

The Magazine of Alternative Education

Education Revolution

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

Spring 2006

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* * *East Hill School* * *



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OF THE THINGS
THEY LEARN"**

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Education Revolution

The Magazine of Alternative Education

Spring 2006 - Issue Number Forty Four - www.educationrevolution.org

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.

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.

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Education Revolution

The Magazine of Alternative Education

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A Word from Jerry

Our Start a School program continues to be very effective. We average about 35 people who are starting new educational alternatives and who pay \$10 a month to stay on the listserve. Many who have been on the listserve have ultimately started their schools or programs and have gone on to become mentors to others, such as Kathyann Natke, who started Ridge and Valley Charter School in New Jersey, Alan Berger, who organized Brooklyn Free School in conjunction with AERO, Erika Sueker, who started Golden Independent School in Colorado, and Maaïke Eggermont, who started a democratic School in Belgium.

We want to develop and expand upon this program by creating a "School Starting Package" of books and DVDs. One project will be to videotape five targeted school-starter workshops at this summer's AERO conference. A related project is creating a DVD of video samples from hundreds of alternative schools so that potential students, parents, or staff members can get a visual impression of schools around the country and around the world.

Welcome to the Education Revolution!

If this issue has a theme it is that "anyone can start a school." Kids who are involved at the start up of a school learn lessons more important than any that can be taught in a classroom. Similarly, kids who are on hand when an institution reaches its end and finally closes its doors are similarly fortunate. In both cases they get to learn something about the essential nature of life.

albertlamb@bigfoot.com

Albert

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Looking for News

with Albert Lamb

The Voucher Question

I can't see any easy way through the voucher question. When I used to homeschool my kids it seemed a great idea for you to get some kind of no-strings-attached voucher from your school district. Then you could spend your education dollar as you saw fit. But I couldn't imagine it happening.

In the States this January vouchers have been pushed up onto the front burner by an ABC television program. This documentary: *Stupid in America, How Lack of Choice Cheats Our Kids Out of a Good Education* by John Stossel, was aired on 20/20. It gets its *Stupid* name from the part of the show where Belgian kids laugh at the results of recent tests which showed how much better they are doing, compared with American kids, in proving that they can learn something in school. The rest of the show was an effective expose of how useless government monopoly schooling is in the States these days. But Stossel was also pushing hard for vouchers. It turned out that even the Belgian kids benefited from vouchers.

Thus the voucher question. The public school debate in America has always had clear political delineations. Left-wingers want everyone to go through the same public school system for reasons of fairness and an egalitarian desire to see everybody mix together and get the same chance in life. Right-wingers want everyone to have access to secular and religious private schools and they mostly want government to get out of the school business, except maybe in a testing capacity. Right-wingers are in favor of vouchers and left-wingers are against them. Those are the battle lines.

Both sides have always seemed to be a little crazy to me and yet both sides have their points. The craziness has to do with: What does all this have to do with kids? Everyone on both sides of the argument is quite happy to indoctrinate kids in order to produce the particular future they desire. Nobody really wants to let them be in charge of their own lives and their own education. Each side advocates a contrasting nightmare scenario.

But if Roland Meighan is right and large scale monopolised education programs, our public schools, are going to implode in the next little while, then maybe letting the public schools

take a hit while letting some parents and schools opt out of the system could be a good thing. Meighan thinks that so many better ways to actually learn now exist that in time these will naturally undermine the monoliths, which are ripe for a killing.

It seems that for alternative educators this issue isn't a left-right thing. But I'm still not entirely comfortable with vouchers. The fear now is that corporate and fundamentalist agendas are pushing vouchers along for their own reasons. Schooling will be mostly privatized and in the process may become even more awful than the current government run school system. Inevitably, in the long run our new chains of schools will be merged, as that is the way with late capitalism. And then this new corporate monopoly will want to raise generations of compliant worker/shoppers of the most bizarre sort, all of them taught to believe who knows what. Government backed McSchools could become the only reality.

Already we have seen the world's richest man, Microsoft's Bill Gates, put a billion of his own dollars into promoting his vision of American education. The Waltons, heirs to the Wal-Mart fortune, are currently the top funders of the charter and voucher movements. Part of their interest may be tapping into the 400 billion dollars a year currently being spent on public schools. If their lobbying is successful we can wait to hear of their plans to start a chain of Walmart for-profit schools.

