

The Magazine of Alternative Education

Education Revolution

Issue Number Forty One

Summer 2005

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William Godwin



Jean Jacques Rousseau



Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi

THE GREATS SPEAK!



Leo Tolstoy



Friedrich Froebel



Emma Goldman

**...IN OUR 2005
ROUNDTABLE
DISCUSSION**

www.EducationRevolution.org

Education Revolution

The Magazine of Alternative Education

Summer 2005 - Issue Number Forty One - www.educationrevolution.org

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

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

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417 Roslyn Road, Roslyn Heights, NY 11577

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

Fax: 516-625-3257

Email: info@educationrevolution.org

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

Executive Director: Jerry Mintz

ER Editor, Illustrator and Designer: Albert Lamb

Advertising: Isaac Graves

Mail and Communications Editor: Carol Morley

Printer: Brenneman Printing Inc., Lancaster, PA

AERO Advisory Board

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

Welcome to the Education Revolution!

This is the summer when the International Democratic Education Conference comes back to Europe. As we go to press planes are being booked and plans are being made for the IDEC in Berlin.

We are trying a few experiments with this issue. If you notice any of them why not email me with your opinions and ideas?

albertlamb@bigfoot.com

Albert

A Word from Jerry

The AERO conference this summer was everything we hoped it would be and more. It was a true "Spectrum of Alternatives." In late June we had 240 people from 29 states and 7 countries joining us at the Russell Sage College in Troy, New York.

At this conference, more than any other I know of, we represented a wide variety of educational alternatives, dialoging with each other for the full five days of the conference. We had Montessorians, led by Tim Seldin, president of the Montessori Foundation. Sharon Caldwell came from South Africa to talk about how she democratized her Mahoon Montessori School. We had Waldorf presenters such as Keith Reams of Rudolph Steiner College. We had Sudbury schools represented by people such as Mark Jacobs of Longview Sudbury as well as a video documentary of Fairhaven School. We had other democratic schools represented by Chris Mercogiano of Albany Free School, for example, who brought a documentary of their school. Homeschoolers were there in force, such as Sally Carless of Global Village School.

Of course, our conference director was 18 year old homeschooler Isaac Graves. We had teachers and students from progressive schools such as Calhoun. Historical alternatives were represented by Jon Scott who attended the Modern School in the 1940's, and Mary Lois Adshead who represented the Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education which was founded in 1907! She brought books written by Johnson. Public charters were represented by people such as Sidney Morris of

Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School. Public alternatives were represented by keynoter Anne Cook, principal of Urban Academy in New York City, fresh from a legislative victory which allowed the 28 consortium schools to continue using portfolio assessment. We had higher education alternatives such as Living Routes, in a presentation by Dan Greenberg just back from a trip to Hungary. We had people from alternatives in Canada, Australia, India and Nepal!



Jerry drinks out of a coconut in Guatemala

People dialogued, searched for commonalities, debated various approaches, sorted out differences, and hopefully learned a lot from each other. Over 80 schools and organizations were represented at the conference. And the icing on the cake were the other keynotes by Alfie Kohn, Matt Hern and John Gatto, each with very different perspectives. People are still buzzing about those talks weeks later.

Conference-goers at the barbecue at Russel Sage College



Alfie Kohn after his talk

I did the first keynote on opening night, giving some details about AERO's history and activities, and hoping to set the table for the interesting interactions yet to come. I then spoke about my visit to the Butterflies program for homeless and working children and showed the documentary I made of interviews with the children.

We will have DVDs of the six keynoters, Jerry Mintz, Tim Seldin, Alfie Kohn, Matt Hern, Ann Cook and John Gatto. We'll also have DVDs that include the panels of current students and graduates, school starters workshop, and of Montessori workshops, etc. to see the details go to our website at www.educationrevolution.org.

There are some very serious discussions that are still going on in the conference listserv following the conference. We are tentatively planning to have another AERO conference next summer. It would be from June 28-July 2. Save the dates!

Looking for News

with Albert Lamb

Controlling Information

One aspect of the No Child Left Behind laws is the access it gives to the US military to personal information about the teenage population. As the war in Iraq has made recruitment more difficult it was inevitable that the Defense Department would want to make better use of this database. This report, from *Parents fight to keep kids from military: Families mount grassroots challenge against stepped-up recruitment drive* is by Tony Manolatos and appeared in the Detroit News on July the 6th:

For nearly three years, the military has collected the names, address and phone numbers of high school juniors and seniors, and uses the data to contact teens by phone and through the mail. Last month, the Defense Department joined forces with a private marketing firm, BeNow Inc. of Wakefield, Mass., whose job is to manage the database and use marketing techniques to narrow in on potential recruits. Privacy advocates across the country are outraged. Under No Child Left Behind, President Bush's extensive education reform, schools are required to give the military this information or risk the cutoff of federal aid. Parents may direct schools or the Defense Department to leave their children's name off the list. Deadlines vary by school and usually fall between late September and the middle of October.

Self-Directed Learning

Each month the Liberty School learning community puts out a newsletter. Arnold Greenberg writes a short piece under the heading *Director's Chair*. Here's an extract from one of his recent articles:

At the recent Governors Summit on Education the disturbing trends were being discussed-our schools are not preparing young people for college or for the work place. Eighteen percent of all ninth grade students get a college diploma within

six years of starting college. In Math and Science, the US ranks near the bottom of Industrialized Nations. Bill Gates, who has invested over 500 million dollars in improving high schools said, "Our high schools are obsolete. Unless schools change we will be limiting or ruining the lives of millions of American students every year." The goal of the summit is to find ways to reshape the curricula and make schools more rigorous.

One of the major criticisms of schools by students is "they're boring" or "it's not relevant to my life." There is evidence that students are willing to put tremendous amounts of energy towards learning things that are meaningful to them. To young children, learning is as natural as breathing. They are learning all the time and some say they learn more in the first six years of their lives than they do the rest of their lives. Most of this learning is self-directed either independently or in collaboration with parents and friends. What happens to the desire to learn when these children get to school? Will schools ever be restructured to encourage self-directed learning and trust that the innate desire to learn will create not only accomplished, independent learners, but happier more fulfilled, self-actualized people? I wonder.

Founding Framers

Many schools that offer no democratic processes to students still hold the idea of a "preparation for democracy" in high regard. On the day before the 4th of July this year the North Carolina Charlotte Observer reprinted an article: *The perils of PC history*. This was originally printed in Carolina Beat, a publication of the John Locke Foundation. The article is a commentary by Lindalyn Kakadelis, a former schoolteacher who is currently director of the N.C. Education Alliance.

Napoleon Bonaparte once said, "History is the version of past events that people have decided to agree upon." True enough. Nowhere is this more evident than in American classrooms, where our children's history lessons change with the political winds. Anti-bias guidelines and fears of offending special-interest groups permeate history textbooks, smudging out historical accuracy. Our Founding Fathers are now referred to as androgynous "framers." According to a 2004 Washington Times report, words such as "man," "mankind," "aged" and "suffragette" are now banned from textbooks. In 2003, reviewers found 533 factual or interpretive errors in social studies texts submitted for adoption to the Texas State Board of Education. While publishers agreed to 351 revisions, they stated that the remaining errors were simply a "misunderstanding" of the textbook.

However, nothing changed to ensure that students would not fall victim to the misunderstandings. The result is that millions of American schoolchildren are misinformed about important historical events and documents. Without a foundation in political, economic and social history, our newest citizens enter adulthood ill equipped to vote, serve on juries, lobby Congress or model civic values.

Imposing Structures

Recently Pat Farenga had some interesting things to say on the AERO listserve. He began by remembering that in the book *Freedom and Beyond* John Holt noted that:

There is no such thing as “no structure” in our lives. He posits that we live in a continuum that spans “inherent structure” (morning and evening hygiene routines, neighborly chat, etc) and “imposed structure” (taking piano lessons, karate, writing in a diary each day, working in a soup kitchen, etc). Children and adults can choose to impose structure on themselves for any number of reasons, but once someone else imposes structure on you, the dynamic and motivations for imposing structure often become counter-productive.

Schooling has it all backwards: when young, we tell kids they can't get out of school, and once they're out, we tell them they can't get back in. Why can't we let people, of whatever age, go in and out of school when they see fit, using it when it seems most useful to them? Let the learner direct his own learning. This would create credentials and work-histories that reflect real honest effort, and not just the seat-time a school diploma vouches for.

Democratic Teachers

One problem that has received a lot of thought in recent year is the question of how best to prepare teachers for working democratically with children. Amukta from India, wrote about this recently while visiting the Institute of Democratic Education (IDE) in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Why are we here and what are we planning? At the IDEC (International Democratic Education Conference) in India, some people were keen to start an international training programme and Yaacov Hecht invited people to come to see how we could go further. We are hoping that at the next conference in Berlin we will have a possible programme with dates and venues so that others too can participate.

On 3rd of April, both Kageki san and me, went with Yaacov to visit Hadera School that was started by Yaacov, which began the movement of democratic education in Israel. We also visited Mahon Democracy, as the IDE is called. We showed the DVD of IDEC 2004 to the student-teachers of the democratic teachers training course at IDE. Eyal, who works at the Institute (those who came to the IDEC in India will remember him) talked about the conference and the International movement for democratic education.

That night Sybilla Higgs from Sands School, who was also in India at the IDEC, and Anna from Phoenix, an organization that supports Sands also joined us in a guest house where we stayed for the next few days. Together the four of us, with Yaacov as our chief guide saw a range of programmes across Israel - schools that have been democratic from the beginning; schools (all are state schools) that have just begun to move in the direction of becoming democratic; a meeting of the first year teachers from all democratic schools; and many meetings with Yaacov and his team.



Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft gets a mention in our Roundtable Discussion, on page 16, as the wife of William Godwin. As well as being famous as a pioneering feminist and the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft deserves to be remembered as an early alternative educator.

Born in 1759, in 1784 she opened a school in an English village with her sister and a friend. While there she made friends with Richard Price, a minister at the local Dissenting Chapel. Price and his friend, Joseph Priestly, were the leaders of a group of men known as Rational Dissenters. They later founded the Unitarian Society. At Price's home Mary Wollstonecraft met other leading radicals including the publisher, Joseph Johnson. He was impressed with Mary's ideas on education and commissioned her to write a book on the subject. In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, published in 1786, Mary attacked traditional teaching methods and suggested new topics that should be studied by girls.

