a worker'. It does more than that: it breeds a hatred of learning. If you find

that difficult to believe then you need to take another look at the difficult students in your low-grade classes - they *hate* learning, and revel in their ignorance. Then take a look at (and listen to the conversations of) some "working class" people in your area – this is what your students will grow up into. Note the lack of intellectual activity and aspiration, and as you do, remember that this is less a function of "innate intelligent," and more a function of the fact that they have been turned off of thinking.

Compulsory schooling originally also had one more very important aim: by making uniform the education of whole generations across a whole country, it aimed to produce a uniform society. This uniform society would have uniform tastes, which would make it much easier for industry to turn out uniform products (at much greater economies of scale) for consumption by this uniform populace. Now fast-forward 100 years: If a whole generation of young people has their creativity stifled by compulsory education, and sees the only meaningful rebellion against this as living an MTV lifestyle, that will make it much easier to sell huge amounts of Coca-Cola. Here in Japan, the schooling is so oppressive that the students cannot wait to get away from school, but their chief rebellion is to go shopping for the latest fashions and cute characters.

Our students are now largely cut off from most of the pleasures that can be

students come to regard learning and thinking as unpleasant activities, essentially turning themselves stupid.

In regarding this issue, I think that my time in the Japanese system has been invaluable, because in Japanese schools there is very little more than lip-service being paid to the idea of producing able, independent and thinking people, a fact that has been lamented by nearly everyone with anything to say on the matter. Thus I have been able to look at compulsory education unmasked, as it were, and to see that it is about little more than indoctrination for social control. It is of course a cliché to claim this about Japan, so to bring this cliché to life I would like to describe a couple of instances of how this control is enacted.

In my school, any student that is late for school in the morning has to sit by the staff room in the *seiza* kneeling position. This position is painful, but the students are nevertheless made to sit in it for fifteen to twenty minutes before being allowed to go to their lessons. They also receive a "late" mark in their mark book, and to further reinforce the point, a count is kept of how many students are late in each month.

Shirt-dashi is another crime. The white shirts of the school uniform are to be tucked neatly into the trousers at all times. Of course, all the boys untuck their shirts, partly because the tucked-in style



*The seiza kneeling position*

had in life for free. Meanwhile they are locked into large classrooms where the anger of oppression is refocused on each other to the result that the classroom becomes a battleground of competitive behavior, of which one of the chief characteristics is an obsession with fashion and cute toys. The other significant characteristic is that the

is pathetically dorky, but mainly because to do so demonstrates their rebellion against the school rules. The teachers are thus constantly haranguing the students to tuck their shirts in, which contributes considerably to the atmosphere of the school: teaching is a day spent making people do things they do not want to do.

# The Alchemy of Learning a student teaches her teacher

Chris Canfield

*Chris teaches English and History at The Community School, an independent day school serving grades 7-12 in South Tamworth, New Hampshire. He is also Dean of Students.*  
[www.communityschoolnh.org](http://www.communityschoolnh.org)

What do you do when a kid tells you, “I’m not coming to your class”? If you’re me, as your back, neck, and jaw stiffen, you clench your teeth, and say (maybe even hiss), “Oh, you won’t...” followed by a nasty little sarcastic comment as your feet start moving—toward the classroom in certainty you’ve “won” or toward the “authorities” to get backup. When Hally said it to me, the stiffening reflex began, but something stopped me. Thank goodness. In that moment I paused and breathed and relaxed. She was a hard worker. That moment, that little moment, began an experiment that has resulted in one of my most satisfying teaching experiences.

Hally is tall and statuesque; I’m short; she calls me “little man”. She is blunt, quick to react, iron-willed, clever, *artistic*, and driven to succeed. Liz, her tutor, spent ten days out West looking at colleges with Hally. Each morning, Hally disappeared into the bathroom for 30 or 40 minutes. She’d emerge, the Hally of the day, each day a work of art. She is, I have learned a little at a time over two years, remarkably self-aware. She is also painfully dysgraphic.

