

*The Magazine of Alternative Education*

# *Education Revolution*

*I s s u e   N u m b e r   F o r t y   T w o*

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# GWS!



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# Education Revolution

The Magazine of Alternative Education

Summer 2005 - Issue Number Forty One - [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org)

AERO

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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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.

## Education Revolution

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“Adults quite often judge kid timelines in an unrealistic manner. How many adults have a hobby, or start a project, or begin a book – or several books at once – and then get sidetracked? Or simply put something away for a while and go back to it, or, having tried something, decide that they do not wish to continue? That type of ‘doing’ is normal unless you are being clock timed or deadline timed.

“Kids will often begin, say, a cardboard castle, then leave it... then a few weeks later, as if it was the next day, come back and begin to work on it again. The same in our writing workshop. Stories will be started, given up, and then returned to very naturally the next term. There are all types of independent doing, and independent taking part and they all show something to each person as they engage in each thing.

“At a free school, over time, kids get to see the difference between quick passions abandoned and others continued, lessons attended regularly or sporadically, commitment to others to complete a project by a certain time for a reason and so on. How many times do adults think they have a passion and then, after trying, decide that it was a bit of a pumped up illusion? Kids do the same and it’s a good thing to experience.”

Photo by Tomo Usuda



Leonard Turton, the brilliant creator of Clubhouse Democracy, now looking very much at home as the Class Two teacher at Summerhill School

*Welcome to the Education Revolution!*

*The times they are a'changing and yet once children have been brought into this world they need to be cared for and looked after. They'll want some stability and they'll need to be acknowledged for who they are. Let's hope we can have the wisdom to really see them clearly and help them get what they need..*

albertlamb@bigfoot.com

*Albert*

*Noella Usborne, who, at 5-years-old, had never taken a photo before has now made a good start on her photographic career with this great portrait of Jerry Mintz and her finger.*



## *A Word from Jerry*

As I write this I am entering a very hectic and potentially significant period of time. Later this week I will do a consultation for Unity Charter School in New Jersey. They are interested in exploring ways to bring their school back to its original vision of a democratic charter school. First I will meet with a group of staff members, parents, board members and student representatives. A month later I will return to build on what we have developed, and perhaps to do a prototype meeting with the whole school.

In between, leaving the day after visiting Unity, I will go to India for the third time, keynoting a gathering of thousands of science students, and then working with the teachers and students of a DAV school in New Mumbai to help them democratize the 2400 student school. I don't believe that has been done before.

After that we will build toward the third AERO conference in June, followed by the IDEC in Australia next July!

Never a dull moment!

# Looking for News

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with Albert Lamb

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## Hurricane Season

I wonder what it would be like to be an 11-year-old today? TV, the Internet, and computer games leave them frazzled and they're rarely allowed outside. Corporations are moving into their every waking moment. Grownups talk of war and more war. Terrorists are on the move. Even more alarmingly the ice caps are melting fast and the seas are warming up. Natural disasters have a new edge on them and the weather seems to be changing. The price of gas has doubled in a year and people are talking seriously of 'peak oil'. What will happen if we can't drive our cars?

With our modern media kids have become dully sophisticated. There is not much anymore that a 16-year-old knows all about that an 11-year-old isn't acquainted with and everyone is growing up very fast. There isn't so much real childish childhood around us anymore these days. But growing up to what? The world seems to be rolling into a stormy new era and no one seems to be talking very seriously about what's going on.

Often it's hard to tell what the adults are talking about at all. A huge new aid package goes through the US congress because of Hurricane Katrina and the devastation it caused along the Gulf coast while at the same time the House of Representatives is planning to cut \$10 Billion from the Medicaid program. New tougher bankruptcy laws are going through just at a moment when tropical storms have made thousands inadvertently bankrupt.

Instead of embracing good jobs for the recently displaced – President Bush's first major act in the recovery effort was to suspend a law (the Davis-Bacon Act) that requires federal contractors to pay workers "prevailing" wages. At the same time, his administration has signed no-bid contracts that will give billions to multi-national corporations like Halliburton without any guarantee that they will hire displaced people to rebuild their own communities. *CAF Action Center* September 2005

So many opportunities! Here's the *Wall Street Journal* followed by The Guardian in the UK.

Congressional Republicans, backed by the White House, say they are using relief measures for the hurricane-ravaged Gulf coast to achieve a broad range of conservative economic and social policies, both in the storm zone and beyond. **After Katrina, Republicans Back a Sea of Conservative Ideas** John R. Wilke & Brody Mullins 15 September 2005

This vision was laid out in undisguised form during a meeting at the Heritage Foundation's Washington headquarters this month. There, a Republican group compiled a list of 32 "pro-free-market ideas for responding to Hurricane Katrina and high gas prices," including school vouchers and repealing environmental regulations. Among the proposals were: "Make the entire affected area a flat-tax free-enterprise zone." Naomi Klein September 24, 2005

School vouchers are one issue where conservatives are in agreement with many alternative educators, as they could provide a simple way of funding kids in alternative schools. They are also feared as a Trojan horse that could bring in corporate run monoliths in the place of public schools.

**Voucher Vultures:** The secretary of education has been very hesitant to waive No Child Left Behind accountability rules for schools accepting displaced students. If the Bush administration is seriously concerned about accountability, then how does it explain the \$488 million for vouchers to schools that have no accountability standards? How does it explain why vouchers would be offered to students who didn't previously attend private or religious schools? It can't.

Regardless of your position on vouchers, now is not the time to support the administration's political opportunism. The strategy is pretty clear: Tug on the heartstrings about helping all children, and then, once the students are in school, demand that they remain in private/religious institutions so that their education is not disturbed. At that point—no surprise—the funding for public schools will be siphoned off to fund the vouchers. The New York Times, for example, quotes the president of the National Catholic Educational Association as saying "this gives us a good idea of how this would work, like a national experiment." *TomPaine.com* Earl Hadley Sept 23 05

Whatever happens with the Bush administration using this disaster to push its own agenda there will be a huge job to do this winter.

**Across Nation, Storm Victims Crowd Schools:** School districts from Maine to Washington State were enrolling thousands of students from New Orleans and other devastated Gulf Coast districts yesterday in what experts said could become the largest student resettlement in the nation's history. Schools welcoming the displaced students must not only provide classrooms, teachers and textbooks, but under the terms of President Bush's education law must also almost immediately begin to raise their scholastic achievement unless some provisions of that law are waived.

Historians said that those twin challenges surpassed anything that public education had experienced since its creation after the Civil War, including disasters that devastated whole school districts, like the San Francisco earthquake and the Chicago fire.



"In terms of school systems absorbing kids whose lives and homes have been shattered, what we're going to watch over the next weeks is unprecedented in American education," said Jeffrey Mirel, a professor of history and education at the University of Michigan. The total number of displaced students is not yet known, but it appears to be well above 200,000. *New York Times* Sam Dillon September 7, 2005,

## Separate and Unequal

The televised fate of the people who didn't get out of New Orleans in time (see inside our back cover), predominantly black and poor, brought issues of race and poverty back into the consciousness of the world. Here are a couple of related stories.

When most people think of higher education in New Orleans, they are more likely to think of Tulane or perhaps Loyola than Xavier and Dillard, two small historically black universities scrambling to get back on their feet. But in the parable of race and inequality left behind by the floodwaters, one chapter still to be written will be the fate of places like Dillard and Xavier, which suffered far worse damage than their wealthier counterparts on higher ground and have tiny endowments, limited resources and students who are almost all dependent on financial aid. *New York Times* By Peter Applebome September 25, 2005

**The Shame of the Nation: Separate and Unequal by Jonathan Kozol** The chief academic authority on this issue, whom Kozol interviews and quotes, is Gary Orfield of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. According to Orfield and his colleagues, writing in 2004, and quoted by Kozol, "American public schools are now 12 years into the process of continuous resegregation. . . . During the 1990's, the proportion of black students in majority white schools has

## NCLB... NOT FOR ME

by Lisa Dolasinski

Presently, I am not eligible to vote; however the outcome of the Senate and House debates and presidential mandates directly affects me. Our president and legislative leaders would be wise to consult with America's teens, allowing them to voice their concerns. I am passionate about education and equal opportunities for everyone; however, I do not support the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy. I feel that the government should take smaller steps to more effectively benefit the youth and spend American's money more wisely.

First and foremost, there is much too little focus on the social causes of poor academic performance. Decades of investigations support the theory that school achievement is directly affected by social position. How can a child succeed if: he is hungry, has unmet health care needs, adult guidance and support is unavailable, has not had proper rest, or has inadequate housing? I am fortunate enough to be raised in a home where I am sufficiently provided for; in contrast, during the week I attend school with peers obviously not receiving proper care. This is the issue that should be focused on, not a broad, unclear program. Anyone sincerely committed to aiding

the performance of a disadvantaged child should address all the basic needs and rights of adolescents initially. In 2000 President Bush promised, "Children will receive the nutrition, physical activity experiences, and health care needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies, and to maintain the mental alertness necessary to be prepared to learn." No mention as to how this program was supposed to be funded was ever made. Ensuring the juveniles' welfare, then acting on behalf of their education should be the steps taken by the government. Bush's initiative, while commendable, is overzealous and mistakenly over simplified.

In addition, there is too much focus on a narrow curriculum. Students in affluent schools, boasting good scores will continue to receive a full range of subjects including art, social studies, and science. Condemned to a second class lifestyle and education, impoverished students must put "reading first", missing out on a varied, enriched learning experience. With all this focus on literacy, one group is limited to a lean diet of basic skills while the other will receive the more complete diet associated with power and success in this society. Evident in my own community, wealthier schools offer a much more enticing curriculum, exciting students about learning, while schools forced to cut their budget yearly cannot possibly compete. These schools produce much less scholarly graduates, not efficiently preparing them for their future endeavors. Establishing the No Child Left Behind ideal will only continue the downward cycle for the disadvantaged youth, not break it!

Furthermore, schools who do not succeed in NCLB's eyes are branded with a scarlet letter. Intensified testing pressure and unyielding stress is placed upon students and teachers alike to show immediate improvement, often before necessary resources arrive. If a school fails to show progress with any two subjects of students for two years in a row, it must be identified as "needing improvement." This type of school is seen as failing, and it does not reflect well on the students or administration. This is especially harmful for schools today because parents of children at a school "needing improvement" are now given the option to abandon the school, opting to send them to private or charter school. My parents are not prepared to send me to a second class school, sacrificing my education; the NCLB program will only hurt schools more by depleting their funding as enrollment plummets. The idea of labeling schools has a negative effect on the youth, emotionally traumatizing them.