Early in 1797, after many exciting years traveling as a writer and activist, she married William Godwin, a philosopher who was notorious for his rejection of romance and marriage. Though they had sworn not to get married, the feminist and the enemy of matrimony were wedded at Saint Pancras Church and settled down happily together. Sadly, on September 10 of that year, at the age of thirty-eight, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin succumbed to puerperal fever after the birth of her second child, Mary. This daughter of hers grew up to marry the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and become a well-known writer herself. Under the name of Mary Shelley she gave us the perennial classic, *Frankenstein*.

Mary Leue Writes AERO:

Your DVD was a ground level look at life in New Delhi such as is not often seen by westerners. Traveling with you in your tiny road vehicles as you went through Delhi's crowded streets brought the whole experience right into my room. Your interviews with both street children and caretakers in the shelter and the field near the temple were so enlightening that I wish more Americans could see how resourceful children can be given the basics of survival - food and a chance to earn a bit of money - and the support of trusting, caring adults who know both how much and how little to offer them!

The basic ingredients for successful lives were clear to see, looking through the eyes and ears of your camera - and they consist mainly of the right to protection against harassment and exploitation, the freedom to make a living in whatever way you can, the availability of voluntary learning, and caring and appreciation on the part of surrounding adults. Congratulations!

“I thought five days was just right. I was filled right up to the brim. I love the open space workshops...”

“I really appreciated the opportunity to learn more about alternative education from so many people, both young and older, with different perspectives.”

“Where does one begin? AERO was stunning - I think I enjoyed it more than any other conference.... I felt I learnt a lot more - the workshops led me to much more introspection than at previous conferences I have attended. I enjoyed the wide range of views, and I think having people as diverse as Tim Seldin, Alfie Kohn and Gatto at the same conference was the key - or else you just have people preaching to the converted and that is boring and does not lead to any sort of growth or learning....”

“I learned a great deal, met some wonderful people, and came away with innumerable stimulating ideas which I think will help our school.... I’m sure your general feedback is going to be that all who attended will come again next year and stay as long as the conference lasts. I even heard some people saying it should have been a week longer! ...There are some similarities in all the schools, but the differences too were striking, and it seems quite possible to coexist without conflict. I appreciated learning what Montessori really stands for, and the ‘democratics’ too!”

AERO **CONFERENCE** **FEEDBACK**

Being There

with Jerry Mintz



An historic arch in Antigua, Guatemala

A Week in Guatemala

Several years ago I heard from one of our readers, Margarita Allen, that there was an alternative school in Guatemala called Naleb. Naleb then joined the AERO network. Roberto and Rita Vizcaino founded the school 28 years ago. It is modeled after the idea of a democratic country: with legislative, judicial and executive branches. There is no other school that we know of in Guatemala that is like it, and it is a miracle that the school survived the long and violent civil war in Guatemala.

Roberto and Rita’s daughter, Lucrecia, a Naleb graduate, attended the IDEC in Japan in 2000. A group from Naleb participated in the IDEC in New York in 2003. They have been interested in hosting an IDEC in the future and invited me to Guatemala in March to see the country and visit their school and explore the possibility.

As I left from New York to drive to JFK airport at 3 AM it was snowing and the roads were slick. I had to drive because I couldn’t get a cab in the bad weather, but I almost didn’t find a spot to park at the airport because it was just before the Easter holiday and several lots were full. After finally finding a spot I made it to the line at Taca Airlines. It

seemed like everyone in line was moving house, with piles of luggage. In fact, I couldn’t fly directly to Guatemala because that flight was full. The Vizcainos had to book a flight to El Salvador and meet me in the capital, San Salvador.

When I arrived at about 1 PM I had had virtually no sleep. The temperature was close to 100 degrees. The Vizcainos with their 11-year-old daughter, Margarita, met me at the airport in their four-wheel-drive SUV. I found out that they really need that vehicle as they give help to some rural schools up some really hairy dirt mountain roads.

Language was initially a bit of a problem, as Rita and Roberto don’t speak much English and I speak very little Spanish (in spite of my Central and South American ping-pong students’ attempt to give me a crash course before I left!). But then we discovered that French is Roberto’s first language, and I do speak some French. So, by putting all three languages together we generally managed to communicate. Actually, Margarita does understand English pretty well, having spent three months visiting Lucrecia, who is now married and living in Atlanta. You might say she understands television English, having spent a lot of time watching TV in

Atlanta. She was named for Margarita Allen.

We drove several hours back to Guatemala, toward the ancient city of Antigua, staying at a mansion, converted into a bed and breakfast, which belonged to some friends of Rita and Roberto. Another friend of theirs, Lucy, had met us in Antigua to help with translation.

It was now the Thursday before Easter, and that night local people begin an intense series of processional marches and parades leading up to Easter, starting late Thursday and going through the night. They put down beautiful "rugs" in the roads made of flowers, sawdust and sand with intricate and very colorful pictures for the processional to march over. We walked around the city, watching them make the rugs and prepare for the next day. I heard that even the Jewish community participates, going around town between 4 and 6 AM announcing the coming processional.

On Friday we saw a spectacular processional, centered around the torture and crucifixion of Christ. In Guatemala they do not celebrate Carnival or Mardi Gras, but focus everything on Easter. Lucy said that in her opinion it indicated more of a fixation on death. She also told me that, although perhaps 60% of the country are Indian, they have very low political representation, one of the causes for the war.

There were thousands of people in the street, watching or marching. Hundreds were in Roman costumes or in purple robes. There was a series of floats representing several tortures and humiliations of Christ. Then there was a huge float, a half a block long, with Christ carrying a cross. Amazingly, this float was not on wheels, but was carried by hundreds of people, as were all the big floats. A big one of Mary was carried only by women.

The city of Antigua is one of the sites Rita and Roberto have considered for hosting an IDEC. There are many old converted monasteries there which could serve a location. We visited one that had been renovated in a spectacular way by a famous architect. It is in the mountains, flanked by two old volcanoes, so the temperature is always moderate.



Making colored 'rugs' for Easter processional

In all we traveled perhaps a thousand miles around Guatemala in four days leading up to and including Easter. We went into Indian areas such as Totonicopan and saw processionals there at night which were more solemn. We went down to Lake Atitlan which is surrounded by volcanoes and has twelve towns along its shores named for the Apostles. While staying there at the Hotel Tolman, I netted my own Tilapia fish which was then cooked while we watched Guatemala defeat Trinidad Tobago in soccer on TV to the delight of the crowd.

On our way to Guatemala City we stopped again in Antigua and explored one of the monasteries. Then there was an amazing coincidence. In a bookstore we ran into Margarita's sister, whose

children had been Naleb students. The Vizcainos hadn't seen her in years.

Finally we came to Guatemala City, the capital, where Naleb School is located. The city has perhaps a third of the twelve million Guatemalan residents. The Vizcainos house adjoins the school, and the complex was planned and designed by them. The school building itself is circular, with about twenty sides tapering up five floors. Roberto is an artist, specializing in a technique he developed in which he paints on thin, sculpted metal.

Naleb had no school on Monday, so we went to visit two of the rural schools they are working with through a grant from a cement company. Their overall purpose is to help these schools become more creative and child-centered.

We first went to rural town Sansali. We got there too late for school but met with 10 teachers and the principal who were waiting for us. I talked about democratic education ideas. One of the teachers was a former Naleb teacher who moved there because of marriage. She complained to us afterward about how difficult it was to do anything creative or innovative. The parents even complained when she did a fundraiser so kids could go to the zoo. She was in tears when we talked to her.

We then went to visit a rural school high up a tortuous mountain road. On the way up we were forced to stop because a truck had broken down on the



Naleb School in Guatemala City

barely 10-foot-wide rutted road with a sheer cliff on the side. There was a small hole opposite the stalled truck next to the cliff. The driver offered to put a spare tire over it so we might pass. "No way!" I said. We pushed his truck to a wider part of the road and managed to get by, taking along with us a woman and young baby who had been riding in his truck with him. We brought them up to the village above.

Driving even higher, we came to the school. There were about 40 kids of all ages in several rooms, but William was the teacher for them all. In the first classroom the children were eager and



Students at rural school take apart computers

interested in us. None of them knew where the United States was. One knew where Canada was. William was teaching the older kids how to take apart and rebuild computers, as well as other skills which might make them employable. Their parents were coffee growers. The kids worked for several weeks on the harvest, and that was the money that paid to keep the school open, since the government only paid the teacher's salary. William said he needs old computers for the kids to work on. (Contact AERO if you have any to donate.)

We then went to a meeting with the regional minister of education and local school superintendents. The meeting went on for two hours and there seemed to be a lot of interest in some of our ideas for change. Though of course, only time will tell.

Finally on Tuesday I got to see Naleb School. They have 200 students from preschool through 12th grade. They

charge \$150-a-month tuition and have a few scholarships, but are \$500,000 in debt from building the school. They were able to borrow the money because the land value had increased so much from the time they first bought it. They are a private school. There is really no such thing as a nonprofit in Guatemala, but Lucrecia is setting up a nonprofit for them in the United States to support the school. They built the school four years ago. Although the school is dedicated to the concept of democratic governance they hadn't ever tried to have decisions made democratically by the whole school.

It was one of the most intense two-day periods I have ever experienced, organized and orchestrated by Rita to make the best use of my time and abilities. In fact, it made me realize how few of those skills I am using these days as I expend so much energy just keeping AERO open and functioning. This realization has had a great impact on me.

The first day was packed and started early. One event after another was planned. First I was to speak to the entire school at an assembly on the fourth floor. Rita wanted me to explain to them about democratic schools, the IDEC yearly meetings, and describe some other schools around the world. Neither she nor I were sure that it would be possible or even advisable to actually demonstrate democratic process. And I pretty much told myself there was no way I could do it successfully as hundreds of noisy kids tramped up the stairways to the fourth floor and sat on the floor in groups.

The morning started with a beautiful rendition of the Guatemalan national anthem sung with many verses by the

entire school. Soon I was introduced and began my presentation, with one of the teachers translating into Spanish. The students were fairly attentive, and cheered and applauded when I described schools in which the students could choose which classes to go to and were not forced to go to classes.