The Community School is small. We have an 8-to-1 student-teacher ratio and a monthly rotation of classes, so teachers and students are likely to have as many as several classes together over the course of a year. When Hally told me that she wouldn’t come to my year-long English workshop, I knew a few things about her. I knew she had a tutor with whom she met weekly for highly productive extra help. I knew she was devouring formula fiction novels. I knew her father had served in Vietnam. The previous spring she’d written a research paper about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. While it did not meet the MLA standards for research or obey the rules of standard written English, and while its content might have been as much the ideas of websites as the ideas of Hally, the kid found and read through at least a dozen articles, many of which were full of statistical analysis.

In my first month at The Community School, the fall before the “I’m not coming to class incident,” I walked out onto the porch to breathe in the end of the week and found Hally on a bench. We were the last people at school. “Who you waiting for, Hally?” I asked innocuously, new teacher making nice with one of the few students I hadn’t yet spoken to. “My father,” Hally snapped. I felt the bite of February in that September air, and I shut up. Not much after, a little Nissan pickup pulled in. Hally’s face lit up as she leapt from the porch calling, “Daddy!”

So, beneath it all, I knew that Hally was a softy. I also knew that her first reaction to direction was often to bark, “I’m not doing that, Chris” and then to storm

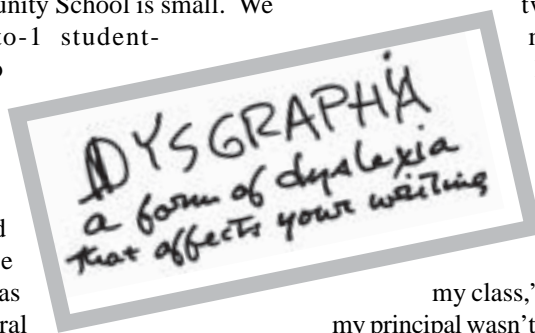
away. But by the next class meeting she’d have taken my direction—on this essay or that research paper—and have clearly spent a lot of time doing so.

What I remember in that “I’m not coming to your class” moment is managing to stay relaxed. I paused a moment before asking, “Why not?” Hally explained that she didn’t like the kitchen, our “classroom,” a homey place with fairly ugly tables that seat a dozen or so people, a four burner stove, two sinks, scads of mismatched kitchenware, a couple of beat up old refrigerators, and the occasional wandering kid.

“You don’t have to come to my class,” I began, hoping that my principal wasn’t overhearing me, “but you have to check in with me at the beginning of every class and tell me what you’re doing, what you’ve done, and what you’re going to do to show me that you’re learning.”

That was the fall of Hally’s junior year. In the “I’m not coming to class” class, Hally would come find me and usually tell me she was reading some vampire novel. Most often during my class, Hally would sit in our lobby, reading in front of the woodstove—fireless in the warm days of fall, fired up through our long New Hampshire winter, and fireless again in the spring. Now and then I’d have to chase away some of her lobby-hanging pals, but, mostly, she read.

When Hally had an assignment in another class things changed. She would appear at check-in snapping, “Chris,” in a tone any drill sergeant would envy. This, I quickly came to understand, meant she would be meeting with Liz, her tutor, and wanted to be prepared. Now and then she’d let me critique issues of organization or expression, but usually she just wanted me to “fix it.” I quickly understood that there’s not much point in drilling Hally in how to spell or how to differentiate between complex and compound sentences. So, I’d “fix it.” She’d be happy. I’d see her the next day. We’d repeat the drill. This pattern repeated itself right up until the week Hally finished her senior project—draft upon draft upon draft.





### *The Community School*

Really, it's that simple. Hally would show up and demand help. At the Community School, our grades are pass/fail coupled with narrative evaluations. Hally's evaluations repeatedly point out her capacity for asking for help. They also almost always include a variation on this comment from a class in her sophomore year: "Hally is the kind of student who takes pride in simply knowing what is expected and completing it efficiently and promptly."

Hally had seen and been fascinated by the Boston Museum of Science's Foucault's Pendulum. She decided to make one. Here's a snapshot of Hally's project: In the middle of a class period, at least eight kids, the science teacher, the librarian, and I are hunting for a bowling ball that our former physics teacher had cemented a hook into – Hally is perturbed – and imperious. Then the twelve-pound bowling ball is swinging a foot above the floor. It swings four inches above the floor. Two inches above. The magnet on the end of the bowling ball describes a pattern in the metal filings Hally has sprinkled on the floor. You get the idea.