Even this 20/20 program comes to us with a brand name behind it. The ABC network is owned by Disney who are one of the most conservative of the opinion-shaping media giants and a hefty supporter of President Bush's campaign in 2000. Maybe someday our kids will be going to DisneySchools.

In the meantime I can listen comfortably to arguments on both side of the issue. If vouchers come in we can quickly take advantage of it by trying some new initiatives. If vouchers don't come in it will make some very creepy people feel bad.

If anyone would like to write something on this issue for the next Education Revolution I'd like to hear from them.

Networking For Growth and Support

By Isaac Graves

On Saturday, January 29th four democratic schools in New York State met for the first time ever. This event, spearheaded by director Alan Berger of the Brooklyn Free School, was designed to network the schools and discuss ways in which they can better support each other. In addition to the Brooklyn Free School, The Free School (Albany), Hudson Valley Sudbury School (Kingston), & Longview School (Cortlandt Manor) were present at the gathering.

In a large common area inside of Hudson Valley Sudbury School nearly thirty staff members met for this significant seven hour event. Topics ranged from public relations, fundraising, and enrollment issues to the discussions of parent roles, admission ages and criteria, rule enforcement, meeting structure, and responsibility versus entitlement. The real heart of the meeting came when each school gave a brief overview of their 'average' day followed by questions and answers. This was made especially intriguing by having the four schools in very different cultural and socio-economic settings: urban, suburban, and rural. What also brought on many engaging conversations



Hudson Valley Sudbury School

was how each school approached similar situations. For example Hudson Valley and Longview are Sudbury model schools which handle conflict resolution through a judicial committee while The Free School in Albany has an all-school meeting and the Brooklyn Free School has a small meeting system to hand conflict resolution. Information on each of their meeting systems can be found through www.educationrevolution.org/lisofdemscho.html.

During the discussion of enrollment, many experiences and ideas were exchanged, such as the sharing of positive news articles to help promote the schools, while one such idea has already been implemented. It was suggested that AERO host a list of schools with current student openings for prospective parents and students to review. That listing can now be found at www.educationrevolution.org/stop.html and AERO member schools are able to list their openings for free.

Despite a number of small differences between the schools, many participants made mention of how incredibly similar they were and how they would likely be considered one and the same to the general public. One staff member commented after the gathering, "Before this meeting, I didn't realize how much our schools had in common." Through this kinship that seems to have developed, the meeting ended with discussion on how they can continue to network, give support, and exchange ideas. Teacher and student exchanges seem likely in the near future while an annual event involving all of the staff and students of each school is currently under discussion. A special listserv was set up so this dialog can continue.

If you are interested in having such an event in your area, contact AERO by phone at (800) 769-4171 or e-mail at info@educationrevolution.org and we can help organize and coordinate the event.

Each One A Leader

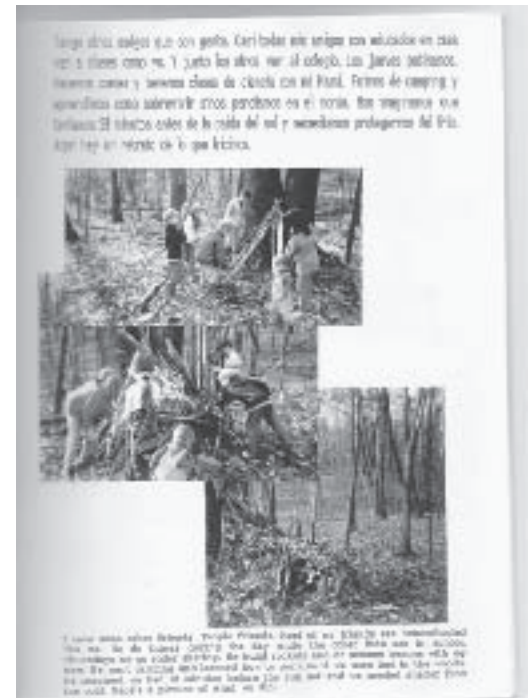
Kathyann Natke on the AERO listserv:

An example of democratically raised children came up today and I thought of you. We were looking at pictures of a school group in a debris shelter in the woods and I went home and found one of our Homeschool Co-ops doing a similar activity.