I found myself describing how a democratic meeting would run for a whole school meeting. Suddenly I plunged into the unknown, explaining that the agenda would consist of any issue that a student thought was a problem, or might be a good idea for the school. We decided to try to have a meeting.

I asked if there were any items for the agenda. Immediately Christian strode up to the microphone. He is an 11-year-old boy from the United States who had moved to Guatemala with his mother who was born in Guatemala. He had encountered many problems when he first arrived a year earlier, not speaking much Spanish. Perhaps the fact that I was English speaking gave him confidence. Nevertheless he said into the microphone that he thought that it was a problem that the lost-and-found was only open every day for a brief time and that he thought that it should be extended. After this was seconded and discussed for a short time he then made a proposal that the woman in charge of the lost-and-found should keep it open for a longer time. He made the proposal in good Spanish, much to the shock of many in attendance. This is just one example of the surprising results from the democratic process. People just go to a higher level. And as many times as I have seen it, it surprises me every time.

I thought that this would be a short topic. I was wrong. It went on for an hour



Roberto Vizcaino, Margarita Allen's sister, Margarita and Rita Viscaino

and there were six proposals. There had been some question about whether the youngest kids in the room, second graders, would be able to understand the process. But they were fully engaged, making comments and voting with clear intention.

Someone proposed an amendment that the hours be extended with the permission of the woman with the responsibility. The amendment was accepted.

A proposal was made by one of the teachers that the second floor teachers would take the responsibility. I wondered if this would pass, particularly because it was made by a teacher.

A proposal was made by a student that the lost-and-found always be open, and that people could take back their lost items whenever they wanted.

A further proposal was made that students had to sign their names and describe what items they took from the lost-and-found.

In the end, the teacher's proposal was defeated; the student proposal of being open all the time was defeated. What was passed was Christian's amended proposal that the hours be extended with the permission of the woman who had been responsible for it, and that the students had to sign for what they took.

Everyone seemed to be impressed with the process. I was both impressed and surprised. It seems that, even though I've seen this over and over, I'm always surprised. After all, I did not grow up in a democracy. I, too, have to fight against a gut reflex that this won't work.

Immediately after the school assembly I met with a roomful of elected student representatives. They were all ages. They were required to have good grade point averages before they could run. They represented the legislative and judicial branches, such as judges, lawyers and class representatives.

At first they said they wanted the meeting in English with no translation, but it became clear that about half the kids didn't understand English well enough. They said they had generally liked the process they had seen in the meeting but, perhaps predictably, some of the "older" elected student politicians



Meeting at Naleb with student government representatives

said that they thought that their meetings of representatives were more orderly.

This was strongly rebuffed by Carlito, a nine-year-old class representative. He said, "No, it was GREAT! It was great being able to speak for ourselves, for anyone to be able to speak, without needing a representative!"

Later I suggested to Rita that it was important not to disempower the elected system, and that the representatives could select items to put before the whole school as referendum, as well as a system to petition that an item be put on the agenda.

After that meeting I had a long and productive meeting with about 20 of the teachers. Some of them might even like to start their own school or a branch of Naleb.

After that I met with a parents group. I met with another larger group the next morning. To them Naleb was a lifesaver for their children and each story was poignant. Out of that meeting several parents decided to organize committees for outreach, IDEC, fundraising for scholarships, etc.

I never did get any lunch that day. After meeting with the parents I went outside to help them start their table tennis program. They had brought in a table for me to teach on.

Herding me down to the table were Sebastian and Andres, with several others joining. I worked with them until the school busses came. When the kids left I realized I had about 45 minutes to take a quick rest before we were to leave for a meeting the people from the Ministry of Education and other friends of the school at a nice hotel in midtown.

I walked over to the house next to the school. But before I could get up the

stairs to my room I heard through the window, "Can Jerry come out and teach us more ping pong?" So I gave more lessons to the kids who stayed after school to get them.

We didn't know who might show up for the hotel meeting or exactly what we might accomplish, but most of the invitees, about fifteen, did show up. We talked about support for the school, democratic process, support for Naleb, going to the IDEC and subsequently hosting the IDEC, and about changes in education law that would make choice and democracy more possible.

Overall, I had never experienced working to help a school on so many levels in such a short time. It was an amazing and fulfilling process for me, and they said it was the same for them.

Not long after the morning meeting with the parents, a quick video tour of all the classes, and some final ping-pong lessons we were off to the airport. We intended to have a final strategic meeting there while I waited for my plane. Rita managed to get in the airport with me while Roberto parked the SUV. But they wouldn't let him in the building, saying that only those flying could go in, for security reasons. But Rita remembered that Margarita had met a person in the swimming pool at Lake Atitlan who was a supervisor at the airport. He gave her his phone number, and Rita says she has a photographic memory. She called the number on her cell phone, and word was sent down to let Roberto in.

We had our meeting and made lots of plans. Then I flew back to New York with a lot to digest and think about, carrying many warm memories. The snow was now gone in New York.

Mail & Communications

Edited by Carol Morley

Hear My Voice! VHS, Insights Productions: Many students who fail in a traditional high school setting wind up in alternative schools – institutions that generally suffer from negative perceptions, lack of funding, and resistance from mainstream school employees. *Hear My Voice!* features testimonials culled from several alternative high school student focus groups comprised of teens from a broad spectrum of ethnicities and personalities. Host/filmmaker Patrice De La Ossa, an alternative high school teacher, asks each group a set of questions, and the kids respond openly – about class size and teacher attention, personal relationships and students’ sense of community, advantages of attending alternative school, how to improve traditional schools, and the negative attitude toward alternative high schools. The fact that the content not only addresses a unique topic but does so from the students’ perspective makes this well worth watching. An accompanying discussion handbook includes additional information, such as the definition and history of alternative education.

Prof. Fred Flener of Northeastern Illinois University has managed to locate and interview 18 people who in 1938 were part of the first graduating class from the Ohio State University School. The OSU School often is listed as one of the most progressive of the schools that took part in the Eight Year Study of the Progressive Education Association. That class, all 55 of them, cooperatively wrote a book that was published under the title *Were We Guinea Pigs?* In this book they described what it was like to be the first class of seventh graders in this junior-senior high school and to spend six years in that environment. Twenty years later, one of their teachers at that time, Margaret Willis, conducted a follow-up of the students, *The Guinea Pigs After 20 Years*. Mr. Flener found that the 18 he interviewed continued to be remarkable people and their memories of the OSU School were still vivid. He started out to trace the influence of a mathematics program known as “The Nature of Proof,” which was taught by an outstanding teacher, Harold Fawcett. He also profiles several other outstanding teachers and the director. Reading this manuscript reminded me of the good experiences that unapologetic progressive educators have been and continue to provide for young people. It is my hope that this inspiring story will be made available for more people to read and so they will find renewed faith in the potential of person-centered democratic education. Do any of you readers have an “in” with a good publisher? If so, you can reach the author at:

f-flener@neiu.edu. (Sent to us by Gordon Vars.)

From: **A Lucrative Brand of Tutoring Grows Unchecked**, by Susan Saulny: Propelled by the No Child Left Behind law, the federally

financed tutoring industry has doubled in size in each of the last two years, with the potential to become a \$2 billion-a-year enterprise, market analysts say. Tutors are paid as much as \$1,997 per child, and companies eager to get a piece of the lucrative business have offered parents computers and gift certificates as inducements to sign up, provided tutors that in some cases are still in high school and have made promises they cannot deliver. This new brand of tutoring is offered to parents by private companies and other groups at no charge if their children attend a failing school. But it is virtually without regulation or oversight, causing concern among school districts, elected officials and some industry executives. Some in Congress are calling for regulations or quality standards to ensure that tutors are qualified and that the companies provide services that meet students’ needs. Critics are particularly concerned about aggressive marketing tactics, like the offers of computers, gift certificates and basketball tickets, though they acknowledge that such practices do not violate the law. But because families can choose from a list of state-approved providers, that has contributed to aggressive solicitations by some tutoring groups. The law’s silence on such issues is not an oversight. “We

want as little regulation as possible so the market can be as vibrant as possible,” says Michael Petrilli, an official with the federal Education Department. Across the country, there are more than 1,800 “supplemental educational services providers,” as they are called in the law. Experts say these groups will earn as much as \$200 million this school year, with about 30 percent of that going to the big national companies. And the revenue is only expected to grow, as more schools are labeled as failing under national law and more parents take advantage of the program. The federal law offers some guidance: states should only accept groups that are financially sound and have a proven record of effectiveness, as defined by the states. And they are required to evaluate providers after two years to ensure that some academic improvement has occurred. States can remove poor quality tutors, but only a handful of states have even begun to develop a method for evaluating the services. *NY Times*

From **What is Killing the Spirit of New Teacher?** Every year, U.S. schools hire more than 200,000 new teachers for that first day of class. By the time summer rolls around, at least 22,000 have quit. Even those who make it beyond the trying first year aren’t likely to stay long: about 30 percent of new teachers flee the profession after just three years, and more than 45 percent leave after five. What’s more, 37 percent of the education workforce is over 50 and considering retirement, according to the National Education Association. Suddenly, you’ve got a double whammy: tens of thousand of new teachers leaving the profession because they can’t take it anymore, and as



many or more retiring. When teachers drop out, everyone pays, writes Claudia Graziano. Each teacher who leaves costs a district \$11,000 to replace, not including indirect costs related to schools' lost investment in professional development, curriculum, and school-specific knowledge. At least 15 percent of K-12 teachers either switch schools or leave the profession every year, so the cost to school districts nationwide is staggering – an estimated \$5.8 billion. Students from the lowest-income families suffer the most. Inexperienced teachers (those with less than three years on the job) frequently land in classrooms with the neediest and often the most challenging students. Beginning teachers frequently start their careers at hard-to-staff schools where resources may be scarce – in other words, urban schools – simply because there are more jobs available there. It's a recipe for disaster for both teachers and students, says Barnett Berry, president of the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Low-performing schools in high-poverty areas often cannot retain a critical mass of veteran teachers, says Berry. "Not only are teachers who are new to these schools more likely to be under-prepared, they're also more likely to be underqualified." The U.S. Department of Education confirms that teacher turnover is highest in public schools where half or more of the students receive free or reduced-price lunches. <http://www.glef.org>.