In the end, the project didn't quite work. We never got the pendulum to swing long enough or straight enough, but all the while, Hally and I read together about the physics of how Foucault's Pendulum bares witness to the earth's rotation.

I had Hally for a class or two her senior year, but week in and week out, she'd appear and ask for help. Senior project is a student's culminating experience at the Community School. At its most simple, sometime during the first half of the year, students leave school for a month to study. Some find internships.

Some find mentors to foster them through a creative endeavor. Some travel. They return and spend the rest of the year creating a report.

Sometime around February of her junior year, Hally asked me if I'd take a look at her senior project proposal. I still hadn't fully recognized Hally's tenacity and agreed without really thinking she'd have anything soon. The next morning she handed me her proposal. Expecting a rough sketch of an amorphous idea, imagine my wonder as I read a plan that not only explicitly stated the goal, finding the right college for Hally, but the plan—books to read, interviews to conduct, schools to visit—including a detailed itinerary. Hally's resulting senior project, "Finding the Right College for an Eccentric Student" was an honor to behold.

Hally visited art schools in Maine, Massachusetts, and New Mexico; colleges that espouse hands-on learning and field work in Arizona and New England; and straight liberal arts colleges in Massachusetts and Vermont. The straight schools left her cold; the hands-on ones were intriguing; the art schools captivating. But all the while Hally was aware of her dysgraphia and how difficult it made writing. As she visits the colleges, her journal entries chronicle her likes and dislikes—always candidly, never disrespectfully.

That future began two falls ago at Landmark College in Putney, Vermont. The school promised Hally eight hours of homework a day. While she spends the brunt of that time working with tutors and learning specialists, eight hours on top of classes *is* eight hours. But Landmark's focus, training the learner to find her strengths and to use them to

overcome her weaknesses, is Hally's focus. Her single-mindedness has convinced her parents to spend the small fortune for the two-year program. Hally plans to use Landmark as her stepping-stone to college.

Senior project culminates with a senior project evaluation. I learned a lot at Hally's evaluation. My principal was at a conference and couldn't be there. She had, however, been in dialogue with Hally through most of the project. She'd recommended that Hally combat her nervousness about facing down the evaluation team by arriving with paper and pencils, and that she draw while we peppered her. We consisted of Suzanne, Hally's favorite teacher, Liz, Hally's beloved tutor, and me.

While our fondness and respect for Hally and our principal's drawing suggestion obviously helped her feel safe, Hally's poised and considered responses awed me. Hally is a girl of few words, though they're usually well-chosen. She's also shy about speaking in public; in fact, it was touch and go with her senior project presentation. Until the week her presentation date arrived, we weren't sure whether or not she would get up in front of the whole school. When you get right down to it, she didn't: I introduced Hally to the room, and she, sitting cross-legged, responded, "Okay, listen. I don't like how we have someone stand in front of the whole group. I want everyone to sit in a circle." It was the quickest the fifty of us ever moved!

An hour before the evaluation, Hally was nervous, and she met with me to calm down and prepare. She decided I should take notes of some of the things on her mind, notes she could use during





# Tsunami

By Vani

(Vani came to the IDEC in Bhubanishwar from the Abacus Montessori School.) I live in Chennai (in a sea-facing house!) and I'm a student of Abacus. I'm okay – although the tidal wave that hit us came rushing through with all its fury at about 14-ft and broke down the compound wall of the plot before ours. It was so scary as there is just nothing you can do. I felt so helpless. Luckily, the wave just stopped in front of our house (thank God!). We are all just shocked right now and too scared to go back. We've moved to our old house, which is nowhere near the sea.

By Niru

(Niru is a 16-year-old homeschooler in Southern India. She was an editor of the daily newsletter at the IDEC.) Unlike other places along the coast, the surge took the form of an actual wave, and the horror stories are still piling up. The refugees are pouring into towns in the landlocked districts, and the town nearest to where I live - Tiruvarur - is one of these. Very few buildings within the reach of the tsunami are left standing, and entire villages have been razed to the ground. People have already begun rescue services, but the effort is still inchoate and disorganised. Most of the fishermen and traders around Nagapattinam are reasonably well off; the larger teams make about a thousand rupees a day in peak season - not at all a bad sum, especially in a rural area. These people had expensive jewellery, wore good clothes, and made merry on a grand scale when they had to. The main problem seems to have been that they were mistrustful of the government and did not put their valuables in safety deposits or avail themselves of savings schemes. As a result, they were penniless at one stroke - or one wave.