As a student myself, I believe that the "No Child Left Behind" program lacks beneficial substance. I feel that there are much more worthwhile projects to implement in schools across the nation. Please, President Bush, give the local communities back the right to administer and design their own educational curriculums. They can best assess the needs of their constituents and design effective programs. The government needs to take smaller steps in reforming educational policies, not make extravagant promises it cannot keep.

*Lisa Dolasinski, 17, lives in Boardman, OH. This essay was a winning entrant in Connect for Kids' first annual essay contest for young writers. Reprinted with permission from Connect for Kids, [www.connectforkids.org](http://www.connectforkids.org).*

# A *Spectrum* of Alternatives

By Paul Rathgeb

*Paul Rathgeb is the publisher of Natural Learning, a journal for teens and adults out of Olympia Community Free School. [www.olympiafreeschool.org](http://www.olympiafreeschool.org)*

When it comes to education, people are fed up between a choice of Pepsi or Coke, Wal-mart or Costco. And with the indoctrination of Bush's *No Child Left Behind* Act and more recently his highly endorsed 'Intelligent Design' theory, state schooling is fast becoming a less enticing choice for our children's education, provoking many people to seek other alternatives. Some people at the forefront of the alternative education movement journeyed from around the globe to Albany, NY this past June, to a conference titled *A Spectrum of Alternatives*. In a 5-day open forum of workshops, meetings, lectures, and dialogue everyone put on their thinking caps to take a critical look at the pattern of state schooling, and to look at the abundance of other alternatives in education. People traveled from as far as Nepal, and South Africa, representing about 85 unique schools, that have emerged from the "one size fits all principal" of monopolized education – or what speaker John Taylor Gatto at the conference referred to as, "weapons of mass instruction."

Hosted by the AERO this was the third annual conference at the Russell Sage Campus. The purpose, according to the founder and host Jerry Mintz, was "to get dialog started amongst a variety of educational alternatives." Workshop topics included Montessori, Waldorf, Sudbury, Modern School, Free School, Eco-villages and home education. No kind of alternative education was left out of the mix, with a hodge-podge of free-range workshops, panels, films, and social gatherings in between, to tie up any loose strings.

Tim Seldin, of the Montessori organization, said during his presentation, "The wisest people to govern schools are the collective community." Matt Hern, who operates the Purple Thistle Center in Vancouver, Canada and is the author of *Field Day*, added, "there is no body of central knowledge which you can hold up and look at, which all kids need to know. The question to be asking our kids is... what do you need to thrive, and this is different everyday."

Alfie Kohn, who took stage with his slick wit about midway through the conference, argues for a different kind of structure than democratic based schools. Kohn speaks widely on human behavior, education, and parenting as an author of several books. He advocates a model where the teacher "is to be more involved, not less... more involved in the direction of provoking and sparking kids." A comment made by an attendee at the conference sums up Kohn, "Kohn provokes...that's his style, his mission. And he succeeded!"

John Taylor Gatto got last word as speaker at the conference. This was rightfully deserved. Gatto, who formerly spent 30 years as a public school teacher in NY, has written a

massive book entitled, *The Underground History of American Education*. He made reference to compulsory schooling as the "flea principal." Fleas trapped inside a dish will attempt to leap out, while continually bouncing off of a sealed lid. With the lid sealed tight for a while and later removed, the fleas no longer continue to jump out. These are schools, Gatto goes on, "which don't allow people to move in any direction in a natural way, keeping them away from the wisdom of the herd." Misdirection is another example of the "weapons of mass instruction" – keeping people away from insight that will change their lives is a first principle of schooling.

"I could have listened to Gatto all day," was the reaction of one conference attendee.

"I enjoyed all the keynotes – not just for the validation of my own perspectives, but for the mental exercise of forcing myself to explore points that surprised me or challenged my assumptions," said another participant at the conference.

The echo heard throughout the conference was that schools need to happen on a grassroots level, within their communities. Surely, education can't be left strictly to 'experts.' A common thread was that more and more people are turned off by a curriculum driven approach, while welcoming more of a child-centered approach to learning.

*Alfie Kohn answers questions.*



There is an alternative movement happening. People simply want more independence, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and control over their own education. And gauging by the tremendous energy of the crowd in a small campus in Albany, NY this early summer, the revolution in education is just getting warmed up. After asking Jerry Mintz, the founder of AERO, what his vision of this kind of conference will amount to in say about five years, he replied, "We won't need them because all schools will then be learner-centered!"

Info about next year's AERO conference, June 29-July 2nd, is now on the AERO Conference site. DVDs of this year's conference can be ordered at the AERO on-line bookstore. Go to [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org)

# Being There

*with Jerry Mintz*



*Berlin coordinator Michael Weiman in front of a IDEC's "tent city."*

## IDEC in Berlin

From July 30 through August 7th we held the first International Democratic Education Conference in Germany, and the first IDEC in Europe since 1999. This IDEC was organized by a group called Kratza, a children's rights group. They are also connected to a group which is organizing a new democratic school in Berlin. They are agitating for an approach to education which is more learner-centered, based on curiosity, rather than totally curriculum-driven. They hoped that by hosting the IDEC in Germany they would help their cause.

There are some alternative schools in Germany, and some of these are actually partially funded by the government, particularly Steiner schools. On the other hand, home education is illegal, and parents are fined or even jailed if they home educate or don't send their children to school. And some new democratic schools are not legally accepted. Parents sending their children

to these schools are fined as if they were home educators or parents of truants.

There were nine people on the IDEC 2005 steering Committee, Mike Weiman, Sabine Steldinger, Paula Sell, Anja Kasper, Lou Frizzi Schulte-Berger, Daniel Schmidt, Christophe Klein, Lorenz Terpe, Stefan Karl and Stefan Schramm.

Most of the IDEC was centered in a huge building called the Fez. It is part of a former "Children's Palace" in East Germany, and currently is a recreational and educational center set on a large piece of land in the woods on the outskirts of Berlin. Most of the participants stayed in large communal tents and ate mostly vegetarian food, catered at a nearby outdoor eating area.

The organizers arranged nearly \$100,000 in grants and services to reduce the cost of the IDEC and to provide some funding for participants from Third World countries.

Over 240 attended the whole conference and there were many additional attendees for the special two day conference held at Humboldt

University. They came from at least 28 countries.

The first IDEC was organized by Yacov Hecht in Israel in 1993. He had to cancel his attendance and presentation at this IDEC at the last minute because of a severe back problem. In addition to many presenters well known in Germany, presenters included David Gribble from England and Jerry Mintz, from the United States, two of the original founders of IDEC. Also presenting were Maira Landulpho Alves Lopes from Lumiar School in Brazil, Mikel Matisoo from Sudbury Valley School in the USA, Yoad Eliaz from Israel, Niels Lawaetz from Denmark, Zoe Readhead from Summerhill School in England, Nirupama Raghavan from India, Derry Hannam from England, Anjo Snijders from Netherlands, Tim Perkins from Australia, Pat Montgomery from Clonlara School in the USA, Jakub Mozejko from Poland, Juli Gassner from New Zealand, Meghan Carrico from Windsor House School in Canada, and Ben Sheppard from Booroobin Education Center in Australia.

This was a nine-day conference with a massive amount of information flow, so a detailed report is not possible. The annual conference was given the name "IDEC" and made into a long, residential, conference by the two girls who organized the 1997 IDEC at Sands School. They wanted it long enough for the group of attendees to become a real community. They also pioneered the idea of Open Space Technology, an organizing system which left most of the programming available for spontaneous workshops throughout the conference. This was done at this IDEC except for the two days at Humboldt University.

Here are a few of the highlights for me:

- \* In the last two years 20 new democratic schools have been created or are in process in the Netherlands. Furthermore, there is now a new university accredited training program for teachers who want to teach in democratic schools.

- \* There are several new democratic schools that have started or are starting in Spain, centered in Barcelona.

- \* A new democratic school has started in Norway.



\* An Italian school superintendent who attended, is trying to democratize schools in his district.

\* The head of a large system of private schools in India attended and will bring IDEC people to India to help him democratize those schools.

\* A group from Nepal attended who have democratized their ashram orphanage in Katmandu.

\* The principal of a large, democratic, public, inner city school in Russia, Alexander Tubelski, attended with four of his students. He also heads a network of about 50 schools which are trying to go in a democratic direction.

\* AERO staff member Aleksandra Kobiljski came from Serbia and created a special room which presented IDEC history year by year, with photographs. Several workshops were also held in this room, and books, videos and other materials were available.

\* AERO showed the DVD they made in December of the Butterflies Program for homeless working and street children in Delhi, India.

\* Several groups were not able to attend because of financial and visa problems, such as the Stork Family School in Ukraine which was ready to send a group of 11 by bus, but were not given visas by the German embassy in Ukraine.

\* The director of Naama Scaale, a Montessori School in India attended. Jerry Mintz had done a workshop on democratic process at the IDEC in India with 11 of their students. They then completely democratized their school and even taught two other schools how to do it.

\* Several German groups who are creating democratic schools got together to explore the creation of a German association of democratic schools.

When we went to Humboldt University we set up a display of posters of many of the schools and programs, including AERO's, in a large marble floored hall. I missed the single step coming into the hall and fell face first toward the marble floor. As I fell I realized what was happening and tried to push off a bit to get flat and perhaps slide some as I hit the floor. That may have prevented me from breaking bones. Nevertheless, I crashed very hard, with my pack adding to the weight, hurting my wrist and elbow and driving everything in my right pocket into the thigh muscle – rendering me barely able to walk

Somehow I still managed to do a decent presentation later that morning to about 45 people on how to present democratic process to people who haven't experienced it. Later in the day I came so close to fainting that I had to leave a presentation I was attending and lie on the floor in the next room until I got some strength back. For the next four or five days I could only navigate stairs one at a time because I couldn't bend my right leg.