From: **Gates Funds Early College with \$30 Million**, by Greg Winter: In an effort to improve high school graduation rates and encourage more low-income students to finish college, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will spend an additional \$30 million to create hybrid high schools in which students spend significant time in college classes. The grants will create 42 such schools, known as early-college high schools, which will serve about 17,000 students around the nation, the foundation said. The schools, most situated on college campuses, will place their students directly in college classes for much of their academic careers, so that upon graduation they will have earned either an associate's degree or as much as two years' college credits toward a bachelor's degree. The foundation earlier committed more than \$80 million to create hybrid schools, but only in the last couple of years. Marie Groark, a foundation spokeswoman, said: "We're not trying to incrementally improve graduation rates. We're trying to reinvent the system to dramatically improve graduation rates. And that requires some risk-taking." The theory is that if students start taking college-level courses as early as ninth grade, they will gather enough credits to be halfway through college by the time they graduate from high school. That in itself will give them more of an incentive to finish high school and go on to college, the theory goes, and, since fewer years of tuition will be required, will also overcome some of the financial barriers to higher education. Even if students choose not to go on to college, the foundation says, they will either have earned an associate degree or have much better academic skills because of the hybrid schools, and both factors will help them make more money in the workplace. Cece Cunningham, director of the Middle College National Consortium, which will receive \$6 million from the foundation, acknowledged that there had long been high schools on college campuses. What makes the hybrid schools different from these so-called middle colleges, Dr. Cunningham said, is the degree to which the student's curriculum is tied to college work. Rather than taking college classes as they become available, she said, many students in hybrid schools will spend nearly as much time in college courses as in high school courses.

From **A Child Held Behind**: The wisdom of retention, the policy of holding a child back to repeat the same grade, has long been debated. The battle – between those who believe retention is damaging to children's psyches, social lives and attitudes about school, particularly in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and those who believe it is the best way to improve skills over the long haul – has played out in waves over decades past. Periods in which retention grew popular are

followed by times when it is not. At the moment, retention is rising in popularity nationally in a climate of school accountability championed by the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind law. As a centerpiece of his education policy, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York City initiated a retention effort last year, as have a range of other municipalities and some entire states. Nationally, more than 15 percent of students ages 6 to 17 are held back at least once before they leave school, according to a 2001 report. Among their complaints, reports Monica Davey, critics of retention worry that too many children who get held back are eventually shuffled into special education programs as a way of removing them from the retention rules and as a way of coping with those who seem incapable of meeting the requirements, despite repeated trips through the lesson plans. <http://www.nytimes.com>.



"Tell me the truth, Dad! Was I mass-produced?"

From **Rethinking a Bad Law**: Nel Noddings has a simple thesis: The No Child Left Behind Act is a bad law, and a bad law is not made better by fully funding it. She makes six main points: (1) In many states the cost is thought to be so high that it would be better to reject federal funds than to accept them; (2) The law employs a view of motivation that many in education find objectionable. As educators, we would not use threats, punishments, and pernicious comparisons to "motivate" our students. But that is how the No Child Left Behind law treats the school establishment; (3) The high-stakes testing associated with the law seems to be demoralizing teachers, students, and administrators; (4) The curriculum, especially for poor and minority students, seems to have been gutted. Wealthier kids, in schools that don't have to worry so much about test scores, may still enjoy arts, music, drama, projects, and critical conversation. But poor kids are spending far too much time bent over worksheets and test-prep materials; (5) If we really wanted to help poor, inner-city kids, we would identify the problem and muster massive resources to solve it: provide money to renovate crumbling buildings, add clinics (especially dental and vision) to school campuses, provide day care for infants and small children, recruit the finest teachers with significantly higher pay, and even provide boarding facilities for homeless children and those caught in family emergencies; and (6) Reports suggest that cheating has increased at every level, and administrators are busily seeking loopholes, using triage techniques, moving kids around and reclassifying them, playing with data – all to meet the letter of a law whose actual requirements cannot reasonably be met. Noddings' conclusion is that we should not waste more valuable resources – human and monetary – tinkering with this law. It is a bad law and should be repealed. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/02/23/24noddings.h24.html>

From **Paddle or Not to Paddle? Still Not Clear in US Schools**: When it comes to spanking, there's no such thing as a consensus in

America's schools. Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia have outlawed corporal punishment in public schools, all in the past 40 years. But as the number of students feeling the sting of the paddle declines, some parents and educators are digging in to defend it as an effective form of discipline. It's another symbol of the nation's red-blue divide, writes Stacy A. Teicher. Most states that still allow the practice are in the South and Midwest. But policies long favoring corporal punishment have come up for debate recently on Southern school boards – in Union County, N.C.; Memphis, Tenn.; and Dallas. Many defenders cite the Bible as their guide, saying that if a child needs correction, it's not loving to spare the rod. Opponents counter that the practice is too likely to lead to abuse, and that schools should be better role models. <http://www.csmonitor.com>.

Daniel Pearl's Legacy Inspires New Global Youth News Service; Worldwide Teen News Service Seeks Aspiring Reporters: PEARL World Youth News, an Internet-based international student-run news service established by the International Education and Resource Network (iEARN-USA) and the Daniel Pearl Foundation invites high school students around the world to become certified PEARL reporters. The youth-run international news service was founded to promote cross-cultural understanding through balanced, objective journalism with a global youth perspective. In the spirit of the high journalistic standards of Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter who was murdered by terrorists in Pakistan in 2002, teenage students will select the issues to be reported, and collaboratively write, edit and publish their articles on the new web-based news service. These articles will be made available to schools all over the world for publication in student newspapers. The PEARL Reporter Certification Program has been developed with the assistance of the New York Times and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. High school students worldwide who are proficient in English and have access to the Internet will be able to participate in the program at no cost. Graduate students at Columbia's Journalism School will serve as evaluators for the certification program. Founded in 1988, iEARN is a global network that enables young people to use the Internet and other new technologies to engage in collaborative educational projects that enhance learning and make a difference in the world. Students and teachers participate in any of the 180 online projects designed and implemented by its participating teachers. It was awarded the 2003 Goldman Sachs Foundation Prize for Excellence in International Education and is a 2004 Tech Museum Laureate prizewinner for "technology benefiting humanity." Please visit www.iearn.org and www.us.iearn.org. The Daniel Pearl Foundation was formed in 2002 in memory of journalist Daniel Pearl to promote the ideals that inspired his life and work. The Foundation works domestically and internationally to promote cross-cultural understanding, to combat cultural and religious hatred, to encourage responsible and creative journalism, and to enrich people's lives through music. For more information please visit www.danielpearl.org. Interested schools and students can contact Anindita Dutta Roy at anindita@us.iearn.org for more information.

From **Jeff Bezos, financial analyst, founder, Amazon.com:** As a preschooler, Jeffrey P. Bezos displayed an unmatched single-mindedness. By his mother's account, the young Bezos got so engrossed in the details of activities at his Montessori school that teachers had to pick him up in his chair to move him to new tasks. It's a trait that goes a long way toward explaining why the company he founded, Amazon.com Inc., has survived to become the most dominant retailer on the Internet. It was Bezos' attention to detail in 1994 that

made him realize that commerce soon would change forever. A Princeton University electrical engineering and computer-science grad who grew up in Houston and Miami, Bezos was investigating potential new businesses for hedge fund D.E. Shaw & Co. in New York. He noticed that the number of people on something called the World Wide Web was growing 2,300% a year. A few months later he and his wife MacKenzie hopped in a Chevy and drove across the country to start an online bookstore in Seattle. Says Paul Saffo, research director at think tank the Institute for the Future: "Jeff Bezos was the first one to figure out what the power of the Internet was for selling." *Business Week*.

Larry Page and Sergey Brin, Cofounders of Google.com; Excerpts from Barbara Walters interview, ABC News: Larry Page: "What we're trying to do is harness all the information that everyone in the world's created." Voice Over: "Both their fathers are college professors. But the Google guys don't credit their success to drive or brains. They say it was nursery school." Sergey Brin: "We both went to Montessori school. And I think it was part of that training of not following rules and orders and being self-motivated, questioning what's going on in the world, doing things a little bit different." Voice Over: "They even broke barriers in how they went public, letting ordinary people bid on shares and not just the big banks. Because they thought it was fairer and because of the strangest motto two billionaires ever had..." Sergey: "Don't be evil." Voice Over: "Not being evil has paid off so far. As for the future, with over 100 million users making 250 million searches a day, who knows where the Google and the Google guys will take us next."



The New School of Northern Virginia: Many private school educators talk about freeing their students from the tyranny of memorization and multiple-choice exams. Back Fencers say the New School actually does it. With only 100 students, it is one of the smallest high schools in the region, but parents say that means it can make learning a very individual experience. Grading is done mostly through exhibitions, projects and essays. Its AP test participation rate puts it

among the top 3 percent of schools in the country, but parents enthuse over quarterly electives that are nothing like the broad-gauged AP classes. Where else can you find courses on Vietnamese history, American literature from 1810 to 1875, or the difference between a freedom fighter and a terrorist? In that environment, says parent Joan Bardee, "the students themselves welcome all different types of kids." Susan Mink, another parent, says the school helps students like her child, who had trouble socially at larger and more impersonal schools.

Public Alternatives

From **California Charter School Produces Two Heisman Trophy Finalists:** California's Helix Charter High School, produced two of the five 2004 national Heisman Trophy finalists, which is college football's highest individual honor. The 2004 Heisman ceremony marked the first time in the 70-year history of the Heisman award that two graduates of the same high school were selected as finalists. Quarterback Alex Smith of the University of Utah and running back Reggie Bush of USC, played together at Helix Charter High in 2000 and 2001. Smith, Helix Charter High's Senior Class President, graduated in 2002 with enough AP credits to finish his undergraduate program in May and begin postgraduate work in Economics this fall. Bush, a 2003 Helix Charter High graduate, is currently a psychology major at USC. "Not only are students in California's charter schools competing academically, but they are demonstrating their successes in a variety

of venues, including athletics,” said Caprice Young, CEO of the California Charter Schools Association. “Helix Charter High School is to be commended for producing two fine scholar-athletes and two outstanding role-models.” Visit Helix Charter High School at www.helixcharter.net.