To these people, receiving food and clothes as alms from strangers is undignified, to say the least. On finding a few cast-offs and torn clothes among the clothes sent to them, one woman says, "We too, were rich. I had lots of gold and silver ornaments. Why should I wear something I would have thrown away before without a thought?" What they want, these people say, is not food or clothing, but means to restart their lives.

The Rapid Action Force (RAF) evacuated people promptly after yesterday's warning of a second tsunami following a 5.5 earthquake in the Andamans. I was one of the few people who were crazy enough to go to Nagapattinam yesterday from my safely landlocked village despite this, and everything less than 3 kilometres from the sea was deserted. Police and military personnel were everywhere, coordinating food distribution to the people huddled in marriage halls and temples. Clothes which had been rejected by the refugees lay in tangles on the road. Other people are moving inland in a steady stream, carrying what they can.

According to the locals the tsunamis hit at roughly fifteen-minute intervals. The first wave came in and took all the people, mostly children, who were on the beach - playing, as it was holiday Sunday and Christmas vacation. The wave was fifteen feet tall, and the water came inland two kilometres, past two streets of houses, and went back immediately. As people ran out to search for the missing people, the second and third waves hit. The timing was as bad as it could be.

the evaluation. Here are some of the notes Hally dictated to me:

*I know reading and writing are hard for me. It took 18 years and a lot of tears to learn this. Because if you have a learning difference, it is twice as hard to do something because you have to read, figure out, retain all that info when other people that don't have a learning difference skip this step. So you're always behind and they're always in front. No fun. But if you understand how you personally learn, you've made that double work load better. It takes a long time.*

**Reading** For example, when I read, sometimes I have to read it more than once. Sometimes up to five times because I have to figure out the words. I had to learn to break them down and sound them out. It's like the pieces of a puzzle that I put back together so it flows and I am able to understand it.

**Writing** is the hardest. My mind's moving with ideas but I have to stop all the time to figure out how to spell what I'm thinking which is really starting from scratch, and then I lose my thoughts. I get frustrated, angry, and my instinct is to walk away, but I found that that gets me nowhere. Breaks are good but the only thing that makes it easier is to just suck it up and get it done.

I'm reminded again of Hally in the kitchen: "I'm not coming to class, Chris." "She doesn't care," could easily have been my reaction. It's this we as teachers need to recognize: all learners struggle, but all learners *want* to care. If we could be a little quieter, take that page from Hally's book and observe, what might we find? How do we stifle our students? When is the class or its content or our manner or the classroom off-putting—as it had been for Hally in that kitchen? My hockey coach used to tell us to pause before shooting, to see the possibilities in that extra second. I could never do it, and I never amounted to much as a hockey player. But I never forgot that lesson. With Hally, I think I applied it. By letting Hally not come to my class, I gained far more than a student: I got one of my finest teachers.

# Books etc.

By Aleksandra Majstorac Kobiljski

**The Science Behind the Genius** By Angeline Stoll Lillard Oxford University Press. An important new book has just been released describing the Montessori experience in depth. This is the first book published in America to explain the modern day science behind this education technique developed nearly a century ago. The book carefully demonstrates how ongoing brain research and studies about child development support the validity and effectiveness of the Montessori approach. It discusses what happens in carefully prepared Montessori environments and shows why the method works so well when used correctly.