We took them to one of the parks where they have a program about survival and challenge groups of students to build a shelter in 20 minutes "before the sun sets on a freezing night." Many groups succeed in building something but our group floored the

leaders with their approach. The kids did it with no adults. One kid said, "20 minutes. 5 to organize? I'll be timekeeper." Quick agreements and they formed a circle. A different kid took the lead with, "Let's be silent 1 minute and each focus on what we'll do and what part you can do." Silence fell until timekeeper said, "Let's go around. Describe what you think we should do and what you want to do." The planned shelters had many similarities and each added only new details and volunteering their role.

After some quick rearranging, when they realized no one took an important part, another recapped, "So, it will be right here, up to here. You and you are going for big sticks over there where a previous group probably would have tossed them. You and you are getting middle sticks. Everyone is bringing small sticks and you are taking them (toddler siblings) and making a big pile of leaves. "You (addressing the toddlers) can get a LOT of leaves right here, okay?"



Photos from "My Life" by Murray Natkie.

Quick round of thumbs up to proceed and they scattered. Elapsed time 4 1/2 minutes. Their shelter was sturdy and fit all of them exactly (to conserve heat it was not too large). Most importantly, it was all of theirs and we could feel their sense that they, as a group, could indeed survive anything. I like to think of them when I spend too much time with adults who think coming to agreement makes everything take too long and consensus is impossible.

Peace,
Kathyann
knat@sprintmail.com



IDEC 2006 DEMOCRACY! What's Next?

This summer on the banks of the beautiful Lane Cove River, while looking towards Sydney Harbour in warm winter sunshine, we will be holding IDEC 2006 – this year's International Democratic Education Conference. We plan to discuss this challenging question: *Democracy! What's next?*

IDEC is an annual gathering of learners of all ages who are passionate about creating an education which will empower the individual within caring communities and who want to implement democratic values and human rights in their places of learning.

From 10th –16th July 2006 there will be discussions, lectures, and interactive workshops. IDEC 2006 will be a week long, live-in gathering where presenters become participants and participants can become presenters: where adults and young people can learn and live together. We also hope to include a variety of cultural experiences to give people a taste of Sydney.



The Australasian Association of Progressive and Alternative Education (AAPAE) is hosting IDEC 2006 for the first time in Australia. AAPAE was established as a network in 2000 and has been growing since that time.

Currambena, Blacktown Youth College and Kinma are the three active Sydney AAPAE members. Present and past members of these school are involved in the organization and the hosting of IDEC 2006. AAPAE Members from other states are also contributing. A student from Unlimited in New Zealand is creating the website. Students from Currambena and Blacktown have been planning activities and adventures for IDEC. Currambena kids and Kirinarai kids from Adelaide, South Australia, have raised money to help IDEC. Preshil kids from Melbourne are hoping to help Whispering Seed from Thailand be able to join us at IDEC.

This summer's IDEC will create an opportunity for Australia to witness the diversity of participatory models of education that exist throughout the world. It is ironic that at a time when many people are recognizing the value of student-centered, participatory education, the general trend in Australian Education is towards a controlled, regulated and centralized system.

School refusal; disengagement with learning and schools; trouble with families, police and the law; issues of drugs and alcohol; racism, poverty, mental illness and suicide are all part of young people's lives in Australia despite our general high level of economic prosperity.

Together we can create bridges so as to support more and more children to become active participants of their own learning and dynamic members of their local communities. Previous conferences have been vital in helping in the development of regional networks and organizing within local regions. We hope that this support will continue and develop further at IDEC 2006. We also hope to build a partnership with democratic education and those passionate about education for sustainable

development.

From 2005 – 2015, UNESCO is conducting the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). UNESCO wants to create what it sees as "a new vision" of education respecting human rights, giving a commitment to social and economic justice, being committed to intergenerational responsibility and showing respect for the diversity of the earth's ecosystems. This 'new vision' requires cultural diversity and building a culture of tolerance, non-violence and peace.

These ideas resonate with many of the principles of alternative, progressive and democratic education. The introduction of democratic principles into socially and economically marginalised schools and communities could have a significant effect in empowering people.