Voucher News in 6 States: Six states and the District of Columbia have laws on the books providing vouchers – payments from the government to a parent or institution on a parent’s behalf to be used for a child’s education: Colorado: Students who qualify for free or reduced lunches in 11 school districts may receive vouchers based on a percentage of the district’s per-pupil costs. Law was struck down by the Colorado Supreme Court in June 2004. Currently under appeal. District of Columbia: Allows students in D.C. public schools to receive vouchers of up to \$7,500 to pay tuition, fees and transportation expenses at private or parochial schools in the D.C. area. Florida: Students at “failing” public schools may receive a voucher worth at least \$4,000 to attend a higher-scoring public school, private school or parochial school. In November 2004, the law was ruled unconstitutional by the Florida Court of Appeals and is now in limbo. Ohio: Students in the Cleveland schools can receive vouchers of up to \$2,500 to attend schools of their choice. Voucher amount based on student poverty. Program was challenged but upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2002. Wisconsin: Law passed in 1989 allows low-income students in Milwaukee public schools to attend the private or parochial school of their choice at public expense. Maine and Vermont: Vermont and Maine allow districts to send students to private schools and pay their tuition if no public school exists to serve secondary school students. Both programs do not allow districts to send students to religious schools. Both programs have been unsuccessfully challenged in court. In Vermont, students without nearby public schools can go to approved independent schools or public schools in or outside Vermont.

From **Few DC Vouchers Help Neediest Kids:** A tiny percentage of students in Washington’s most troubled public schools applied for private school vouchers under the nation’s first federally funded program, according to a new Education Department report. Only 79 applications – 4 percent of the total – came from 15 Washington schools designated as in need of improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act. All were awarded scholarships of up to \$7,500 to pay tuition, fees and transportation expenses for nonpublic elementary or secondary schools in the current school year. An additional 73 public schools were designated as needing improvement after the application deadline, the report said. From those schools, 456 students applied. A total of 433 students from all schools that were eventually labeled as needing improvement received scholarships, said Ed Greenberger, a spokesman for the Washington Scholarship Fund, which administers the program. Those students received more than 30 percent of the scholarships, Greenberger said. By contrast, reports Lauren Frayer, 518 eligible applicants came from private schools. Forty-three percent of those students got vouchers. Of the 1,251 other public school students who applied, 85 percent were admitted into the program. “Parents whose students are already (in private school) want public assistance to help their students remain there,” said Roxanne Evans, spokeswoman for D.C. Public Schools. “That’s one of the tragedies of vouchers – that private school students use public money to fund private education.” However, Greenberger said application figures for the coming school year show the program is moving away from serving private school students. Of the 2,286 applications received from public school students so far for 2005-2006, 52 percent are from students who attend schools that need improvement or who will be entering kindergarten, Greenberger said. He predicted that students who attend public schools would receive virtually all the new scholarships to be awarded in lotteries later this month. <http://www.boston.com>.

Home Education News

From **Hybrid Schools Blend Homeschooling & Private Education:** On Tuesdays and Thursdays, children file into the tiny classrooms at Victory Academy, where teachers lead lessons in math, reading and foreign languages. However, on Mondays and Wednesdays, reports Patti Ghezzi, those classrooms are empty. The school’s 48 students are taught at home. Victory Academy, a Catholic school in Mableton, is one of at least a half-dozen schools in metro Atlanta blending home schooling and private education. Several more such schools are in the planning stages. Kids and parents say the arrangement affords them the best of home schooling and a more structured school. Georgia’s home schooled population has doubled since 1996. Last year, more than 34,000 children were taught at home –about 2 percent of the state’s student population. That figure doesn’t include home schooled students whose parents don’t register with the local school board. It’s unclear how many home schooled students are attending some sort of school part time. For some parents who don’t like public schools, “hybrid” schools like Victory offer a more affordable alternative than traditional private academies. Organizers believe the “hybrid” concept could open up home schooling to many families who want to try it but are intimidated by the prospect of developing lesson plans for each child and covering everything a child needs to know. www.ajc.com.

State to Require More Tests for Homeschoolers, by Anne Williams, *The Register-Guard:* One of myriad reasons that parents choose to home-school is a belief that public schools go overboard on standardized testing. But thanks to a new, more stringent interpretation of state rules by the state Department of Education, students who take classes from publicly funded home-schooling centers such as the Bethel area’s HomeSource soon will be expected to complete the same reading, math and writing tests given to their public-school counterparts each spring. That pending mandate comes on top of a long-standing rule already requiring all registered home-schoolers to take an approved standardized achievement test in grades 3, 5, 8 and 10. The HomeSource board of directors decided to comply before waiting to be told, and gave the first in this year’s series of state tests on March 11. More than two-thirds of the 22 eligible students took



“Let’s stay tadpoles forever!”

part. “The reaction was really very positive,” said Paula Praus-Williamson, HomeSource executive officer, who sent letters out alerting parents two weeks before the test. HomeSource, which opened in 1996, offers an array of courses aimed at rounding out a home-schooled education. The center serves about 600 students in grades K through 12, with an annual budget of a little more than \$1 million. Any parent has the right to opt out of state tests, although few regular public-school parents do so. The testing demand isn’t the only change coming as a result of the new interpretation of the rules governing private alternative education programs. In the past, the Department of

Education and the Bethel district applied those rules loosely, viewing HomeSource as something entirely different from other private alternative education programs. Most such programs offer specialized curricula that typically attract students who have struggled in regular high schools. But HomeSource and other private alternative programs share at least one essential characteristic, noted Cliff Brush, who coordinates alternative programs for the Department of Education. "It's important when we think about these to remember they're all publicly funded," said Brush, who helped draft a letter last month citing "compliance deficiencies" in the Bethel district's handling of HomeSource. "They may be operating within or outside of the district themselves, but as long as they're publicly funded, the same standards should apply." The department's letter said the district had fallen short on requirements to approve and evaluate HomeSource annually, and was unable to show that student placements at HomeSource were handled according to the statute. HomeSource's Praus-Williamson said home-schooling advocates may push for legislation in the next session to exempt HomeSource and the handful of similar home-schooling centers from some elements of the private alternative program statute.

From More African Americans Turn to Homeschooling: More African-American families have embraced home schooling in recent years, making black people one of the fastest-growing segments of home schoolers. Like charter schools and voucher programs, the home-schooling movement is fueled by parents fed up with large class sizes, low academic achievement peer pressures and the high cost of private education. Local statistics aren't available, reports Denise Smith Amos, but nationwide, 85,000 black children learned at home in 2003, according to national education statistics and home-schooling groups. Black students probably make up about 5 percent of the nation's 2 million home schoolers, says the National Black Home Educators Resource Association. But other groups say this estimate is conservative. Home schooling is no longer just the domain of white, religious conservatives or anti-establishment freethinkers. It's become a civil rights movement for black parents trying to take back their children's education, said Joyce Burges, the group's founder. The reasons black parents give for learning at home are varied. Some cite unsafe and inadequate public schools. Others say they've moved into better school systems in the suburbs, only to find their children still subject to academic inequities. Public school officials are loathe to criticize home-schoolers. Yet some teachers' groups and others object to home schooling, saying there's no oversight. Children are limited by what their parents know, they say, and home schooling has been used to hide truancy, child abuse and neglect. <http://news.enquirer.com>.



Our circular designs appeared as crop circles in 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

International News

POLAND

Just a brief note to say that there was an IDEC presence at the alternative education conference in Lodz, Poland last weekend. David Gribble attended and was present at the launch of the Polish version of his book - *Real Education - Varieties of Freedom*. Zosia Grudzinska, who hopes to be in Berlin in the summer, translated the book. Well done,

Zosia! The author and translator got to meet each other at last. Also Taras and Yulya made it over from Vinnitsya. Taras had put together a short film about AIST/Stork at top speed, with Polish voice-overs, that he's planning to put onto CDs. I don't know what it's like in the country you live in, but the idea of children having any degree of control over what and how they learn, and of being treated on equal terms with adults in decision-making is not something people in Poland are very used to. So it's great that the book is out, to give folks something to think over. *David French*

UNITED KINGDOM

A secondary school head has abolished homework for 12-year-old pupils, arguing that it is old-fashioned and no longer relevant. Patrick Hazelwood, head teacher of St John's school in Marlborough, said that he wanted pupils to "manage their own learning", making make teaching "relevant to life in the 21st century". Dr Hazelwood has adopted a scheme developed by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), which states that a teacher's job is not to transmit a body of knowledge to the pupils. "The National Curriculum is very much like a dinosaur. It served a purpose at the time; it filled the notion of the 'job for life'," he said. The head teacher of St John's stated that his aim is to "get away from the imposition of homework, a product of 20th century education" and allow children to embrace their 21st century "learning journey". Some parents reacted to the announcement with caution, while a spokesperson for the Department for Education and Skills stated, "A well organised homework programme helps children and young people to develop the skills and attitudes they will need for successful, independent life-long learning." www.teachers.org.uk.

From New Teaching Technique Goes to Top of the Class, by Kevin Schofield: A new method of teaching primary school children to read and write has been hailed as a major success after

researchers discovered it enabled pupils to surge years ahead of their contemporaries. The groundbreaking programme, known as synthetic phonics, was created at St Andrews University and has been piloted in Clackmannanshire for the past seven years. It involves teaching primary-one children to read by learning more than one letter sound at a time. Youngsters are taught the initial, middle and final letter sounds so that they quickly learn how to blend them together to form words. Videos and songs are also used to help youngsters spell and read unfamiliar words. The new method differs from traditional teaching, where children are taught one letter sound at a time right through the alphabet. Dr Joyce Watson and Professor Rhona Johnston, who developed the synthetic phonics programme, have been carrying out a study into its effectiveness since it was first introduced. The results revealed that by primary seven, pupils were more than three years ahead of their peers in reading and almost two years ahead in spelling. The study also found that boys outperformed girls in reading and spelling. The report said: "At the end of the seventh year at school, when the children were around 11.5 years old, they were reading at a 15-year-old level. Spelling was 1.75 years ahead of chronological age. The boys were significantly ahead of the girls in word reading and spelling. Their word reading was 11 months ahead of the girls and their spelling was nearly nine months ahead of the girls." Dr Watson and Prof Johnston plan to conduct a further study to find out why boys seem to benefit more than girls. The synthetic phonics method has been so successful that it is now used in more than 300 schools across the United Kingdom. Peter Peacock, the education minister, welcomed the study. He said: "These results show that innovative approaches to core subjects really can help our children achieve more at school. These youngsters have a head start in reading and writing

and this strong foundation will prepare them well for the challenges of secondary school and adult life.” <http://news.scotsman.com>.