At one point, not long after my fall, I discovered a room that had a ping-pong table in it. Inside I saw some of the kids to whom I had taught a little ping-pong playing and losing to the local college champ. I was in terrible shape, barely able to walk a few feet at a time. But the situation got the best of me. Slowly and painfully I dragged a chair over to one end of the ping-pong table and took out my paddle. I sat down with difficulty in the chair and bid the young man to play. I must have looked pretty pathetic. But I knew that I could still move my arms and cover most of the table, my serve would still be good, etc. Actually I won easily, much to the shock of the local champ and the delight of my students.

\* Windsor House School in Vancouver, Canada, after a very successful 35 years as one of the most important democratic schools in Canada is now under attack by the local education authority for not following their curriculum.

\* Booroobin Sudbury Education Centre (it can no longer call itself a school) in Australia continues to be attacked by the Queensland education authority and continues to fight in court.

\* After the last Humboldt workshop, a group of adults and students marched to a nearby square in Berlin with dozens of signs, with "curriculum" pointing in one direction and "curiosity," "creativity," etc., in various

languages pointing in the other direction. They handed out literature and a conference statement to interested bystanders.

In addition to workshops, I taught table tennis to about 15 participants. I also organized an auction which raised over \$1500 toward the costs of this IDEC. People at the Humboldt presentation donated an additional \$1000 to the cause.

At the final event at Humboldt there was a panel discussion which involved the Berlin superintendent of schools. Although some people were clearly angry at his policies and point of view it was pointed out that the students on the panel were particularly sensitive and sincere in their comments to him and we hope some communication took place. There was good press coverage of the Humboldt event.

At the end of the last day there was a long and wonderful talent show. The conference wound up with a surprise concert by a 15-person brass band, which

has been performing around the world for the last 30 years. The participants greeted them very enthusiastically and spontaneously danced around them. They said they hadn't seen such a reaction in all their years of performances. Perhaps the people were expressing their joy of being at the first IDEC in Germany.

*Student participant in IDEC rally to inform people in Berlin about democratic education*





# Mail & Communications

*Edited by Carol Morley*

**Physical Activities in School Suffer:** Ever since the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 took effect, some health officials have worried about an unintended side effect as schools struggle to meet the law's mandates that all children measure up in reading, math and other basic skills. Their fear: Less and less time will be allotted for physical activity and even recess, in turn fueling the obesity epidemic in American children and teens. Some critics have taken to calling the act "No Child Left Without a Big Behind" or "No Child Let Outside," reports Kathleen Doheny. "The risk is there," said James Sallis, a professor of psychology. "If they spend time on something not on the list — math, science, reading — they will be out of business," Sallis said, referring to the penalties imposed for not meeting the mandates. The act, he added, is "treating kids like little learning machines, which they are not." A spokesman for the U.S. Department of Education said the agency had no formal reaction to concerns that the No Child Left Behind Act might lead to a curtailment of physical education programs in schools. <http://www.forbes.com/lifestyle/health/feeds/hscout/2005/06/05/hscout525549.html>

From **States Leave No Child Law Behind**, by Anita Kumar, St. Petersburg Times, Sept. 4, 2005: It's not unusual for states to chafe at federal rules. But the state revolt against the federal law that inundated America's classrooms with standardized tests is unprecedented. Forty-seven states are questioning, opposing or outright rebelling against the most sweeping education reform in a generation. In Utah, lawmakers ordered that state policy take precedence over federal policy. In Texas, educators were fined for failing to test students with learning disabilities as federal rules require. In Colorado, the state gave its school districts permission to opt out of the law. Now Connecticut has sued the federal government, and more states are contemplating the same. The states complain about money - the lack of it. It costs millions to test every student, every year, in grades 3-8 and once in high school, plus pay for penalties. In four years of funding since Congress passed the law, it has budgeted \$27-billion less than needed; an additional \$13-billion shortfall is expected next year. Another big complaint is how rigid the federal government is about the rules. More than 40 states have asked the U.S. Education Department to ease up on everything from teacher certification to rules for testing special education students. State lawmakers say it's unconstitutional that No Child Left Behind gave the federal government unprecedented influence over schools, traditionally the responsibility of states and local school districts. Utah passed a law giving its rules priority over No Child Left Behind, despite the government's threat to withhold \$76-million in federal funds. "This is not a federal issue," said Margaret Dayton, the Republican state representative who sponsored Utah's bill. "There is no part of the Constitution that allows for the federal government to delve into education."

**The NCLB on Trial:** With a lawsuit filed Monday, Connecticut became the first state to take its objections to the No Child Left Behind Act to court. The state's attorney general, Richard Blumenthal,

describes the landmark law as an unfunded mandate that places too high a financial burden on states. Of particular concern, say Connecticut officials, is the law's requirement that, beginning this year, students be tested annually. The state tests its students every other year and wants to continue that practice, or have the Feds pay for the additional testing. Although Connecticut had hoped other states would sign on to the lawsuit, none have done so to date, in part, says Blumenthal, because of concerns that the federal government will withhold funds. Read more in the *Education Week* article "Conn. Files Long-Awaited Lawsuit Challenging No Child Left Behind Act." (Free registration may be required.) ([www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/08/22/1conn\\_web.h25.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/08/22/1conn_web.h25.html))

From **Holdouts Against Standard Tests Are Under Attack in New York**, by Michael Winerip: Stephen M. Saland, chairman of the State Senate Education Committee, is a conservative upstate Republican, and Steven Sanders, chairman of the Assembly Education Committee, is a liberal New York City Democrat. But when it comes to education, they have much in common. Neither is a fan of the federal No Child Left Behind Law and its extensive testing mandates. Both say that standardized tests are too dominant in public schools today. That has at times put the two education chairmen in conflict with the state education commissioner, Richard P. Mills. During his 10-year tenure, Dr. Mills has turned New York into one of the most test-driven public systems in the nation, requiring students to pass five state tests to graduate. For months now, the legislative leaders and the commissioner have been locked in a little-noticed fight over the future of 28 small alternative public high schools, a fight that may well be the final stand for opponents of standardized testing in New York. Senator Saland and Assemblyman Sanders are doing their best to protect these schools and help them retain their distinctive educational approach. Instead of the standard survey courses in global studies, American history, biology and chemistry pegged to state tests, these schools favor courses that go into more depth on narrower topics. In the mid-1990's, the former education commissioner, Thomas Sobol, granted these 28 consortium schools an exemption from most state tests. That permitted a more innovative curriculum, and students were evaluated via a portfolio system that relies on research papers and science projects reviewed by outside experts. The testing exemption for these schools is about to expire, and Commissioner Mills does not want it renewed. He believes that all students, without exception, should take every test. Recently, Senator Saland defied the commissioner. He shepherded a bill through the Republican-controlled Senate that passed 50 to 10 and would continue these schools' waivers for four years. Senator Saland's bill does require that students pass the state English and math tests to graduate, letting the state gauge the alternative schools' performance versus mainstream schools.

Dear Jerry, A voice from your past, Dorothy Fadiman, checking in. Thanks for continuing to keep the home fires of education burning

through these dark days. I wanted you to know that I have put **WHY DO THESE KIDS LOVE SCHOOL?** up on the Internet so that anyone anywhere can view, download and share it for free. Dorothy Fadiman, Box 1414, Menlo Park, CA 94026. [http://www.archive.org/details/why\\_do\\_these\\_kids\\_love\\_school](http://www.archive.org/details/why_do_these_kids_love_school) (Also available from our online bookstore at [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org))

From **Fierce Opposition Arises to Mental Health Screening in Schools**, by Karen MacPherson, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: In 2003, a federal commission created by President Bush recommended improving and expanding mental health programs in schools to provide help as early as possible to students with learning problems or those



*“Nimble is like being clever, physically, and a candlestick is a long thing that holds a candle and a candle - surely you know what a candle is.”*

who might turn violent or disruptive. The report attracted little attention outside mental health circles. But over the past two years, a cottage industry of fiery opposition has grown up around the proposal to expand mental health programs in the schools and has become a popular rallying cry for conservatives who see it as unwarranted government intervention in family life. Opponents of school-based mental health programs point to parents who say their children have been misdiagnosed with problems such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and forced to take medication under pressure from school officials. To these parents, the commission suggestion to “improve and expand” school mental health programs is the first, inexorable step toward mandatory school mental health screening for all students, and mandatory medication for many, despite repeated assurances by commission members, school officials and congressional experts that this won’t happen. Led by groups like Ablechild.org and EdAction, these parents want to prohibit schools from having anything to do with the mental health of their students, saying it is the job of parents to ensure their children’s well-being. As a first step, the groups are pushing Congress to pass legislation, sponsored by Rep. Ron Paul, R-Tex., and supported by House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, to prohibit any federal funding for mental health screening of students without the written consent of their parents.

From **New Law: Schools Can’t Force Meds on Kids**, by Rob Hotakainen and Melissa Lee, Star Tribune: Schools no longer have the upper hand in deciding whether children should be given Ritalin or other controlled substances. A new federal law [Individuals with Disabilities Act - IDEA] tilts that power to parents, barring states and schools from keeping students out of class in cases when parents disagree with a recommendation to medicate a child. The law is provoking an emotional debate over the proper role of teachers and other school employees in trying to help children they believe are troubled. And it is taking effect amid growing concern over the exploding use of Ritalin, the brand name for methylphenidate.

Production of that drug has nearly doubled in the United States since 2000, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration.

**School Choice Information Resource:** Parents, students and educators nationwide now have a one-stop location for information about school choice: the new Choices in Education Web page, available through [heritage.org](http://heritage.org). The interactive site allows users to follow the debate over school choice in real time. It includes all the latest news, maps and research on school choice, along with contact information and links to other education sites. The new site replaces a popular book on school choice that’s been published in past years. Web: <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/SchoolChoice/SchoolChoice.cfm>. Heritage will also launch an e-mail alert called “multiple choice” to provide regular updates on school choice.

From **Elizabeth Hall, 95, Is Dead; Began Innovative College**, by Douglas Martin: Elizabeth Blodgett Hall, an educator who concluded that bored high school students should be sent straight to college and started Simon’s Rock College to prove the point, died July 18 in Canaan, Conn. She was 95. Her death was announced by Judith Monachina, spokeswoman for the college, in Great Barrington, Mass., which is now part of Bard College. Mrs. Hall, as the headmistress of a girls’ prep school, perceived that adolescents were maturing faster than in the past, and that high schools were not meeting the challenge. So in 1964, she began what she called “an early college” for young women. Students who otherwise would have been in the last two years of high school instead took the first two years of college. Leon Botstein, president of Bard, explained in an interview that Mrs. Hall abhorred the way adolescents were “infantilized,” when they were capable of doing high-level academic work. He said that her ideas had been adopted by more and more colleges, and that Bard itself had intensified its “early-college” efforts by beginning a high school in New York City in 2001 to teach college-level courses.