"Only in a democratic environment based on respect for diversity and dialogue can individual self-expression and self-

THRESHOLD

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government be secured and freedom of association be upheld... people of all cultures value their freedom of choice and feel the need to have a say in decision affecting their lives" (Speech given by Kofi Annan Un Sec Gen in Oslo accepting the Centennial Nobel Prize)

Sustainability is more about new ways of thinking than about science or ecology. Sustainability is a conversation about creating a healthy future for all. Whilst it involves the natural sciences and economics, it is primarily a matter of culture. It is concerned with the values people cherish and the way we perceive our relationship with the natural world. As with Democratic Education it puts people at the heart of decision-making processes and empowers them to transform their lives. We hope that our IDEC will contribute to some productive changes.

by Cecelia Bradley

Participant speakers at IDEC 2006 will include Yaacov Hecht, Jerry Mintz, Eric Schneider, Sally Carless, John Edwards, Robin Grille, Stuart Hill, Yoshiyuki Nagata, Louise Porter, Dennis Foley, Terry O'Connell, Stephanie Alexander, John Marsden, Bill Hannan and Lorna Hannan, Di Roberts, Jack Heath, Rebecca Gallam, Dr David Cohen, Ian Gibson, Robert D Walshe, Kageki, Phil Smith, Derek Sheppard and many more

For more details view
our websites:
www.idec2006.org
www.aapae.edu.au

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Pictured below: Cecelia A. Bradley
Pictured opposite: AAPAE members and friends in Brisbane
and below: Jenny Williams, Project Manager for IDEC
and a Currumbena parent



Being There

with Jerry Mintz

Democratic Unity

Unity Charter School was a pioneer: one of the first to be based on democratic process. It was inspired by Sudbury Valley School and started over seven years ago.

In a letter to AERO, founding Unity board member Lisa Brick said: "Since we do have compulsory education laws, and since millions of children will go through the public education system, I feel that it is imperative for those of us with the will, energy, and optimism to design and implement public learning environments that are supportive of individuality, creativity, self-realization and self-governance. These new learning environments can act as blueprints for numerous communities to emulate to transform their public schools."

Early on I was called in as a consultant by Lisa Brick to help them

fine-tune their democracy, and I have followed their progress since then. Back then there were daunting challenges, including lawsuits by the local board hanging over their head.

Even then there were problems with the meeting process as is indicated in Lisa Brick's response to my report in 1999:

"It is evident that the meetings need to be longer than one hour. It is evident that having the meetings first thing in the morning defeats the allotted time span since it is impossible to start at the alleged start time. Your idea regarding limiting activities during the meeting time may be quite effective in having an increased participation. I feel that more children would find that the meetings are empowering if they came in and heard the discussion."

Over the years Unity has gone through various changes, and their democratic process had deteriorated somewhat, especially since they lost

their large meeting space after last year. But this is very common with schools which start out intending to be democratic, because the forces around them militate against that approach. For example, all the nearby schools reflect the mainstream, failing approach of authoritarian control, and most of the teachers, parents and administrators did not grow up in democratic schools but rather, in that same authoritarian system. So it just isn't an instinctive thing to do, especially in the face of increasingly restrictive state education expectations.

Lately the school has made do with a sort of token democracy they called "DG." It was more like an elective class, and didn't include the elementary students.

I was invited to come back to Unity to help them get their democratic process back on track. First I did a session with the staff and administrators. I requested that there also be a representative group

of students at the session. Their presence there was crucial, to have their point of view represented for feedback and as a sounding board.

It seemed that some teachers feared that I was going to come in and impose some process on them. Of course that would be impossible, but I hoped that I would be able to pinpoint ways in which they could get back to a more inclusive democratic process.

I gave a Power Point presentation, putting the democratic process in perspective and outlining choices for them to make. We had some excellent discussion. It was clear that the school still had a commitment to democracy. I was scheduled to return to Unity after my keynote and consultation in India. The centerpiece of the second session was to have an actual, all-school democratic meeting.

I returned to Unity on October 19th. It was a sunny and fairly mild day, so we determined that the meeting could be outside on the parking lot. The alternative was to have it in the large hall area inside, but it would have been cramped and required moving out all of the tables.

We set up chairs, pads and pillows in a circle, and brought out a portable sound system. I felt the sound system was very important, so that the softest voices could be heard and encouraged.

There was some question raised about whether the elementary students should participate in the meeting. I made it clear that their presence was crucial, because the meeting needs to represent and empower the whole school. But contingency plans were made to possibly have the teachers take the youngest students out if they couldn't understand the meeting or became restless. Those fears turned out to be quite unfounded.

The students piled out excitedly into the parking lot and onto the chairs and sitting pads. There were over 100 students and teachers in the meeting. I briefly gave them some background about what we planned to do with this meeting. They clearly understood. I told them that they could put anything they wanted on the agenda, although this day we would probably only get to one or two items. They then proceeded to put 35 items on the agenda! Clearly the students were ready for this!