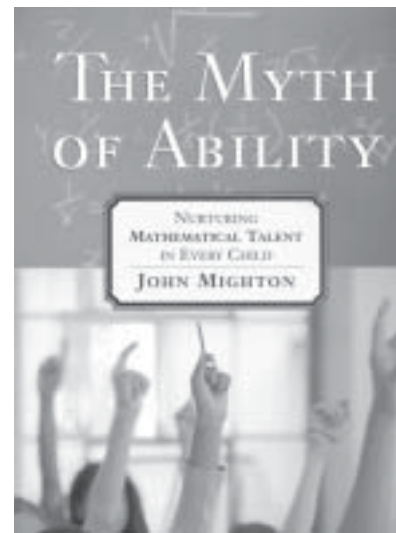
**High Schools in Crisis: What Every Parent Should Know** By Ellen Hall and Richard Handley This book explains to parents what is happening with teenagers in the large and outdated public high schools. It puts a finger on the rage that children feel and the degree to which they feel failed by the system. There are two of chapters that place the book in larger debates – A New Model for the Classroom and The School as Community. Those two chapters are a vote in favor of small schools. Both educators and parents will find themselves in the middle of an interesting debate when reading the book. Being based on over a decades experience of an alternative school, the book is a strong voice in the small school camp. It is a valuable resource for parents who try to understand what their children are getting into by enrolling public high schools. In a boarder sense, the book is a strong advocate of educational alternatives. But the question in the air remains - are small schools a panacea?

**The Compassionate Classroom; Relationship Based Teaching and Learning** By Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson Ever since the concept of emotional intelligence became well known educators have considered ways in which to accommodate new findings in brain research. This book demonstrates the connection between learning and the relationships between students and teachers. It is strongly based on non-violent communication principles. For teachers not familiar with non-violent communication it will take multiple readings but for those already familiar with the principle it is a helpful guide for classroom implementation. It is filled with exercises and role-plays that could be introduced to the classroom to enhance understanding. This is a great curriculum development resource!

**Genius Denied: How to Stop Wasting Our Brightest Young Minds** By Jan and Bob Davidson with Laura Vanderkam With failing schools and one-size-fits-all solutions, gifted children seem to be the first to feel the rejection. Although Davidsons and Vanderkam are not the first to note the waste that goes on in the classroom, they paint a grim picture. Classroom work geared to the lowest common denominator is only too painfully obvious in a wide array of examples the book has to offer. This book is not only a call to nurture the children's talents but it's also a call to accept the exceptional needs of exceptional children. Parents and educators must give these children their due, even if it means taking different educational paths. A parental MUST-READ!

## The Myth of Ability: Nurturing Mathematic Talent in Every Child

By John Mighton This man did what many of us have always wanted to do: get our children interested in, and not scared of, mathematics. Mighton is the founder of JUMP (Junior Undiscovered Math Prodigies) and educational program providing free tutoring for elementary-level students who live in Toronto. He based the book on a great deal of research into early childhood education that has shown that children are born capable of learning anything, including math. Thus the book is not only an exposition of an educational approach to math that will turn calculus and fraction from a bogeyman to an afternoon pastime. The second and larger part of the book puts theory into practice and included workbook problems. Some call Mighton 'Math Motivator', others 'Educational Alchemist' It seems to me he is a guy who has figured out how to teach kids math by teaching them to believe in themselves first. Children who are made to believe they cannot do math, will never do math well. Thus, Mighton makes sure to boost children's math self-esteem. A great resource for homeschooling parents!