**The American School Board Journal** offers a sample online education policy and advice on evaluating the potential success for online learning in a cover story by Liz Pape. “Online education helps school administrators find the balance between the optimal learning environment offered by small high schools and the rich and varied course offerings, often found only in larger schools,” writes Pape. The Journal article examines the “Magnificent Seven,” criteria developed by the National Education Association to help school districts determine the potential value of online education: (1) Curriculum; (2) Instructional design; (3) Teacher quality; (4) Student roles; (5) Assessment; (6) Management and support systems; and (7) Technological infrastructure. “It’s a good match for tomorrow’s learner – today.” <http://www.asbj.com/current/coverstory.html>

**Children from Very Strict Households More Likely to Engage in Unwanted Behaviors in Mid-Late Adolescence:** The results of a long term study into parenting practices by researchers at the University of Michigan shows that giving teens too little freedom can put them at risk of engaging in risky behaviors in mid to late adolescence. Teens from very strict households are more likely to become friends with individuals who engage in risky behavior and have more opportunities for supervised free time. <http://cdwire.net/>

From **Students Say High Schools Let Them Down**, by Michael Janofsky, The New York Times: A large majority of high school students say their class work is not very difficult, and almost two-thirds say they would work harder if courses were more demanding or interesting, according to an online nationwide survey of teenagers conducted by the National Governors Association. The survey also found that fewer than two-thirds believe that their school had done a good job challenging them academically or preparing them for college. About the same number of students said their senior year would be more meaningful if they could take courses related to the jobs they

wanted or if some of their courses could be counted toward college credit.

### **A Thousand Free Online Courses Now Available for Students Whose Studies Have Been Interrupted by Hurricane Katrina:**

The Sloan Consortium, an international association of colleges and universities committed to quality online education, is offering students whose studies have been interrupted by Hurricane Katrina an opportunity to continue their education tuition-free. More than 1,000 students have already requested courses by signing up at [www.SloanSemester.org](http://www.SloanSemester.org). In collaboration with the Southern Regional Education Board and with a \$1.1 million grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the special 8-week accelerated semester provides a wide range of courses to serve the learning needs of students at the community college, university and graduate level, regardless of academic discipline.

### **LA Mayor Urged to Study New York Model:**

As Antonio Villaraigosa settles in to his new job as mayor of Los Angeles, an editorial in the Los Angeles Times suggests he should look to New York City for guidance on fixing his city's ailing public-school system. Prior to his election, Villaraigosa had advocated for greater mayoral control over LA's troubled schools. Since taking office, however, he has appeared to back off his once staunch support for a mayor-led reform effort. In New York, where Mayor Michael Bloomberg gained control of the school system in 2002, the centralized authority has succeeded in trimming bureaucracy, allowing the district to reduce class size, hire parent coordinators, and establish a principal-training program with the savings. A similar model, says the Times, could spawn positive changes for the City of Angels. Read more in the Los Angeles Times editorial "Learning from New York." [http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-ed-mayor31jul31,0,5325687\\_story?coll=la-homeoped](http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-ed-mayor31jul31,0,5325687_story?coll=la-homeoped)

From **TV Linked to Lower Achievement**, Special to World Science: From toddlerhood to adulthood, watching television is associated with lower educational achievement, three new studies suggest. The studies found that three- to five-year-olds who watched more television performed worse on reading and math tests three years later; that third graders with televisions in the bedrooms performed worse than others on standardized tests; and that children who watched more TV from ages five to 15 were less likely to finish school or go to college.

From **Schools Where Teachers Rule**, by Sarah Carr: In Milwaukee, which is a national leader in the movement toward teacher-led schools, there will be at least 14 such programs next year, and that figure does not count private schools. Appleton will have two teacher-led schools next year. Minnesota, another leader in the movement, has 15 schools where the teachers are part of a workers' cooperative structured much like a law firm, so they not only make most of the decisions related to the school, but also set their own salaries. Education officials and teachers unions in California, Chicago and other places are studying the teacher-led model. In Milwaukee, not all of the teacher-led schools are structured in the same way. Some schools have a clear "teacher leader" who does most of the administrative tasks but lacks the title and some of the authority of a principal; others are more pure "teacher cooperatives" where the decision-making and administrative tasks are spread out to include all of the teachers more equally; still others are a hybrid. Most of the teacher-led schools are small programs chartered by the district.

**The College of St. Rose and the Center of Integrated Teacher Education (CITE)** will be launching a new SAS program specifically designed for people who want to be leaders of small and/or charter schools. The program will start this October. It will be held primarily on Saturdays at The Renaissance Charter School in Jackson Heights,

Queens. All instructors will be leaders in the small school/charter school movements. Applications, brochures, and information can be obtained by calling CITE at (888) 222-3016. Monte Joffee.

## **Public Alternatives**

### **Charter Schools Prove More Popular than Vouchers:**

Charter schools, which are publicly financed but privately administered, have proliferated across the nation, with 3,300 such schools now educating nearly one million students in 40 states. In contrast, voucher programs, which use taxpayer funds to pay tuition at private schools, serve only about 36,000 students in Ohio, Florida, Wisconsin and Washington, D.C. Legislative debates over voucher programs and charter schools have tended to become fierce political brawls, reports Sam Dillon. Because voucher programs divert tax dollars from public to private schools that are not subject to the same government accountability measures – standardized tests, for example – both national teachers' unions, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, oppose them. Officially, at least, the unions support charter schools, as long as they are governed by nonprofit groups, are held accountable for student achievement and meet other criteria. In states like Ohio that permit private companies to govern whole chains of charter schools, the unions have fought them bitterly. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/13/education/13voucher.html>

### **From Florida Approves First Humanist Charter School in U.S.,**

by Duncan Crary, Humanist Network News: An application to open the first humanist charter school in the United States was approved by the Hillsborough County School District in Tampa, Fla. The Humanists of Florida Association (HFA) successfully filed the application to open the public charter school. The school will be named "Carl Sagan Academy" in honor of the late Carl Sagan, astronomer and humanist. Sagan is most famous for making science interesting, relevant and understandable to everyday people. Carl Sagan Academy is scheduled to open in 2005 and will serve a middle school student population in the neighborhoods surrounding the University of South Florida.

## **Home Education News**

**One Million Homeschooled Students:** The U.S. Department of Education estimated in July that about 1.1 million children are home schooled, or about 2 percent of the nation's 53 million children ages 6-18. The number is growing 10 times as fast as the general school-aged population, the department estimated. <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentID=11756>

### **It's All Homework if You Learn at Home:**

by Rachel Davis, The Times-Union: Nearly 500 children statewide are enrolled in Florida's Virtual Academy, a pilot program similar to home-schooling but with state-approved lesson plans and certified teachers who communicate with students through conference calls or e-mails or online message boards. The virtual school is in its third year and serves students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The school plans to ask the state to remove its pilot program designation. Nine teachers located across the state provide instruction, guidance and accountability to both parents and students. All teachers are certified to teach in public schools and several have taught in traditional classrooms for years. Even though virtual students are part of public schools, they are not allowed to participate in extracurricular activities in their local school districts. Families who choose to participate in the virtual school represent an array of demographics and backgrounds. Many military families participate, as do families with children who have disabilities. Others choose to participate because they live in zone with a poorly performing school. And for others, it's crowded classrooms.



## International News

### ISRAEL

The biggest financial magazine in Israel, "The Marker", has announced its annual list of the one hundred most influential people in the country. They did it in a most honorable ceremony in the presence of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and all heads of financial and political local scene. This year, for the first time, they announced also the list of the 10 most influential people in the social and educational areas for 2005. Yaacov Hecht was one of the 10, and the only one from the world of education, (even our minister of education was not mentioned!). Among the criteria for choosing Yaacov, came: The foundation of the chain of democratic schools in Israel (32 schools so far, over 6000 students); the foundation of the program for teacher training, which engages young revolutionary students into the revolution of democratic education (The program is considered the most prestigious teachers training in the country); the facilitation of democratizing processes in three out of the ten biggest cities in the country, and in five smaller towns and local municipalities; the facilitation and performance of international workshops and lectures, in the purpose of distributing the ideas of democratic education around the world. We feel we are at the midst of a revolution which is gaining momentum, and is highly extraordinary. It's exciting! From Leah Behar- Tsalik, Member of the Institute for Democratic Education, Israel. P.S. Yaacov asked me to inform all those who expressed their worries: his back is doing better and he is feeling well. He thanks you for your care.

### JAPAN

From **Japan's Schools: Now Too Lenient?** by Bennett Richardson, Contributor to The Christian Science Monitor: After years of trying to make its classrooms more lenient places of learning, Japanese policymakers are wondering whether to beef up the nation's school curriculums because of concerns about academic performance. A fierce



debate over the direction of the nation's education system has been thrown into disarray by conflicting studies related to whether Japanese students are performing better or worse than in the past. Recent international studies that show a fall in national ranking for Japanese students have added weight to the arguments of conservative politicians and influential business groups that Japan risks losing competitiveness on the world stage due to its dangerous experiment with a more open and lenient educational system. The Japanese public has overwhelmingly agreed, with 78 percent giving current school curriculum a failing grade, according to a major newspaper opinion poll in March.

## UNITED KINGDOM

From **Parents to Get Public Money to Run Their Own Schools**, by Tony Halpin: Parents groups will receive public money to run their own schools under plans being drawn up by Ruth Kelly, the Education Secretary. Ms Kelly told local government leaders that she intended to end their dominance of state education by inviting other groups to open and run schools. A White Paper this autumn will include radical proposals to replace failing schools with ones run by parents, companies or charities. Ms Kelly also made clear that 1,000 schools considered to be "coasting" would face pressure to respond to demands for better standards. Her proposals indicated an important extension of private sector involvement in state education, despite growing hostility from teachers' unions towards plans to open 200 academies by 2010. Academies are sponsored and controlled by businesses and other private organisations, but funded by the Government. The role of councils would be as "the commissioner rather than the provider" of education, supporting parents in relations with schools. "Councils don't add value through micro-managing heads, employing the teachers or owning the bricks and the land that schools sit on," she said. The aim is to transfer power from bureaucrats to parents, to force schools to respond more rapidly, and to overturn the Labour orthodoxy that councils should control education. David Bell, the head of Ofsted, backed the plan. But unions accused Ms Kelly of seeking to speed up school closures to meet the target for opening academies. Steve Sinnott, the general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said: "The suspicion remains that there is a secret agenda to achieve the Government's target on academies."