In order to sort them out and prioritize them, we took a quick vote on all of them to determine interest. The ones which had the most interest, with over 60 votes each, were

Free play Group PE (*Physical Education*)

Lunch outside

School Snack Bar

80 minutes for Group PE on 10/26/05

More Field Trips

Lockers

Play all day

We decided to start with the issue of whether students could have their lunches outside. The degree of participation was astounding. Since so many wanted to participate, we had to set up a system of prospective speakers standing in line to speak at the microphone. I'd estimate that over 2/3rds of the school chimed in on this subject. And I think that virtually every one of the younger students spoke.

Of course, the situation was somewhat chaotic, but I did not want to squelch any of them or impinge on this great release of energy.

Eventually a proposal was made that the students have the option of whether to eat inside or outside. This passed

overwhelmingly on the first vote, but part of my procedure, which we call the "Iroquois Democracy," because we learned it from the Mohawk Indians, is to allow those who voted negatively to say why, and to allow a revote or even a better or more inclusive proposal.

During the latter part, one student astutely asked whether there would be enough staff supervision to have that option. The principal responded and said it would possibly involve one more staff member, but that she thought it could be done. The vote was then confirmed. The meeting ended at that point. It was only an hour long. We considered that this was not a "demonstration" but a real meeting making a real decision.

After the students went home we had a follow up session with the teachers, administration and the original students from the first session. In general they were pleased with how the process went and hoped to be able to follow up on it with democratic, whole school meetings. The teacher of the younger students felt that she has already been using this process with her children, which would explain the ease of their involvement.

Following the session, as the staff went into staff meeting, the student group caught me on my way out and asked if they could meet with me before I left. Board member Zamir Hassan was also present. At that meeting the students expressed their concern that the ideas presented that day would not be fully implemented. They wanted ideas and suggestions about how they could ensure that the school continued to move toward democracy and freedom.

I am not completely confident that these two sessions were enough to help Unity get back to being a true democratic school. The students clearly want to be part of a democratic school. The staff and administration do also, but I believe there is an undercurrent of fear and resistance, which is quite understandable, since the school has always struggled to fulfill its mission, as stated by Lisa Brick seven years ago, to be "supportive of individuality, creativity, self-realization and self-governance. These new learning environments can act as blueprints for numerous communities to emulate to transform their public schools."

Teachers and
students at
Unity Charter
School



Mail & Communications

Edited by Carol Morley

AERO has just completed creating one of the most important resources that we have ever offered – and it's free! We now have on our website the text of all of the past issues of Education Revolution Magazine, from the first one in November 1989 (under the name AERO-Gramme) to our Winter 2005 issue, #43. By looking through this you can almost read the history of the alternative education movement for the past 17 years, as well as visualize the evolution of AERO by seeing images of all the covers of the magazines. For those who would like to see the issues in PDF format with pictures, just e-mail us at info@educationrevolution.org and we can send you PDFs of #30, 33, and 37-42. To see the entire archive go to www.educationrevolution.org/archives.html

AERO is pleased to announce the launch of a new website for its founder, internationally known educator, Jerry Mintz. The site features recent interviews and keynote speeches, books, articles, and biography. Visitors can order materials, arrange interviews, consultations or speaking engagements, or contact Jerry directly through the site. Its location is <http://www.jerrymintz.com>.

Diane Walters will be representing Waldorf Education for AERO's keynote panel discussion "Educational Alternatives: Finding Our Commonalities & Celebrating Our Differences" to be held at this summer's conference. Living Imagination is the culmination of 22 years of work and study, developing a practical application of spirit in matter through the practice of Anthroposophy and Waldorf Education. Spanning the countries of Canada, the United States, and Russia, Diane has offered lectures and workshops to educators, and families on a variety of topics. <http://www.livingimagination.org/>

In the most unlikely of places, the **Chugach School District** in Alaska won the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige award, one of three districts to ever win it. The award created by Congress recognizes extreme examples of quality. The tiny Chugach district, consisting of three remote villages, each with fewer than 30 students K-12 plus homeschooling, over a period of eight years changed its graduation rate from zero to 70%, reduced annual teacher turnover from 50% to 5%, raised achievement scores from the mid-20s to the mid-70s, and restored hope among parents for their children. Report card grades were abolished in favor of competency achievement. They spend 30 days per year

on staff development, use progressive methods of instruction and involve students in community-based learning. <http://www.chugachschoools.com/>