Conferences

Sept. 1 – 5, 2005, **Rethinking Education Conference**, Sheraton Grand Hotel, Irving, TX. Pat Farenga, former publisher of Growing Without Schooling magazine, will discuss unschooling strategies for all ages, unschoolers and college, resources, skeptical relatives, and more. Linda Dobson, widely read author of numerous homeschool/unschool titles, will share her wealth of knowledge & experience in unschooling. Michael Mendizza, founder of Touch the Future, will talk about the value and necessity of play and joyful parenting as the basis for true education for our children. Lots of events and fun for all ages. Find out more about the conference program at www.rethinkingeducation.com

Sept. 29 – Oct 6, 2005, **World Wilderness Congress**, Anchorage, AK. About 1,000 folks from all over the world discussing and strategizing about wildness, indigenous people and the natural world. We are inviting a small group of committed students (age 16-23ish) from around the world to share their experience and insight in regards to living in nature and connections/ ties to the land. For more info about the 8th WWC go to wild.org. Email: wildlife@ak.net. Martinsen / Hornaman, P.O. Box 58, Sitka, AK 99835. Tel: (907) 747-8999.

Nov. 3 – 5, 2005, Coalition of Essential School's **Fall Forum 2005**, Boston Marriott Copley Place Hotel, Boston, MA. This year's theme is "Reclaiming the Freedom to Learn." Join educators, parents, students, and other leading thinkers in education at the CES annual conference to exchange ideas, ask questions, and share insights from schools around the world. This year we focus on creating schools that equip all students with the knowledge and skills to make the most of their lives and get a fair start on a promising future. Look for the Call for Proposals for conference sessions to be distributed in mid-May. Applications will be accepted from mid-May through mid-June. Conference registration will open in late August. To learn more about Fall Forum, visit: www.essentialschools.org.

Jobs and Internships

Schools looking for teachers Teachers looking for schools

As we go to press there are 21 schools advertising jobs and there are 8 teachers looking for employment. Contact us if you would like to place an ad as an alternative school or as a teacher looking for an alternative school. You can email us at info@educationrevolution.org or call us at 800 769-4171. Placing ads is a free service for AERO members.

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

Why Have Freedom in Education?

A roundtable discussion

Conducted by Dana Bennis

Dana Bennis has worked in freedom-based education both as an educator and in the non-profit sector. He presently works at The Calhoun School in New York City and is earning his Masters in Education degree through Vermont College of the Union Institute and University.

Dana Bennis (Moderator): Welcome everyone to the first segment of our new series here at the Vermont College Summer Residency, “Educational Dialogues through the Ages.” We have a great group of panelists here for the opening discussion on the topic, “Why Have Freedom in Education?” Taking time off from their busy schedules to join us today are Jean Jacques Rousseau, William Godwin, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, Leo Tolstoy, and Emma Goldman. Thank you all for being here, I know some of you had a long journey through space and time in order to be with us here today. I hope your universal translators are all working.

In order to begin this dialogue we thought it would be valuable to define “freedom in education.” Therefore, prior to this conversation tonight all our panelists sat down with the faculty at Vermont College and worked together to come up with a definition, which will be the basis for our conversation. The definition is the following: freedom involves both a negative and positive sense, to be free from restraint and interference and to be free to develop understanding and responsibility, to express oneself, and to realize one’s goals. In educational terms this means

the child is in control of their own education and the adult fills the role of guide, friend, and fellow-learner. Although this still may be a vague definition, it is what we will use for this conversation.

Now then, let’s start by putting to all of you the title question: Why have freedom in education? Who wants to start?



Jean Jacques Rousseau

Rousseau: Well, being the eldest here by about 44 years, I will begin. It is important to realize that people are born good, and that if people simply follow

their natures no mistakes will occur. By giving a child freedom you can save the child’s young mind from deceit, vanity, anger, and jealousy, from all the vices, in short, which result from slavery and which we cannot avoid instilling in our efforts to enforce obedience. Our endless restrictions make children dependent and unable to deal with reality, and our commandments result in less learning as well as hatred of both the subjects and of the educators who are forcing the study of those subjects.

Pestalozzi: Ah, it is good to hear you once again, Jean Jacques. You always say everything so clearly! I want to add that we must consider the psychology of the child when discussing education. The unpsychological schools are essentially only artificial stifling-machines for destroying all the results of the power and experience that nature herself brings to life. The violence done to children in schools is astounding. Just picture this: We leave children up to their fifth year, in the full enjoyment of nature – they already know full well the joy of unrestrained liberty – and after they have enjoyed this happiness of sensuous life for five whole years, we make all nature around them vanish from before their eyes. We pitilessly chain them for hours, days, weeks, months, years, to the contemplation of unattractive and monotonous letters and, contrasted with their former condition, to a maddening course of life.

What results from this unpsychological, baseless, unconnected teaching? The effects on children are a complete crippling of the mind and physical atrophy, as well as one-sidedness, warped judgment, superficiality, and presumptuous vanity.

Froebel: Yes, exactly right Johann. How can we expect children to be able to realize their essential nature and their connection with the eternal unity of life if we so completely control and

determine their lives? The only way by which man achieves true happiness, I believe, is through an education in freedom and self-awareness. Meanwhile, all teaching which prescribes and determines must impede and destroy the child's will.

Tolstoy: Let's just state a plain fact: schools resemble prisons

Most panelists: [Exclamations of agreement].

Tolstoy: Schools deprive children of their natural free motion and replace it with obedience and quiet. That certainly sounds like a prison to me. What happens is that teachers and pupils begin to see each other as enemies! School breeds a loathing for education, while children really learn disrespect for elders, hypocrisy, deceit, and idleness. Instead of helping children to naturally learn their culture through real interaction, schools have a stupefying effect in which children become dim-witted and do not desire to learn after completing school.

Now, I have taken a look at schools of the 21st century, and it is true that some of them are providing a decent place for children – and are producing much less loathing of school. However, many of these same problems still exist in a great many schools. I guess I was right when I doubted, in 1862, if schools based on freedom would become the common approach within a hundred years.

DB: So it seems that you all agree that there are very harmful effects of control and coercion on children in schools. If I can attempt a brief summary, you have said that such control has the power to cultivate vice and bad habits in children, to stifle their natural curiosity, to dumb them down and deaden them to further learning, to separate them from their true selves, and even to harm them physically through preventing mobility while at school.

Godwin: Excuse me, if I may step in here. I'd like to make a different point. All that has been said is incredibly important in terms of the localized effects of compulsion on children. What must also be considered is the dangerous potential role that any government can play in education. After all, government must always depend upon the opinion of the governed. Therefore, does it not seem likely that government will employ education to

strengthen its hand and perpetuate its institutions? Political leaders will try to control the education of the young so that children will grow into adults that support their political views.

Goldman: Yes, William, thank you for bringing this up. Every institution of our day, the family, the State, our moral codes, sees in every strong, beautiful, uncompromising personality a deadly enemy; therefore every effort is being made to cramp human emotion and



Leo Tolstoy

originality of thought in the individual into a straitjacket from its earliest infancy. After all, individual initiative could result in a challenge to the State or the current dominant ideas.

As the great thinker Max Stirner would have said, any kind of education can limit one's freedom of thought. He decried the way education, controlled by governments and institutions, is putting "wheels in the head," or implanted ideas, which enable the government to control citizens. Such wheels in the head can include ideals that drive people to sacrifice themselves for the good of the state. These wheels are very hard to get rid of, and meanwhile we do what the government wants.

I do not mean to say that this process is carried on consciously but it certainly results in the complete molding of children. Schools should have the words "predigested food" written on their buildings, as a warning to all who do not wish to lose their own personalities and their original sense of judgment.

Godwin: I must say it is good to have a woman on this panel, Emma. I know

that men have dominated political and educational thought at least in producing written work, but there are many women out there who have contributed just as much to these issues. After all these years, my wife Mary Wollstonecraft must be getting to me! After all, she wrote her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792!

Goldman: Well, thank you William, although just the fact that you mentioned my gender makes me realize that we have a long way to go. But I'd like to continue, if I may, since there is an obvious fact that we have not yet mentioned. This fact is that human beings detest coercion. Every sensitive being abhors the idea of being treated as a mere machine or as a mere parrot of conventionality and respectability. In practice, this means that compulsion is bound to awaken resistance. This is essential for all teachers and parents to realize. Even parents who reject the authority of the government to control their minds can be dogmatic themselves and awaken this resistance in their children, who may grow to love government control simply because their parents were constantly thrusting the opposite idea on their children!

This point makes clear to me another reason why we must have freedom for children – because children will nearly always rebel against compulsion. These tendencies of children are actually refreshing and encouraging psychological forces. They are the greatest guarantee that the independent mind, at least, will always resist every external and foreign force exercised over the human heart and mind.

DB: This reminds me of a song from the musical *The Fantasticks*, entitled "Never Say No." Two fathers sing together about how every time they say no to their children, the children do the exact thing the fathers were trying to prevent. So their advice to fellow parents is to, "never say no!"

Tolstoy: I liked Emma's comments. Her insightful look into the tendency of humans to rebel brings to my mind another human tendency that educators must be concerned with – the tendency for adults to influence children and for children to be influenced by adults. As adults we have great power. In addition to all the negative effects of compulsion discussed above, a heavy influence on

children can also result in students assimilating those beliefs which the founders of the institution want the children to have.

Now, I am not saying that therefore we ought to attempt to stop influencing children. In truth, it is impossible to deny this tendency; adults *do* influence children. However, the existence of this tendency proves to me the necessity of freedom in the matter of instruction. In other words, it is precisely because adults influence children that we need to have freedom in the learning process. Freedom will ensure that there is no indoctrination.