## Conferences

October 28 – 30, 2005 **Holistic Learning: Breaking New Ground** The Fifth International Conference - The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto "Journey of the Spirit" With keynote speakers: Tobin Hart, Jane Tompkins and Chet Sisk. Visit our website: [www.astralsite.com/holistic](http://www.astralsite.com/holistic)

26th-27th of November 2004 **The First International Alternative Education Symposium-Istanbul** will be held in Istanbul Darphane-i Amire Building. Visit our website at: [www.alternatifegitim.org](http://www.alternatifegitim.org)

28 to March 3, February 2006 **National Charter Schools Conference** The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is hosting the conference in Sacramento, California. Visit our website at: <http://www.charterconference.org/> For general conference information, email [conference@charterassociation.org](mailto:conference@charterassociation.org) or call 213-244-1446 x.201.

May 4-7, 2006 **2006 Annual West Coast-USA International Conference on Montessori Educational And The Partnership Way** - Monterey, California Contact: [www.montessori.org](http://www.montessori.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](mailto:info@educationrevolution.org) or call us at 800 769-4171. Placing ads is a free service for AERO members.

# The Magazine of Alternative Education

## Revolutionary Times

### JOHN HOLT'S



### First Ten Issues

*Back in 1977 the first issue of Growing Without Schooling started out as a four-page newsletter, one large sheet of paper folded in half. The type was small and there were no pictures, no illustrations of any kind, just the title, Growing Without Schooling, in the top right hand corner of the front page. Each section had its own title in boldface capital letters but it looked more typed than printed. Instead of italics there was frequent underlining. Although it soon grew to 12-pages or more the tone was set. Simplicity, honesty, directness and no compromise. For families who were homeschooling, or thinking of homeschooling, it was a godsend.*

## GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING 1

This is the first issue of a newsletter, about ways in which people, young or old, can learn and do things, acquire skills, and find interesting and useful work, without having to go through the process of schooling. In part, it will be about people who, during some of their own growing up, did not go to school, what they did instead, and how they made a place for themselves in the world. Mostly, it will be about people who want to take or keep their children out of school, and about what they might do instead, what problems come up, and how they cope with these. We hope, also, that children who are, right now, growing without schooling will let us know how they feel about this. If they do, we will not identify them as children, except as the do in their own writing.

GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING, or GWS, as we will call it from now on, will be in part an exchange. Much of what is in it, we hope, will come from its readers. In its pages people can talk about certain common ideas, needs, concerns, plans, and experiences. In time it may lead to many informal and personal networks of mutual help and support.

GWS will come out whenever we have enough material to make an interesting issue. This may at first be only three or four times a year. Later, as more people read it and send in material, it may come out as often as six times a year.

GWS will not be much concerned with schools, even alternative or free schools, except as they may enable people to keep their children out of school by 1) Calling their own home a school, or 2) enrolling their children, as some have already, in schools near or far which then approve a home study program. We will, however, be looking for ways in which people who want or need them can get school tickets – credits, certificates, degrees, diplomas, etc. – without having to spend time in school. And we will be very interested, as the schools and schools of education do not seem to be, in the act and art of teaching, that is, all the ways in which people, of all ages, in or out of school, can more effectively share information, ideas, and skills.

### A STUDYING TRICK

Here's a good trick for people who have to learn a list of disconnected facts – names and dates in History, formulas in Chemistry, Physics, or Math, capital cities, etc. Get some 3x 5 cards. On one side of each card put half of your piece of information, on the other side put the other. Thus, on one side, "Columbus discovered America," on the other, "1492." Or, on one side, "Salt," on the other, "Sodium Chloride" or NaCl. Then use the cards to test yourself. Shuffle them up, put aside those you know, work on those you don't. You'll find what just deciding what to put on the card in the first place will do most of the work of memorizing it.

## THEY REALLY SAID IT

A number of parents, in different parts of the country, have sued the schools because after spending years in them their kids had not learned anything. A judge on the West Coast recently threw out one such suit, saying in his ruling, in plain black and white for the world to see, that the schools had no legal obligation to teach anyone anything.

I foolishly mislaid the news clipping about this. If anyone can send us the details of this case and ruling, I will be grateful.

## GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING 2

### ANGRY ASPS

ASPS are what I call people who constantly Attack Schools but Protect (or promote) Schooling. In one breath they say, "Schools are terrible to, and for, poor kids." In the next they say, "Schools are the only way that poor kids can escape from being poor." The logic is hard to follow. Schools have made it far harder for poor kids to escape from poverty than it used to be. There are hundreds or thousands of jobs, that people used to do perfectly well without college or even high school diplomas, that people now have to have diplomas to get. And how the schools, which have always despised, ignored, insulted, and oppressed poor kids, are suddenly going to protect and help them, the ASPS never make clear.

One ASP wrote me a furious letter about GWS, "How is a welfare mother with five kids going to teach them how to read?" The answer is, teach them herself. If she can't read, but one of her children can, that child

can teach the other children, and her. If none of them can read, they can get a relative, or friend, or neighbor, or a neighbor's child, to teach them.

Reading, and teaching reading, are not a mystery. The schools, in teaching the poor (and the rich, too) that no one can teach a child anything except a "trained" teacher, have done them (and all of us) a great and crippling injury and wrong. A number of poor countries have had mass literacy programs, often called Each One Teach One, in which as fast as people learn to read they begin to teach others. They found that anyone who can read, even if only fifty or a hundred words, and even if he only learned them recently, can teach those works to anyone else who wants to learn them. Every now and then, in this country, a school, often a city school for poor kids, lets older children, fifth or sixth graders, teach first graders to read. Most of them do a better job than the regular teachers. Quite often, older children who themselves are not very good readers turn out to be the best teachers of all. There is a clear lesson here, but the schools don't seem able to learn it, mostly because they don't want to.

People who make careers out of helping others – sometimes at some sacrifice, often not – usually don't like to hear that those others might get along fine, might even get along better, without their help. We should keep this in mind in dealing with attacks from ASPS.

And this may be the place to note that "trained" teachers are not trained in teaching, but in classroom management, i.e., in controlling, manipulating, measuring, and

classifying large numbers of children. These may be useful skills for schools, or people working in schools. But they have nothing whatever to do with teaching – helping others to learn things.

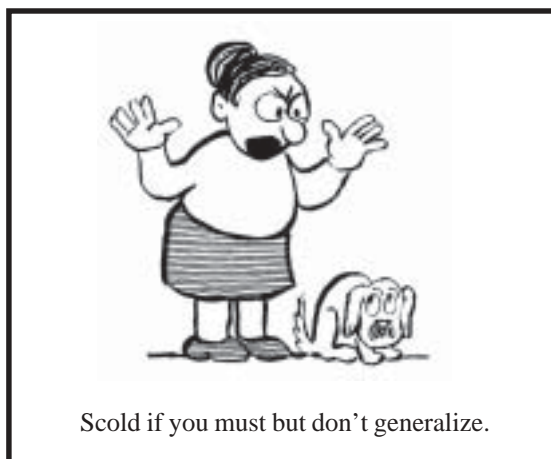
## GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING 3

### TEACHING MACHINE

When the Santa Fe Community School was just starting, a young inventor, who hoped to market one of the "teaching machines" then much in fashion, lent one of his models to the school. It was a big metal box, that sat on top of a table. Through a window in the front of the box, one could see printed cards. Beside the window were five numbered buttons. On the card one might read something like this: "an apple is a 1) machine 2) dog 3) fruit 4) fish 5) musical instrument." If one pushed button #3 a little green light went on above the buttons, and a new card appeared behind the window. If one pushed any of the other buttons, a red light went on. In short, like most "teaching machines," it was a rather fancy way of giving multiple choice tests.

On the day the inventor brought the box to school the children, aged 5 through 8, gathered around the machine to see how it worked. The inventor showed them how to use it, and for a while the children took turns pushing the buttons and answering the questions on the cards. This only lasted a short while. Then the children began to say, "Open the box! We want to see inside the box!" Someone opened up the front panel, showing the cards, mounted on a revolving drum, and beside each card, on the drum, five little holes, and a metal plug to stick into the hole matching the

### Blattitudes



Scold if you must but don't generalize.



“right answer” on the card. The children considered this a minute, and then all fell to work – making cards. After a while they all had some cards to load into the machine. Bargains were struck: “I’ll play using your cards if you’ll play using mine.” One child would load up the machine with his cards, and put the answer buttons in the right places, then another child would come and take the test, then they would trade places. This went on for perhaps a day or so, all very serious.

Then, so the friend told me who was teaching there at the time and saw all this, the game began to change. There was much loud laughter around the machine. The teachers went to see what was going on. What they saw was this. A child would load the machine, as before and another child would take the test. Up would come a card saying something like, “A dog is a 1) train 2) car 3) airplane 4) animal 5) fish.” The child taking the test would press button #4, the “right answer,” and the red light would go on. The cardmaker would shriek with laughter. The child being tested would push the buttons, one by one, until he or she hit the right one and the drum turned up the next card. Then, same story again, another right answer rewarded with the red light, more shrieks of laughter. When one child had run through all his rigged cards, the other would have a turn, and would do exactly the same thing. This happy game went on for a day or two. Then the children, having done everything with the machine that could be done with it, grew bored with it, turned away from it, and never touched it again. After a month or so the school asked the inventor to come take his machine back.

This little incident tells us more about the true nature of children (and all humans) and the way they learn about the world (if we let them) than fifty years worth of Pavlovian behaviorist or Skinnerian operant conditioning experiments. Sure, “Psychologist and Pigeon (or rat, etc.)” is a good game, for a while at least. But everyone wants to play Psychologist; nobody wants to play Pigeon. We humans are not by nature like sheep or pigeons, passive, unquestioning, docile. Like these children, what we want is to find out how the machine works, and then to work it.