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# *Kid's Corner*

## Evil King Tomo Goes Spying

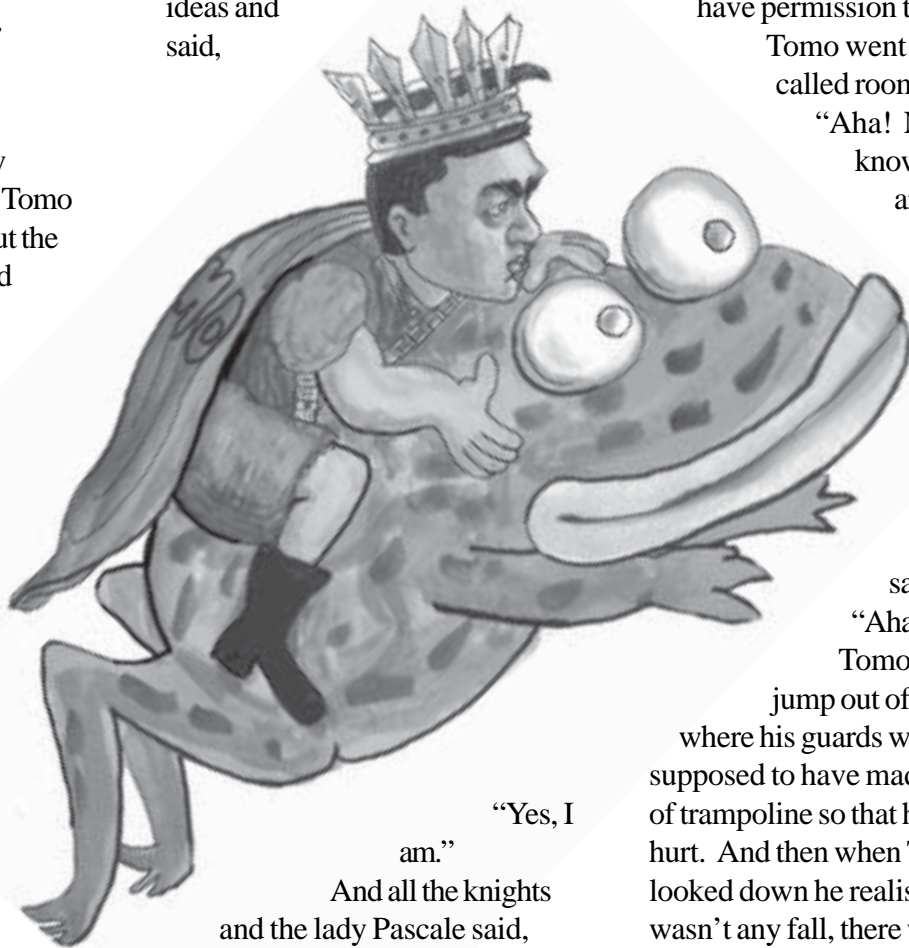
By Max Ferrer

It all began one summery evening when the evil king Tomo was in his castle figuring out the perfect plan. And he found the perfect plan. He decided that he would disguise himself as an old bizarre man and that he would get into King Tony's castle and listen to where King Tony and Queen Zoë and Prince Neill would go on holiday.

Meanwhile the seven knights and the lady Pascale were having lots of fun partying and eating nice roasts and chicken, enjoying and making lots of stupid jokes, especially Sir Leonard. While all this was happening the evil King Tomo managed to disguise himself as a guard at the door, because there was only one. After disguising himself as a guard, looking very convincing, the seven knights and the lady Pascale walked by. And

Sir Matteo started teasing the new guard as he was very *drunk* and then Sir Lancelotty and Sir Max both agreed on this and said, "You! We've never seen you here before. Are you one of the new guards the king was talking about?"

The evil King Tomo had to think fast or else they would have found out it was him and the whole thing would have been a pointless act of getting into the dungeons, so Tomo came up with one of his brilliantly wonderful ideas and said,



"Yes, I  
am."

And all the knights  
and the lady Pascale said,  
"OK, then," and they all went to  
their rooms and went to bed.

After they all went to bed Tomo stuck one of his ears to the door listening to where King Tony, Queen Zoë and Prince Neill would go on holiday. They said, "Let's all go on safari to Africa!" So then they chose, but the evil King

Tomo, while listening, made a very stupid mistake, which he wished he hadn't have done. He let himself go thinking the door was locked and leaned against the door. And then the door opened and he fell to the ground.

King Tony, Queen Zoë and Prince Neill all said, "What are you doing here?"

He said, "I slipped and fell against the door. I'm sorry, my King, Queen and Prince."

Queen Zoë said, "All right then. I guess you are too tired. You have permission to go to bed."

Tomo went to his so-called room and said,

"Aha! Now that I  
know where they

are going, I  
might as  
well  
send  
my  
forces  
there to  
stop  
them.

Aha," he  
said, and

"Aha!" again.

Tomo decided to  
jump out of the window

where his guards were supposed to have made some kind of trampoline so that he didn't get hurt. And then when Tomo looked down he realised that there wasn't any fall, there was a very deep moat.

He fell in the water. Luckily the water was nice and refreshing and then his guards had to fish him out of the moat and he went back to his kingdom on his giant frog with his two stupid guards.

*Max Ferrer  
is a current student of  
Summerhill School*

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