DB: Let me see if I get this right, Leo and Emma. Children will always want to resist compulsion and yet they can be unduly influenced by adults. So you think freedom will help ensure against both rebellion and indoctrination?

Goldman and Tolstoy: Right.

Godwin: I believe that Leo and Emma have hit upon some of the significant psychological bases for our needing freedom in education. But there is something deeper here. Simply put, freedom is a natural human right. Each child has a claim upon his own (or her own, of course – that was for you if you are still awake in the audience, Mary!) little sphere of empire and discretion; and he is entitled to his appropriate portion of independence.

Tolstoy: Yes, William, exactly. This is crucial. Humans are born with freedom, and the right to have “ownership of self,” as Max Stirner would say. Unfortunately, state-run schools have at their foundation the belief that they have the right to forcibly educate the masses. Educators support this statement with at least four reasons: 1.) The knowledge given in the schools is the God revealed truth, 2.) It is based on eternal laws of reason, 3.) Schools have always been based on compulsory activities, and 4.) History has evolved education in this way.

On the contrary, there is no right to educate when education means the tendency of one man to make another just like himself. The right belongs to the child as to whether or not he will take and make use of knowledge that the world can provide. We must grant the child full freedom to avail himself of teaching which answers his need, teaching which he wants, and to avail

himself of it to the extent to which he needs and wants it, and to avoid the teaching which he does not need and which he does not want.

DB: So you are both saying that freedom should be part of education because freedom is a natural human right. Do the other panelists agree?

All panelists: [General murmurs of agreement].

Godwin: Well, I’ll tell you one person who doesn’t believe that, my elder Jean Jacques here. What do you say, Jean?

Rousseau: Quite the contrary, William, I do agree with you that it is a right for all people to live in freedom. But, and perhaps this is what you are getting at, we must realize that as adults we have goals for our children and we want them



William Godwin

to grow in a certain way. So, while preserving the appearance of liberty for children, we can be simultaneously modeling right behavior and guiding children towards what we want. Certainly, the child should do what he wishes, but he should only wish what you desire, he should not take a step which you have not foreseen nor open his lips to speak without your knowing what he is about to say.

Godwin: Jean, I have heard you say this a hundred times, but I still cannot understand how someone with your deep intelligence and insight into childhood and human nature can justify such obvious deception towards children. It is like Leo’s analogy of a bird owner who wants to give his birds more freedom, so he lets them out of the cage and gives them freedom at the end

of cords attached to their feet. Your precious Emile is really your personal puppet and thus has no true freedom. Will you at least admit that?

Rousseau: My Emile believes he has complete freedom, and for all intents and purposes he does. But like Leo, I recognize that adults do indeed have an influence on children. Children are never completely free from all influences. Therefore, we ought to use our influence over children in a positive way.

Froebel: Although I do agree with the fundamental belief in freedom, I must say that Jean has a point. We should not step back and refuse to play a role in our children’s lives. For instance, I believe that the importance of religion and union with God ought to be implanted in children from a young age, even though the children may apparently not understand or even notice it.

Godwin: So both you and Jean do not believe in the right to freedom, then, Friedrich!

Froebel: That is not it at all, William. What we are saying is that we recognize the importance of freedom and the fact that we as adults can influence children and therefore ought to influence children in a good way.

Tolstoy: I think, if I may step in, that this is where freedom gets very tricky. As I was just saying, and as Jean and Friedrich reiterated, we as adults *do* have an influence on children. No one can ever be completely free from outside influence. But while the acceptance of this fact leads some to plan and determine how to mold children, this fact impresses upon me the need of educators to give them total freedom of choice in their education. In my opinion, anyone who advocates a particular method or a certain ideology with children or who plans how to mold children is transgressing the child’s freedom, including our friends Jean Jacques, Johann, and Friedrich here.

But still, it must be made clear that the dilemma is not, “how do we eliminate influence and leave kids completely free?” We *will* influence children and must accept that. The dilemma for us as educators is “how is the educator to act in order not to transgress the limits of culture, that is, of freedom?”

Goldman: I believe that Elizabeth Ferm, teacher and director of the Stelton

Modern School (based on Francisco Ferrer's Modern School model which I supported for many years) in New Jersey, has a great answer to your question, Leo. While she believed schools must avoid the imposition of ideas and beliefs, which is I think what you are getting at, she worried that teachers would confuse self-determination for the child with passivity for the educator. On the contrary, Ferm would say that educators should be active, not passive, participants in the child's quest for self-expression. The role of the educator is to give meaning to self-expression – to help students learn how to be their own authority and also how to accept the usefulness and necessity of help from others. I believe Elizabeth's description of the role of a teacher fits perfectly with my own belief that a teacher oversteps his function as soon as he attempts to force the child in any way whatsoever.

But I believe that this discussion of the role of the educator is getting a bit away from our original question. Aren't we supposed to be focusing on the reasons for freedom in education?

DB: Yes, thank you, Emma. I did not want to stop this interesting bit of dialectic. And I want to point out that all of you have made important comments on the nature of freedom and the role of educators. Within the practice of freedom in education, I believe there will always be a conversation (if not an all-out debate) about if, how, and to what extent educators and schools should influence children.

However, in addition to what we have said regarding human rights, psychological factors, and the negative effects of coercion, we have not yet touched on the practical benefits of having freedom in learning. Anyone want to take a shot at that?

Tolstoy: Well, back in my native Russia in the 1800s, we did not have universal compulsory education. One of the many advantages of that was that you had the chance to study and see for yourself what happens to children who never had to deal with the constraint and the dulled minds that resulted from education in schools. My observations of these children proves that people entirely uneducated, that is, who are subject only to the free cultural

influences . . . are fresher, more vigorous, more powerful, more independent, juster, humaner, and, above all, more useful! These are the same qualities that we produced at Yasnaya Polyana, my non-compulsory school for peasant children.

Rousseau: Those moral, social, and personal virtues are also those that



Emma Goldman

characterize my Emile as a result of his natural education. To your list I would add confidence, contentment, honesty, temperance, patience, resolve, and bravery. I repeat that by replacing *external* compulsion with *natural* compulsion, we are guarding the heart from vice and the mind from error.

Moreover, because I chose to let Emile's body grow freely with the constant exercise to which his instincts prompted him he grew hardened and became stronger as well as happier. Along with these moral, social, and physical qualities, his intellect was also developed in the best possible way. My purpose in that regard was not to furnish his mind with knowledge, but to teach him the method of acquiring it when necessary, to lead him to know its exact value, and to inspire him above all with a love of truth. Learning how to learn and how to recognize truth is developed through freedom, and these qualities are more important than memorizing facts. This seems especially true in the 21st century, I must add, with this new-fangled 'Inter Net' thing.

Pestalozzi: Yes, Jean. And I have to add that this Inter Net has added another layer to my concept of "Anschuuang," or "sense impressions"

– which are the only true foundation of human instruction. Sights, sounds, smells, and interactions with other people and our surroundings make impressions on one's senses and become the building blocks for learning and development. If humans are left free and open to the impressions from Nature and are not bound by the artificial stifling-machines, commonly called schools, then we can truly realize and connect with our own self. We must remember that all that we are, all we wish, all we might be, comes ultimately out of our own selves.

Godwin: This reminds me again of Max Stirner, who ought to be here himself if he wasn't over at Goddard College's residency instead. But as mentioned earlier, Max spoke about "ownership of self," and he lamented how government and church and other institutions create people who cannot find themselves because they are surrounded by images of what they ought to be. The free person, on the other hand, will be able to own his or her thoughts.

DB: Perhaps, then, *expression of self* and *freedom* have a reciprocal and dependent relationship; both require the other and both enable the development of the other.

Froebel: Yes, I believe that is true. I would add that the presence of freedom and self-awareness are necessary for the creation of wisdom and are the only way by which man achieves true happiness, since it leads him to the fulfillment of all that his nature demands.

Goldman: You are echoing words from the first quarter of the 18th century, Friedrich; ideas discussed in the 1720s, when only Jean here was around – and he but a boy. People were already talking about how freedom of thought and speech promotes wisdom, which in turn provides the basis for prosperity.

DB: Well on that note about happiness and prosperity, I think we'll leave off this discussion for now and give us time for a couple of questions from the floor. Do I see any hands out there? Ah, yes, Peter?

Peter: Yes, thank you. In my own teaching I find it important to be open to trying out new ideas and approaches, and the concept of freedom for students seems to have some merit. However, I do not think it is possible to know what

is right for every situation and every person. Do any of you worry that you are too dogmatic about the theory and practice of freedom in education?

Pestalozzi: Great question, Peter. I believe there is a tendency for anyone who is working against a system to merely react and do the opposite in a dogmatic fashion. We must be careful of this. While freedom is an essential part of my educational practice, instead of basing all I do on the idea of freedom I choose to follow a more appropriate guide: psychology. I am trying to bring education into harmony with the way the mind actually works. By helping children take in impressions through their senses in an organized manner, we



Friedrich Froebel

are providing them with the foundation of human knowledge and instruction. In this way, I am not dogmatically following an idea, but listening to the *true* nature of the human mind.

Tolstoy: But, dear Johann, for all the good work you have done for children, is it not possible that you are simply replacing one dogmatic approach with another? Considering the psychology of how we learn is very helpful, yes. But we all learn in different ways. Peter is quite right here. Attempting to create a philosophical definition of education and of its aims is impossible, useless, and injurious. We not only do not know, we cannot know what is at the essence of an educational experience for other people. This idea seems even more valid in the 21st century as technology and transportation have opened up infinite doors for human beings, provided they are not oppressed in some other fashion.

Peter's point is so valuable because we cannot dogmatically implement freedom for children, as that would in effect be forcing the child to do everything on their own. Such an approach would go against the very idea of freedom. I believe that the only method of education is experimentation, and its only criterion freedom. In other words, each person and each teacher-pupil relationship ought to have the freedom to experiment and determine the best ways for that person to live and learn, while keeping in mind that children always should have the option not to listen to the teacher.

DB: I would just like to point out a couple of things before having one last question. Leo just brought in the idea that people cannot determine ahead of time what they or anyone else will need to learn for their life. If this is true, then it is impossible to pre-plan a curriculum of learning that will include all of what a person needs. Freedom in learning, at least to some extent, then becomes a

necessity so that each individual's education can be arranged in accord with that person's wants and needs. This idea of necessity due to the uniqueness of each person and the infinite possibilities the world provides seems to be an additional reason for having freedom in learning.