We want to find out why things happen, so that we can make them happen. Maybe we want this too much; in the long run (or not so long) it may be our undoing. But that is the kind of creature we are. Any theory of learning or teaching which begins by assuming that we are some worm-like or rat-like or pigeon-like creature is nonsense and can only lead to endless frustration and failure.

## GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

### 4

#### BATTING PRACTICE

The eight year old I talk about in “Rub-On Letters” lives in a little house on a small side street, really more an alley. Cars seldom come through, so kids can play there safely. In one part of the street there are high board fences on both sides, which makes it a good place for small ball games. My friend and her friends often play their own version of baseball here. For a bat they use a thin stick about three feet long. The ball is a playground ball about six inches in diameter. The rules fit the space perfectly: with that stick, no one can hit that ball over those fences.

The day I arrived, after dinner, she asked me if I would pitch some batting practice. I said Sure, and we had about forty-five minutes worth in the alley. Next morning after breakfast she asked again, and we had about an hour more. Some of the time she very kindly pitched to me – I was amazed to find how hard it was to move that squishy ball with that skinny stick.

The point of the story is that all this I did something of which I am quite proud, that I don’t think I could or would have done even five years ago. In our almost two hours of play I did not offer one word of coaching or advice. The words were more than once on the tip of

my tongue, once when she tried batting one-handed (she did better than I thought), once when she tried batting cross-handed (she gave it up on her own), now and then when she seemed to be getting careless, not watching the ball, etc. But I always choked the words back, saying to myself, “She didn’t ask you for coaching or advice, she asked you to pitch batting practice. So shut up and pitch.” Which I did.

Nor did I give any praise. Sometimes (quite often, as it happened) when she hit a real line drive, I let out a small exclamation of surprise or even alarm, if it came right at me. Otherwise, we did our work in silence, under the California sun. I remember it all with pleasure, and not least of all the silence. I hope I can be as quiet next time.

## GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

### 5

#### SKINNER’S GUN

A friend of mine, when still a student at Harvard, told me one day that he and a few friends had just had a very interesting conversation on the library steps with Prof. B. F. Skinner, famous for ‘inventing’ behavior modification and operant conditioning.

But first of all, he did not ‘invent’ behavior modification. The idea of using bribes and threats, rewards and punishments, to get people to do what we want, is very old, and is not made new by calling these rewards and punishments “positive and negative reinforcements.”

On the other hand, operant conditioning is a new invention, or at least a very new twist on an old one. It is a way of getting other people (or dogs, rats, pigeons, etc.) to do what you want, without ever showing or telling them what you want. Very briefly, it works like this.

If you have, say, an animal moving about at random, and if you give it a jolt of pleasure every time it moves, however slightly, in direction A, and a jolt of pain every time it moves, however slightly, in the opposite direction, after a while that animal will move almost directly in direction A, as far as it can. If you are watching human beings, and reward them every time they change their behavior, even in the slightest degree, in the direction of something you want them to do, after a while they will be doing that something you want, without your ever having told them to do it, and, what is even more important (and sinister), without their ever even having decided to do it. This is part of what Skinner means when he says, as he does all the time, that the human experience of willing and choosing is an illusion – all that has happened (he claims) is that without being aware of it we have been getting some kinds of reinforcements – rewards or punishments – from the outside. Control those rewards and punishments, he says, and you control human behavior.

Oddly and ironically enough, this is exactly how, as I will describe it in a later GWS, the behavior of schools as institutions is controlled.

Anyway, on this particular day, Skinner (so my friend said) told the students that if he could just find a way to gain total control of human behavior, he would feel that he had not lived in vain. In other writings he makes clear why he wants this control. He wants to use it, and thinks he could use it, to make some sort of “ideal” society, without war, poverty, cruelty, or any one of a thousand other ills. This dream, ambition, delusion, is kindly enough. But it makes clear that Skinner (like most of his true believers and followers) is an exceptionally foolish man.

Now, believing in an absurd and mistaken theory about how humans think and feel does not of itself make Skinner foolish. The history of Science, after all, is a catalog of mistakes, a list of wrong answers, not right ones. But some very bright people have had very good reasons for believing (at least for a while) in some of those wrong answers. Even wanting to have control over all human behavior, though a rather grandiose ambition, does not of itself

make Skinner foolish. What stamps him as foolish is thinking that if he could find a way to control all human behavior, he would be the one who would then be allowed to control it. I have often imagined myself saying to him, “Fred, suppose you could invent what for metaphorical purposes we might call a Behavior Gun, a device such that, if you aimed it at someone and pressed the trigger, Z-Z-ZAAARP, that someone would thereafter do exactly what you wanted. What makes you think that you would be allowed to point and shoot the gun? How long do you think it would be before large strong hands would gently (or perhaps not so gently) pry your nice new Behavior Gun out of your hands, while a voice said, ‘Excuse us, Professor, we’ll just take that gun, thank you very much, if you don’t mind.’ Has the thought never occurred to you that someone, someday, might point and shoot that Behavior Gun at you?”

In a recent magazine article Skinner asks sadly why we don’t use what we already know about controlling human behavior. Oh, but Professor, we do! The trouble is that the “we” who are doing this controlling – military and political leaders, big businesses, advertising men and propagandists, the bosses of the mass media, tend to be people that Skinner (and I) do not much like or agree with. They do not seem to be particularly interested in using their power over human behavior to make a better world – though they probably have high-sounding words to justify whatever they want and do. They are (of all things!) mostly concerned to keep what power they have, and if possible to get even more. And any little tricks that Skinner and his equally woolly-minded behavior modifying colleagues can think of to control human behavior, these people will be delighted to take over. Go, Professor, go!

What we (and he) would do better to think about is how to help people gain better control over their own behavior, and to resist better all those other people – leaders, bosses, and experts of all kinds p who are trying to control it. This is one part of what GWS is about.

Let me now answer a question that no one has yet asked, but that some surely will. Why bother to condemn Skinner in GWS? What have his ideas,

good or bad, to do with taking children out of school?

Just this. Everywhere the schools say (often in a court, to which they have brought some unschooling parents), “We are the only people who know anything about teaching children. Unless you do it our way, you’re doing it the wrong way.” But their ways of teaching are heavily influenced by Skinner’s theories. Many schools, and more every year, admit, no, boast that they are using behavior modification techniques in their teaching. So anything we can do to show that behavior modification and operant conditioning are the inventions of an essentially shallow and second-rate thinker may someday help people to persuade some court to let them teach their children at home.

## GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING 6

### ON READING

Years ago I visited some friends; their youngest child, whom I had not seen since she was a tiny baby, was about five. After sizing me up for a while from a distance, and deciding that I seemed to be OK, she made friends, and soon asked me if I would “help her read.” Not quite knowing what she meant, I said I would. She got her book, Dr. Seuss’s HOP ON POP, led me to a sofa, and when I was seated, climbed up, snuggled against me, and began slowly to read out loud. What she then did, and what she wanted me to do, I describe in the chapter on Reading in HOW CHILDREN LEARN. The point I make here is that the first thing she had to do, before the work could begin, was to get in cozy physical contact with me.

In THE LIVES OF CHILDREN, describing his work with twelve year old Jose, the tough street kid, George

Dennison makes the same point. He could only work with Jose at all when the two of them were alone in a locked room. The possibility that other children might see his ignorance and confusion would have been enough to stop Jose dead right at the start. Even alone with his good friend George, he could barely master his self-hatred and panic. Of these meetings Dennison writes:

“And so our base of operations was our own relationship, and since Jose early came to trust me, I was able to do something which, simple as it may sound, was of the utmost importance: I made the real, the deeper base of our relationship a matter of physical contact. I could put my arm around his shoulders, or hold his arm, or sit close to him so that our bodies touched, or lean over the page so that our heads almost touched. ... The importance of this contact to a child experiencing problems with reading can hardly be overestimated. ...”

I have to add here that the trusting had to come before the touching. To touch or hold a child who has not yet decided to trust you will only make that child far more nervous.

In any case, whether you are a “gifted” five year old or a terrified illiterate twelve year old, trying to read something new is a dangerous adventure. You may make mistakes, or fail, and so, feel disappointment, or shame, or anger, or disgust. Just in order to get started on this adventure, most people need as much comfort, reassurance, and security as they can find. Obviously, the typical classroom, with the other children ready to point out, correct, or even laugh at every mistake, and the teacher all too often (wittingly or unwittingly) helping and urging them to do this, is the worst possible place for this.

At the Ny Lille Skole (New Little School) in Bagsvaerd, near Copenhagen, which I describe in *INSTEAD OF EDUCATION*, there is no formal reading program at all – no classes, no reading groups, no instruction, no testing, nothing. Children (like adults) read if, and when, and what, and with whom, and as much as they want to. But each child knows – it is not announced, just

one of those things you find out by being in the school – that anytime s/he wants, s/he can go to Rasmus Hansen, a tall, deep-voiced, slow speaking teacher (for many years the head teacher of the school), and say, “Will you read with me?” and he will say Yes. The child picks something to read, goes with Rasmus to a little nook, not a locked room but a cozy and private place, sits down right beside him, and begins to read aloud. Rasmus does almost nothing. From time to time he says softly, “Ja, ja.” Meaning “That’s right, keep going.” Unless he suspects the child may be getting in a panic, he almost never points out or corrects a mistake. If asked for a word, he simply says what it is. After a while, usually about twenty minutes or so, the child stops, closes the book, gets up, and goes off to do something else.

Hardly anything one could call teaching. As it happens, Rasmus was “trained” as a reading teacher. He told me that it had taken him many years to stop doing, first one thing and then another, all the many things he had been trained to do, and finally to learn that this tiny amount of moral support and help was all that children needed of him, and that anything more was no help at all.

## GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

### 7

#### FRACTIONS

Theo Glesy tells us a nice story:

“When Danile was 6 or 7, she was lying in my bed thinking about money and wondered how \$1 would divide among 3 children. She thought about it awhile and said, ‘You could break it into dimes and give each one 3, that leaves 1 dime, you break that into pennies and

give each one 3, and I get the extra penny.’ That was all her own, I made no comments or suggestions.”

When I first taught fifth grade, before I had “taught” the children anything about fractions, or even mentioned the word, I used to ask them questions like this: “If you had three candy bars, and wanted to divide them evenly among five people, how would you do it?” Most of them could think of one or more ways to do this. But after they had “had” fractions, and had learned to think of this as a problem that you had to use fractions to solve, most of them couldn’t do it. Instead of reality, and their own common sense and ingenuity, they now had “rules,” which they could never keep straight or remember how to apply.

## GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

### 8

#### SEATWORK

A mother – not an unschooler, she was interviewing me for a newspaper – told me the other day about some of the “reading problems” her child is having at school. His problem is that he loves to read and regularly read books several years ahead of his so-called “grade-level.” His teacher complained to his mother that the boy was “falling behind in his reading seatwork.” This work consists of copying out vocabulary and spelling lists, reading sample paragraphs and answering questions about them, filling out various workbooks, and doing similar exercises – the kind that people invent who think that the ability to read well consists of hundreds of separate and measurable “skills.”

When the children were supposed to be doing this “seatwork,” this boy held books in his lap and read them instead. The teacher said that if he did



not catch up with his seatwork she was going to give him a C in reading. The mother said, "How can you do that? You know he reads books, for his own pleasure, that are way ahead of his grade level. How can you give such a boy a C in reading?" The teacher admitted that she knew the boy was a good reader, probably the best in the class. But she still insisted that he had to do his seatwork. The mother then said, "but the reason for the seatwork is to get the children to the point where they can read and understand the kind of books my son is already reading. Why should he have to get ready to do what he already knows how to do?" The teacher would not budge. The children were supposed to be doing seatwork, he had to do seatwork.

## GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING 9

### LEARNING DISABILITIES

Still planning a longer article on "Learning Disabilities." For the time being, here is a question that it might be interesting and useful to ask school people and other L.D. believers:

"How do you tell the difference between a learning difficulty (which we all experience every time we try to learn anything) and a learning disability? That is to say, how do you tell, or on what basis does someone decide (and who is the someone?) whether the cause of a given learning difficulty lies within the nervous system of the learner, or with the things outside of the learner – the learning situation, the teacher's explanations, the teacher him/herself, or the material itself? And if you decide that the cause of the difficulty lies within the learner, who decides, and again on what basis, whether or not that inferred cause

is curable, in short, whether anything can be done about it, and if so, what?"

If any readers ask this question of schools, I would like very much to know what answers (if any) they get.

## GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING 10

### THE MAGIC GUN

A reader has sent us a clip from Advocate, published by the Illinois Education Association. The story reads, in full:

"The Ragan Report, a communications newsletter, recently carried an item which may give some insights to [sic] the burgeoning school discipline problem – which has topped the Gallup Poll's list of the public's top concern [sic] in the schools for nine of the last ten years. This is how a young teacher in a one-room school house handled this issue at the turn of the century; 'I stood on top of my desk and commanded three young men to sit. They cursed me and laughed. I pulled a revolver which was concealed under my coat, cocked the hammer, and stated with some authority for them to sit down or we would bury them in the school yard. They sat down. The school has settled down to business.'"

Frankly, I doubt very much that any such thing happened,. But how strange it is, and how sad, and how scary, that so many of our fellow-countrymen just love to hear stories like that. The Magic Gun – just point it, and all your problems are solved.

The complete text of GWS issues 1 – 12

is collected and published as

## "Growing Without Schooling, Volume 1: A Record of A Grassroots Movement."

It is available from [www.FUN-Books.com](http://www.FUN-Books.com).

### FROM THE INTRODUCTION:

"It is not what we teach children but how we treat them that determines what type of people they will become," Holt once told me. This is why unschooling is as much about social change as it is about school reform: unschooling is about creating or reclaiming places and events for adults and children of all ages to live and learn together. Certainly there may be places and times when one wants to learn in traditional school settings; unschooling isn't about denying access to school to anyone, but rather, about being able to choose to learn in a school when one needs, or wants, to do so. "But children learning this way will choose to play all day and never do any serious learning," some will argue. The response to that criticism is spread throughout the pages of GWS, and crystallized in these first twelve issues."

By Patrick Farenga

# The *LORD* of the *FLIES* at 50!

## David Gribble *takes another look...*

This year, the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of William Golding's "The Lord of the Flies," has revived murky misinterpretations of it.

An early instance is The London Times review quoted inside the front cover of the Faber paperback of 1958. "... Mr. Golding," the reviewer declares, "*knows exactly what boys are like; he has a compelling imagination; and the vivid realism with which he describes the disintegration of the untried and precarious civilization under the pressure of raw nature carries the reader to the blood climax . . . a most absorbing and instructive tale.*"

Other people have gone further, and taken the book as proof of the universality of childish savagery, though how fiction can be proof of anything is difficult to see. There is even talk of a Lord-of-the-Flies syndrome, a supposed tendency among boys to revert to primitive nastiness when they are not under adult control.

The story itself is enthralling, but completely unrealistic. A group of boys are left stranded on a fertile island in the tropics as the result of an attack on an airplane. They have arrived there uninjured, having emerged, as far as I can make out, from a tube that was dropped from a

plane; the tube was then immediately dragged out to sea by a storm, and it plays on further part in the story. The children have been scattered about the island and gradually assemble. Except for a part from a choir school who all somehow managed to land together, none of them know each other, or even recognise each other from the airplane. No one has any baggage except for the members of the choir school, who have their cassocks as well as their school uniforms. No one has any difficulty in finding food or water, and except for those who are killed instantly, no one is seriously hurt. The palms provide shelter from the sun, the rocks have created a perfect swimming pool and wild pigs have made convenient paths through the forest where they can be killed for food without danger.

At first, under the leadership of a boy called Ralph, the boys make some attempt to build shelters and keep a signal fire alight on top of the central hill, but soon they are led into savagery by Jack Merridew, significantly the only boy with a surname, who begins by killing pigs and painting his face with coloured clay, and ends up creating a tribe of his own which he rules with violent discipline. Two boys are actually killed by the tribe, and soon Ralph is the only survivor who does not belong. It

is a great adventure story with two forest fires, a dead parachutist, a thunderstorm, the slaughter of animals and children and a tremendous final chase.

## Unrealistic

The Times' critic says, "*Mr Golding knows exactly what boys are like,*" and astonishingly commends the book for its vivid realism. As well as being completely unrealistic, the book offers no evidence at all that Mr. Golding knows what boys are like. When the boys first meet they do not discuss the accident or tell each other of their own adventures. They show no anxiety about their position and no concern for the rest of the passengers who must have been dragged out to sea in the tube. Only four boys are clearly characterised: Ralph, the confident, good-looking, athletic leader with a vague awareness that action needs to be taken, Piggy, the inhibited, unhealthy, socially inept intellectual who actually knows what ought to be done, Jack Merridew, the aggressive, arrogant head prefect of the choir school and Simon, a shy, solitary boy who has fits and a sense of the numinous.

The story tells of the victory of Jack Merridew over the other three – the victory of violence over responsibility, intellect and religion. It is plainly a fable, not without relevance to the adult world.





All the boys except Ralph, Piggy, Simon and sometimes the characterless twins, Sam and Eric, prefer swimming and lazing around to exploring or doing anything constructive. Few real children of this age like lazing around; they adapt their environment, they build shelters and furniture, they investigate, they invent, they fish, they organize games, they experiment with cooking, they make plans. William Golding was not writing Robinson Crusoe or Coral Island, he was writing a fable, and for his fable he needed an aimless group of idlers, so that is what he created. It is not a realistic picture of a group of children.

Of his four fully characterized boys, three resist the call of savagery. It is only the uncharacterized mob that follows Jack Merridew. Jack himself is the source of all the drive towards violence and primitivism. And who is Jack Merridew: He is the chapter chorister and head boy. He arrives as the lead of a group of uniformed choirboys. It is he who represents the authority from the world the boys had left behind them, and he does not keep the boys from savagery, he leads them directly into it.

At the end of the book Ralph weeps for “the darkness of man’s heart”. The darkness of man’s heart, not the darkness

of children’s hearts. It is a pity that the book is generally taken as an exemplification of the latter, and often not merely as an exemplification but as a kind of proof.

The real message of ‘The Lord of the Flies’ is not that children without adult control are barbarians, it is that the experience of adult control guides them into barbarism.

*This article originally appeared in the TCNEWS*

*Supporting Therapeutic Environments  
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### **A Letter from A.S. Neill to Carlos Kruytbosch.**

*28 December 1963*

Dear Carlos

Oddly enough the post that brought yr letter brought one asking me if I'd have a discussion with William Golding, to be published in the USA magazine Redwood ... no, *Redbook*. I shd be meeting him next week. You are right, S'hill kids would have had charity, kindness. I hear that Golding believes kids are born bad and must be disciplined to be civilised. Note he had no girls on the island. Note his boys were, barring Piggy, middle class and much indoctrinated. I have never seen S'hill follow a leader. For a time in small gangs maybe, but the adolescents never followed. Our talk shd be breezy.

Love from us all,

*Neill*

(After this letter was sent William Golding refused the magazine's invitation to meet Neill. See: *All the Best, Neill -Letters from Summerhill* edited by Jonathan Croall Published in the UK by Andre Deutsch, 1983)

## ***Summerhill Summer 2005***

*by Tomo Usuda*



*Bust of Neill by Roger Thornhill*



# Books etc.

**Real Schools – In Their Own Words**, edited by Mary Leue, is a compilation of “insider reports” from 27 unusual schools. Some schools are represented by several essays and some schools by just one. Many schools are celebrated that are no longer with us. Most of the schools are American but some important ones are from other countries. A lot of them are free schools, but not all by any means. The quality of relationship at the institution seems to be the real key as to whether or not it is a Real School – not whether or not it abides by some structural formula. As Mary says, “These are happy schools.”

Mary Leue has been in an ideal position to assemble these essays. Her personal experience of free school and community living, as founder of the Albany Free School, goes back over thirty-five years. She has been graced with a wide view of this kind of close up living. These writings all first appeared in her magazine *Skole, The Journal of Alternative Education*, which she edited for many years.

“What I am attempting to put together here,” Mary says, “is not really intended as a guide for families to use to pick out a school for one particular child. Rather, my intent has been to make a statement about education itself, by presenting what feels to me like fertile ground – in twenty-seven different locations and by as many different genera.”

These stories are a good antidote to the educational mood of our time. To quote Mary again: “Somewhere along the way, things in school began to acquire more significance in lifetime terms, as though children were turkey poults in captivity who must be taught to peck at their feed, very soon after breaking out of the shell, because, without such teaching, they often starve in the midst of plenty, not having been fully domesticated like chickens. And the window of opportunity for their achieving that learning is narrow, their instinct to peck fading away quite soon if not reinforced by success.”