Futurist says today's students need to start learning Chinese, Arabic to be successful tomorrow, by Emily Richmond, *Las Vegas Sun*: The future of public education in Clark County is now – and it speaks Mandarin Chinese. That's the message futurist Ed Barlow had for the Clark County School District at a community workshop Thursday. With Barlow serving as a curriculum consultant, a new high school opening in North Las Vegas in 2006 plans to offer Chinese, Spanish and Arabic, said Marsha Irvin, superintendent of the district's northeast region. School districts in other places, including Chicago, have already begun expanding foreign language programs to include both Chinese and Arabic. <http://www.lasvegassun.com/>

From **Charter schools thriving**, by Bethany K. Warner, *The Northwestern*: The Experimental Aviation Association charter school, housed at Oakwood Elementary School is Oshkosh's first charter school and is in its fifth year of operation. On its heels are four other charter schools: the four-year-old Environmental Education Charter School and the two-year old Oshkosh East High School, Journeys project-based school and ALPs Charter School, an accelerate learning program for gifted and talented students. A sixth charter school, expected to focus on healthy living is in the works to open in September 2006 at Merrill Elementary School. Statewide, more than 35,000 students are enrolled in 181 charter schools. The charter school movement began in Wisconsin in 1993 when the state passed the first legislation allowing 10 school districts to create up to two charter schools each for up to 20 charter schools statewide.

Experts Say Put Stress on Play, Not on Children: A new statement, issued by the Alliance for Childhood, condemns the increasingly academic curriculum in kindergartens and preschools, which is replacing child-initiated learning through creative play and hands-on activities. According to the statement, "Education is not a race where the prize goes to the one who finishes first." Instead of strengthening the "drive to learn," current trends in early education policy and practice heighten pressure and stress in children's lives, which can contribute to behavioral and learning problems." The group makes five specific "calls to action": (1) For early education

that emphasizes experiential, hands-on activities, open-ended creative play, and caring human relationships; (2) For a reversal of the pushing down of the curriculum that has transformed kindergarten into de facto first grade; (3) For research on the causes of increased levels of anger, misbehavior, and school expulsion among young children; (4) For additional research that examines the long-term impact of different preschool and kindergarten practices; and (5) For teacher education that emphasizes the full development of the child including the importance of play. “The disappearance of play is a tragedy not yet fully explored or understood,” said Joan Almon, president of the Alliance. “Research and experience suggest that today’s children will not develop as well cognitively, socially, or emotionally as those whose childhoods were rich with play.”

http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/pdf_files/call_action_education.pdf



“Remember, children, always wear hats, sunscreen, dark glasses and thermal underwear..”

Camden school shows kids the ‘Big Picture’ *Asbury Park, New Jersey.* On a recent Thursday morning, the staff at the new Met East High School was delighted that most of their students were not in the building. Most of the school’s 42 students – all ninth-graders – were doing internships at places ranging from law offices to funeral homes. Getting out into the community is a key element of the school, New Jersey’s first in a national network of ‘Big Picture’ schools. Even on the three days a week when most students are in the building textbooks are rarely used. Students don’t take tests and don’t get letter grades. Instead, they’re supposed to follow their passions and learn on their own. <http://www.app.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20051227/NEWS03/512270309/1007>

California students are increasingly being **begged, bribed and badgered** to go to class, not only to improve their education but to boost the coffers of cash-strapped school districts that rely on state funding largely determined by daily attendance. Temecula schools, which lose about \$30,000 a day because of absences, are raffling a car, Disneyland vacations and iPods to pupils with near-perfect attendance. *LA Times, December 2005*
The National Charter School Research Project at the Center on Reinventing Public Education has published a webpage

where visitors can click on their state on a map of the US to see how it’s charter schools compare to others. You can download a brief PDF file with data on charter school enrollment, demographics and how your state is unique. You can also choose to download all 40 states at once in a PDF file. The site is at http://crpe.org/ncsrp/pubs/2005_report/2005_Briefs.shtml

From More CPS cover-ups as 8,000 Chicago students arrested—75% are African American, By Tracy Dell’Angela, Chicago Tribune: More than 8,800 children were arrested at Chicago schools last year – a practice that disproportionately affects black students charged with typical teen misconduct such as fights and talking back to staff. A report released this spring by the Advancement Project concluded that the schools were criminalizing routine student misbehavior with a “take no prisoners” approach – punishing students with suspensions and a trip to the police station. The “Schoolhouse to Jailhouse” report analyzed arrest numbers from 1999 to 2003, which showed that 75 percent of all children arrested over the five-year period were African-American though they make up 50 percent of the district’s enrollment. <http://www.chicagotribune.com>