Now, do we have another question from the floor? Yes, Connie?

Connie: All this talk about freedom and happiness is all fine, well, and good, and certainly very important. But as I hear you all describe the benefits of freedom for the individual, I can't help but think about the larger social context. What about thinking of freedom in terms of the liberation of all the oppressed people out there? Isn't that huge piece missing from this conversation? Haven't any of you had the time to read Freire?

Godwin: Thank you for that excellent question, Connie. I also have felt the lack of that important piece in this dialogue, and I assure you Freire has

This dialogue is, of course, imaginary. The comments from the speakers include both verbatim quotations from their own writings (listed below) as well as words that I have given them from my interpretation of their ideas. For example, in the first remark from Rousseau, the italicized text below is a direct quote from *Emile* (Rousseau, 1762/1964, p. 36) while the rest is my own writing for Rousseau:

"Well, being the eldest here by about 44 years, I will begin. It is important to realize that people are born good, and that if people simply follow their natures no mistakes will occur. By giving a child freedom you can save the child's *young mind from deceit, vanity, anger, and jealousy, from all the vices, in short, which result from slavery and which we cannot avoid instilling in our efforts to enforce obedience.*

For enjoyment and flow of reading, the verbatim quotes are not specifically referenced but are meshed into the rest of the comment. Hopefully this format is fun to read and pays respect to the writers and their ideas. If anyone would like more specific references, please email me at dbennis12@yahoo.com.

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been on both my *and* Mary's bookshelf for many years now. What I have seen since the 1700s is that governments use education to teach citizens to obey the laws favoring the wealthy and to accept them as wise and just, and to support

chauvinistic patriotism and the political and economic power of the state. Meanwhile, the general populace is stifled from gaining any power. I believe that despotism and injustice will continue to exist in any society in which

human reason is controlled within the walls of the schoolhouse.

For this reason it is essential that we have an education that does not merely echo the values of those in power and train citizens to support that power. Our youth ought not to be instructed to venerate a constitution, however excellent; they should be led to venerate truth; then they can venerate their constitution in so far as it corresponds

Here is a summary of the conclusions of the panelists regarding "why have freedom in education?"

- 1) **Freedom is a natural human right.** All people are entitled to control over their lives.
- 2) **The existence of psychological forces**
 - a) Coercion tends to lead to resistance and rebellion; freedom for children from constraint prevents this reaction
 - b) Children tend to be influenced by adults; freedom for children will reduce this influence
- 3) **Necessity.** Due to the uniqueness of each person and the infinite possibilities the world provides, there must be freedom in education. This ensures that each individual's education will be arranged in accord with that person's wants and needs
- 4) **The practical benefits to the individual** – development of the whole person
 - a) Personality benefits: confidence, independence, honesty, resolve, responsibility
 - b) Intellectual benefits: understanding, knowing how to learn, being able to recognize truth
 - c) Social benefits: a dedication to being just and humane
 - d) Physical benefits: strength and health
- e) Identification with one's self ("spiritual benefits" some would say)
- 5) **The practical benefits to society**
 - a) The reduction of poverty and misery
 - b) The creation of a more just and humane world
- 6) **The negative effects of coercion and constraint**
 - a) Personal effects: the cultivation of vice and bad habits such as deceit, anger, jealousy, and superficiality
 - b) Intellectual effects: ineffective learning, the stifling of natural curiosity, dislike of the subjects that are forced, and a losing of the desire to learn
 - c) Social effects: a dislike of the person that forces the learning, competition among students
 - d) Physical effects: physical atrophy and deterioration resulting from immobility
 - e) A separation of a person from their self ("spiritual effect" some would say)
 - f) Pawn for governments or institutions: education controlled by the government or an institution has the potential to mold people in the way it desires instead of letting people develop in their own way.
 - g) Societal effects: indoctrination into the present form of society, maintenance of the status quo



Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi

with their uninfluenced deductions of truth.

Goldman: I would also like to respond to you, Connie. William, myself, and many others have been involved with education not only because we value the development of the individual, but also because of the impact it can have on a societal level. As I recall from his works, Johann used to speak and write constantly about the benefits of education for the poor. Is that right, Johann?

Pestalozzi: Yes, exactly, Emma. One great purpose of my life has been to stop the springs of the misery in which I saw the people around me sunk. An education based on nature and sense impressions is the answer.

Goldman: Right. Education must insist upon the free growth and development of the innate forces and tendencies of the child. In this way alone can we hope for free individuals and eventually also for a free community, free from injustice and inequality. In other words, freedom for the child is so essential for me precisely because we need to create a more just and humane world.

DB: Well, thank you to Jean Jacques, William, Johann, Friedrich, Leo, and Emma. This was a wonderful dialogue. Before we finish this evening I would like to point out that education today has been highly influenced by the speakers we have up here. The ideas we have discussed tonight, including having children follow their natural motivation, the importance of considering the psychology of learning, and the practice of giving children freedom to control their own education, are in place in many schools around the world and this is due in large part to the insight and work of these panelists. Although it is true that the majority of schools do not practice these ideas in full, we can see the effects in little ways in most educational settings. Some playtime for young children is a standard now, and group-work and class discussions, mainly absent from education up to the mid 20th century, is now quite common.

Additionally, some individual teachers and schools around the world closely follow the ideas we have discussed here tonight. Many schools which call themselves progressive, holistic, free, or democratic are practicing freedom for children to varying extents. Schools calling themselves progressive and holistic, such as The Frances W. Parker School, where I presently work, give children some degree of freedom of choice in their learning while implementing a flexible pre-set curriculum. Such an approach brings to mind the melding of freedom and planned influence discussed by Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, who are often cited as inspirations for these schools.

Meanwhile, there are many free and democratic schools throughout the world putting the child's education completely in the hands of the child, without a conscious effort to push the students in any specific direction. This approach more closely resembles the anarchist or libertarian conception of freedom as described by Godwin, Tolstoy, and Goldman, and once again those names are often brought up as inspirations. Nonetheless, even though democratic schools may not consciously direct children, I believe that the end goal or aim of all of these schools, progressive and democratic, is the same: to enable children to lead happy, fulfilling lives.

Again, thank you to all our panelists and also to Vermont College for sponsoring this exciting new dialogue series. Join us next time for a discussion of "What does freedom in education look like in practice?" So long everyone.

Books etc.

A Dorset Utopia

The Little Commonwealth and Homer Lane

By Judith Stinton

Reviewed by Albert Lamb

A new book has just come out in England retelling the remarkable story of the real granddaddy of democratic education, Homer Lane. If A.S. Neill had not seen Lane's *Little Commonwealth* in action it is unlikely that he would have created his free school Summerhill with its powerful child-run democratic structures.

Homer Lane was born of puritan stock in Hudson, New Hampshire and grew up in Framingham, Massachusetts. He



Homer Lane

married young and for love and his wife bore him two children before dying of pneumonia. He later married her older sister, with whom he had two more children.

Lane enrolled in the Sloyd Training School in Boston. Sloyd, a finish word meaning 'skill', was a method of handicraft training that became an important part of the movement to dilute the over-academic school curriculum. John Dewey, then teaching at

Harvard, was one of the lecturers on the course and he became a mentor for Homer Lane.

Dewey was critical of the existing system of education. It was class-bound and self-interested, whereas it should be an introduction to a life of shared interests and social interaction. The combination of Sloyd and Dewey was central to Lane's developing thought.

As a Sloyd teacher Lane moved to Detroit Michigan where he was briefly appointed as Superintendent of playgrounds.

His observation of the children there led him to conclude that "by far the greater proportion of juvenile crimes are merely a form of play." In their unsupervised games, the children's heroes were "the bandit, the pirate, the outlaw and the robber." Lane was dismayed to discover that delinquency declined in cities with unsupervised grounds. His investigation of this discovery led to an interest in the ideas of Maria Montessori with her theories of the relationship between

Homer Lane ran The Ford Republic, a kind of reform school for boys in Michigan, where he added an element of self-gov-

ernment. This got him invited to England by George Montagu, who was involved in setting up a very high-profile institution for juvenile delinquents to be called The Little Commonwealth. George Montagu came to his radical ideas as an MP and a member of the Borstal Committee.

In December 1911, Montagu spoke again of his plans during the annual meeting of the Penal Reform League, at which he explained that he would have to begin his republic with boys alone, "to avoid the antagonism of the Home Office," His audience, however, contained "some eminent suffragettes." Two of them, Lady Constance Lytton and Miss Sylvia Pankhurst, "moved that such an enterprise would be unsatisfactory if girls and women were left out."

When he was given the job of creating The Little Commonwealth in 1913 Homer Lane decided to start with a group of girls and let them settle in before adding delinquent boys to the group. He observed a trial of three girls charged with theft in London.

At first sight the girls, (Lane wrote) were "certainly not very promising material," though he had been struck by their behaviour when they were finally caught. "When the girls were arrested in the act of secreting some stolen articles, one of them had said: 'I'll come along and own up if you'll let that girl go,'" indicating a fourth and younger member of the group. At this point I determined to try to get these girls for the Commonwealth." Lane saw the girls' thieving as a healthy and legitimate reaction to their surroundings and upbringing. He seemed to relish their bad behaviour.

These children of the mean streets of London, who were known as "The Terror of Deptford" were to become the founding members of the new community deep in the countryside on the Southwest coast.

A week later, Lane went to collect them. He refused to use handcuffs, or the police matron and two constables who had been assigned to help him. Instead he sent one girl off to find a taxi cab while he waited with the other two. At Paddington Station he himself went to buy the tickets, leaving the girls to buy newspapers to read on the train. As Lane recalled, he gave the "abundant opportunity to escape" and they made no attempt to take it "Thus their first contact with the Commonwealth was that of responsibility and confidence."

There is hardly a more inspiring story in the whole history of societies dealing with children and Judith Stinton has done a lovely job with it. Published by Black Dog Books, 104 Trinity Street, Norwich, Norfolk, NR2 2BJ UK. £11.95



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Tim Seldin & Sharon Caldwell at the 2005 AERO Conference.

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