Another good use for this book is as a reference book. When Katrina blew through New Orleans and the city flooded I was reading on the Education Revolution e Newsletter that fears about the New Orleans Free School turned into relief that everyone was OK. I looked up the founder, Bob Ferris, in Mary’s book and was interested to read that: “A significant new paradigm is emerging throughout the United States and the world today. We must change our schools from convergent complicity to divergent creative living organizations.” *Real Schools – In Their Own Words* celebrates that diversity.

Albert

Mary’s book is available  
from her own website: [www.spinningglobe.net](http://www.spinningglobe.net)  
or from [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org)



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# Alt-Ed 101

*Simon Robinson recommends a starter course of good reading.*

The free education movement is about giving children the same amount of respect as adults, in the belief that this is both intrinsically preferable, and that this is the way they will respond best to the challenges of the world. This applies just as well to homeschooling, where parents and child collaborate, and to the free schools, which have organised meetings at which they discuss and make their decisions. Jerry Mintz does a particularly good job of describing, and arguing for, this approach to education and decision-making in his book *No Homework and Recess All Day*, and Alfie Kohn covers much the same ground from the point of view of the social sciences in his books *Punished By Rewards* and *The Schools Our Children Deserve*.

There are many aspects of the free education model that I still find confusing. By far the best thing is to buy a couple of books and read about them. I would like to make a few recommendations.

Both the John Holt books, *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn* are excellent. He was such a patient and careful observer of children that he serves as an example to all of us to do likewise: to pay attention to what is really going on in a child's mind, instead of just attending to what we think is going on, or what we would like to be going on. As such his books are an extremely good place to start thinking about these issues.

I recommend Grace Llewellyn because reading her *Teenage Liberation Handbook* will give you an extremely good, and extremely inspiring, idea of what education could be about if it was not locked up in classrooms all day long. She opens with a thoughtful discussion of what school is and why it is that way, before discussing why you should get out and how to best go about it (including chapters devoted to *The*

*Perhaps Delicate Parental Issue* and *The Not Necessarily Difficult Legal Issue*), and then the bulk of the rest of the book is advice on how to actually go about getting a real education once you are out of school.

There are a number of books written about free schools. My personal favorite is Chris Mercogliano's *Story of the Albany Free School*. Matthew Appleton's discussion of Summerhill in *A Free Range Childhood – Self-Regulation at Summerhill School* is also excellent, and perhaps goes into more detail about individual issues.

John Taylor Gatto is excellent on how schools are and why they were designed this way. Some may find his style a little uncompromising, but I personally found this to be a strength. His assessment of the work of *The Seven Lesson Schoolteacher* (in *Dumbing Us Down*) is without equal, and his *Underground History* will convince you with its historical detail.

Finally I am going to recommend Alfie Kohn extremely highly. He is a fascinatingly readable writer whose breadth of scholarship (in the social sciences and beyond) is unparalleled, and he pulls such diverse material together with a control I find humbling, while still keeping his feet very firmly rooted in the available evidence. He is also not afraid to state his opinion very clearly, and to cut apart unjustified assumptions. Regarding education directly, I recommend *The Schools Our Children Deserve*, followed by *Punished By Rewards*. I would be remiss if I did not also include *No Contest*, which is only indirectly related to education, simply because he shows to be false some of our most deeply-held beliefs about the way of the world; competition is a fatally flawed way of going about life, and it is neither inevitable (far from it) nor in any way desirable. The implications for our way of life are nothing short of revolutionary.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### *Recognizing Great Teachers Project*

I'm looking for suggestions on whom I should interview for a book I am writing. The book is on the topic of learning which, because it is a personal matter, I distinguish from schooling and education. It is to be written for the high school-age student who is concerned about his or her school, career, and life.

The book will consist of interviews with three groups of people in a variety of fields. These three groups are: high school students, people in the middle of their life, and elders who can look back on their experience.

I have finished two interviews. They're typed, edited, and approved for publication by the interviewees. Both are beautiful and candid expositions in the areas of astrophysics. One is from my friend Neil Tyson, who's now the Director of the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History. He represents the active, middle-age practitioner.

The other is Charles H. Townes, whom I worked with in 1976, and who invented the Maser, the Laser, the atomic clock, discovered interstellar organic molecules and began the research that led to the discovery of the Big Bang. He gave me a wonderful interview which I hope will inspire kids of all ages. At 90 he represents the senior practitioner.

Now I'm looking for a high school age kid to represent the next generation in astrophysics. I'm finding it surprisingly hard to find anyone. I think that's because my request is unusual (there are few talent hunters looking for teenagers interested in astrophysics) and partly because hard science is not popular with this generation.

I ask the people I interview to tell me about what drives them, what obstacles they've overcome, and where they find their strength. My object in these interviews is to substantiate my thesis that the essential ingredients of learning are curiosity, integrity, and self-confidence. I do not tell this to those whom I interview, but I am finding that they are substantiating this with their own stories.

When I finish the astrophysics series of interviews I will put the three together and publish it as a 'trial balloon.' I may look for some funding and use this article as an example of the format and content of the book. The book, when complete, will be a compilation of a half a dozen of these triptychs, each in a different field.

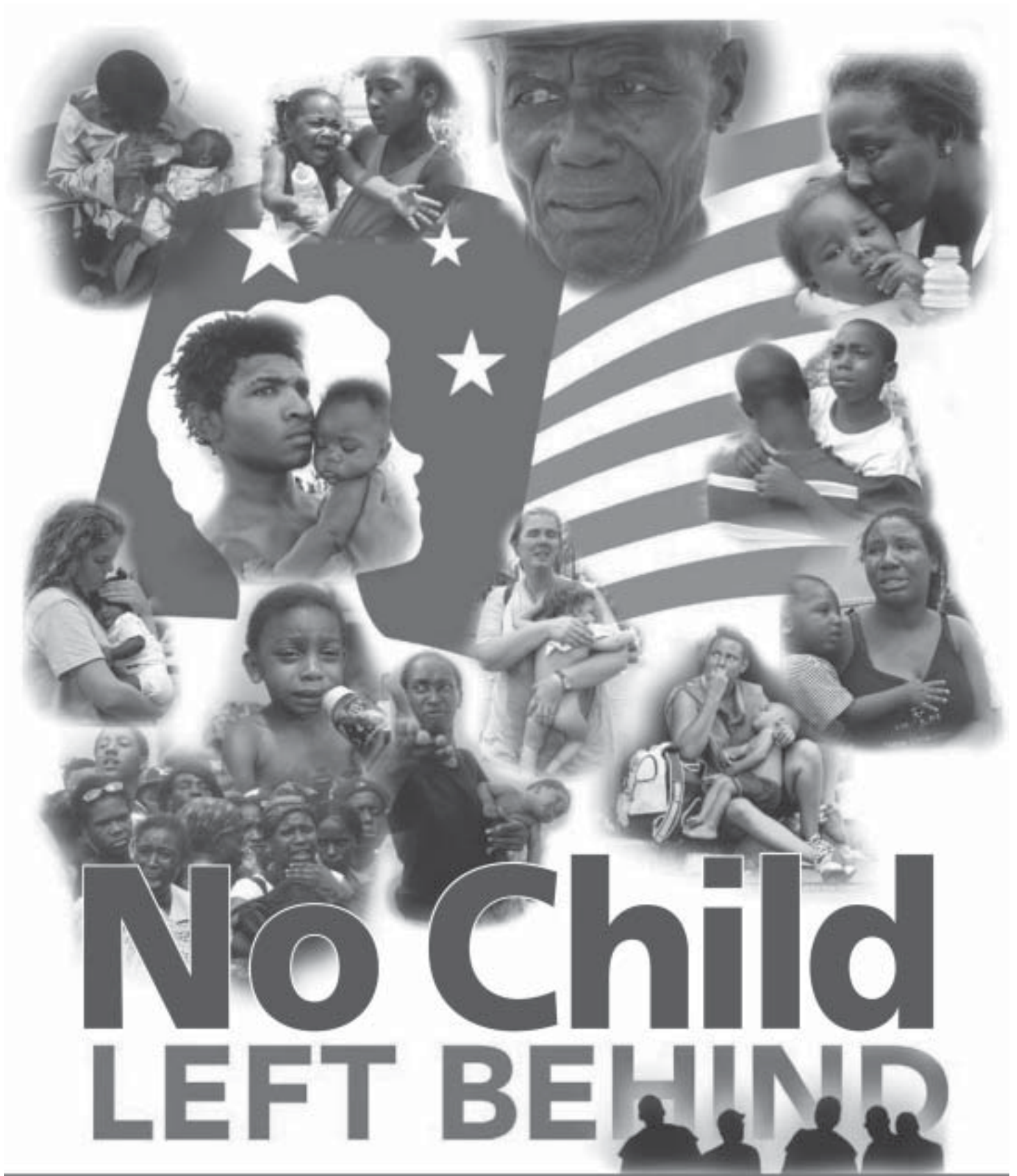
I'm exploring what other fields to include. I expect to complete a series in the sport of wrestling, and I'd like to branch out into other areas such as politics and the arts. John Gatto recommended that I consider Phylis Schlafly, Noam Chomsky, or Ralph Nader. And I'm exploring the idea of interviewing playwrights as they tend to be independent, thoughtful, and available.

Does anyone have any ideas about whom I might interview?

**Lincoln Stoller**

email: [lincolnstoller@earthlink.net](mailto:lincolnstoller@earthlink.net)

Check out the AERO bookstore!  
[www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org)



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Tim Seldin & Sharon Caldwell at the 2005 AERO Conference.

# AERO NEEDS YOUR HELP

Like many cutting edge organizations, AERO still suffers from chronic lack of funding. That's why I am sometimes a volunteer director! An anonymous donor has offered to match any contributions made to AERO for up to \$5000. If you would like to make a donation to this matching fund you can mail a check to: **AERO of the School of Living, 417 Roslyn Rd, Roslyn Hts, NY 11577**

You can also make a donation by going to: **[www.EducationRevolution.org](http://www.EducationRevolution.org)**

As it stands now, AERO still needs \$2,500 to meet the generous offer.  
Thank you for your support!

AERO Founder/Director, Jerry Mintz

# AERO

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