Wikipedia, the Free Online Encyclopedia, Ponders a New Entity: Wikiversity, by Andrea L. Foster: Fans of Wikipedia, the popular online encyclopedia that anyone can edit, have proposed the creation of Wikiversity, an electronic institution of learning that would be just as open. On a Wikiversity Web site, Cormac Lawler, a doctoral candidate in education at the University of Manchester, in England, says the mission of Wikiversity is to use the open-source model – based on software that anyone is free to modify – to develop learning materials, teach, conduct research, and publish. Collaborative learning would be stressed, and students themselves could determine course content and activities. <http://chronicle.com/free/2005/12/2005121601t.htm>

Ablaze Academy’s curriculum can be accessed anywhere there is a computer and a connection to the Internet. Over 102 core courses are included in Ablaze Academy’s comprehensive and challenging curriculum. Ablaze Academy provides curriculum content to match skill levels of all students, whether on a developmental, remedial, or enhanced learning track. The curriculum teaches each subject carefully and completely, adding practice, mastery, review tests and a final exam for each subject. One important distinction the Academy offers to its students is the services of Tutor.Com. When Ablaze students need help they are able to connect to live tutors. The school’s website: www.ablazeacademy.com

New Educational Alternative in Virginia: Founding families of Friendship Sudbury School originated from a homeschool support group that met weekly at one of our family homes in Louisa County for around one and a half years. As most of us leaned towards the ‘unschooling’ end of homeschooling, there were too few group situations (homeschool or school) that encompassed the freedom for children to follow their unique interests as fully as they preferred. Therefore, we came up with the idea of starting a Sudbury School, which we felt falls between homeschooling, with its sometimes isolating nature (through distance and scheduling limitations), and most schools, with

their highly restrictive nature, community isolation, and age segregation. Friendship Sudbury School was formally known as Blackberry Village School. <http://www.friendshipsudburyschool.org/>

It's time to phase out the middle school model, by Gregory Kane: Students in those uncertain years between the ages of 11 and 13 fare better at reading when they're in schools where the classes are kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) instead of middle schools that include grades six through eight, according to test scores recently presented by the head of the city school system. <http://www.baltimoresun.com>

Pupils 'must look away to think': Pupils should be encouraged to look away from their teacher when answering a question, scientists have found. Far from daydreaming, children who avert their gaze when considering their response to a question are more likely to come up with the correct answer. Stirling University psychologists found that, when looking away, five-year-olds answered 72% of questions well. But when children had not been instructed to look away when thinking, they answered just 50% correctly. The research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, was published in the British Journal of Developmental Psychology. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4602178.stm>

Independent Learning Center We are a project of the 38-year-old independent Free School of Albany. Built upon the same principles of autonomy, respect, and personal responsibility that have made the Albany Free School so successful with elementary and junior high school aged students over the years, the Independent Learning Center guides students in setting their own learning goals and building the lives they imagine. ILC responds to the growing need of teens for independent, community-based learning. We operate the only democratic educational institution for teens in the Capital District. ILC offers a full time day school option centered on student-designed projects, community internships, and portfolio building. 8 Elm St, Albany, NY 12202. Email: Lpenniman@albanyilc.org. <http://www.albanyilc.org/>

Two sessions of **Not Back to School Camp** will be held in Eugene, OR: August 31 to September 7 and September 24 to October 1. Together, campers and staff co-create a week-long smorgasbord of workshops, spontaneous events, and special evening gatherings. We seek unschoolers who are excited about life, eager to share in what NBTSC offers, and enthusiastic about offering their own workshops and other contributions. We come to camp to change ourselves and the world, teach each other great things, and sing under the moon. Ages 13 to 18. Maximum number of campers is about 105. The hostess is Grace Llewellyn, best known as the author of *The Teenage Liberation Handbook* and founder of Not Back to School Camp. 541-686-2315

In its first private venture, **EducationNews.Org** launches **StreamingTechnology Partnership**, a division of EducationNews.org publications. Streaming Technology Partnership, Inc. will offer Internet video streaming, recording, and delivery services to schools and education-related

organizations. StreamingTechnology Partnership is a joint venture lead by Bandwydth Corporation headquartered in Dayton, OH. "Our decision to launch StreamingTechnology Partnership is linked to our expectation that Internet video capability will offer incredible benefits to both teachers and students." StreamingTechnology products include: Webcasting services, videoconferencing, Internet narrowcasting, and video streaming. <http://www.educationnews.org>

Home Education News

Undergraduate Program for Homeschoolers: The Undergraduate Program for Homeschoolers at Goddard offers young people, ages 14-19, who have learned independently outside of schools, an opportunity to begin earning college credit while continuing to learn in a self-directed style. Students design their own courses in collaboration with a faculty advisor, and may choose one or two 3-credit courses per semester. Each semester begins with a weekend residency. In 2006 residencies will be held March 3-5 and September 8-10. Students develop their semester study plans at the residency, and attend workshops on topics such as academic writing, library research, critical reflection, and areas of special interest. There will also be time for socializing and informal discussions with peers and faculty members. Following the residency, students engage in a 12-week semester. According to their study plans, which explicitly list each student's particular learning goals, students send regular packets containing their particular work to their faculty advisor, who responds with detailed comments and suggestions. <http://www.goddard.edu/academic/Homeschool.html>

More Black Families Home Schooling, by Zinie Chen Sampson, AP: Denise Armstrong decided to home school her daughter and two sons because she thought she could do a better job of instilling her values in her children than a public school could. And while she once found herself the lone black parent at home-education gatherings that usually were dominated by white Christian evangelicals, she's noticed more black parents joining the ranks. Home-school advocates say the apparent increase in black families opting to educate their children at home reflects a wider desire among families of all races to guide their children's moral upbringing, along with growing concerns about issues such as sub-par school conditions and preserving cultural heritage. Nationwide, about 1.1 million children were home schooled in 2003, or 2.2 percent of the school-age population. That was up from about 850,000, or 1.7 percent, in 1999. To help guide black home-schooling families, Joyce and Eric Burges started the National Black Home Educators Resource Association in 2000. <http://www.nbhera.org/>

Homeschooled boy wins national science contest: Michael Viscardi, a senior from San Diego, won a \$100,000 college scholarship, the top individual prize in the Siemens Westinghouse Competition in Math, Science and Technology. Viscardi tackled a 19th century math problem and his new method of solving it has potential applications in the fields of engineering and physics. "He is a super-duper mathematics

student,” said lead judge Constance Atwell, a consultant and former research director at the National Institutes of Health. “It was almost impossible for our judges to figure out the limits of his understanding during our questioning. And he’s only 16 years old,” she said. *The Associated Press*.



“Yes, Sir! No, Sir! Three bags full, Sir!”

International News

Mexico

Experiment opens college to everyone in Mexico City, by Marion Lloyd, Houston Chronicle Foreign Service: There are no entrance exams. In fact, there are no exams at all, nor grades. Classroom attendance is optional, and tuition is free. Welcome to the Autonomous University of Mexico City, or UACM. This radical experiment in higher education is how Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, the presidential front-runner, sees the future of public universities in Mexico: accessible to all, regardless of age, income or academic achievement. The former Mexico City mayor created the UACM by decree in April 2001. Rather than applying a standard entrance exam, it selects students by lottery. All applicants need is a high school diploma, proof of residency in the capital and a little luck. Those whose numbers don’t come up are given preference in the next round of admissions. Students are encouraged to take the initiative in their own learning, ‘certifying’ their knowledge before a commission when they feel ready. The university’s four campuses are in some of the city’s poorest neighborhoods.

Korea

Alternative Schools Grow Ever More Attractive: An increasing number of people fed up with the standardized education provided by Korea’s public schools are turning to alternative education, licensed or otherwise, which has been proliferating since the mid-1990s. Following explosive growth since 2000, there are now more than 100 alternative schools across the nation. That has meant an end to the prejudice that alternative schools are for misfits and trouble-makers. More and more ordinary students, including the academically gifted, go to alternative schools to pursue an education that values their individuality. Competition for some of the most popular alternative schools is fierce, with as many as five applicants for every place. As the number of alternative schools has mushroomed, legislators earlier this year passed a bill aimed to absorb the alternative programs into the framework of the formal education system. When a related executive decree goes into

force next year, the number of state-approved schools, currently at 25, is expected to rise sharply. <http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200510/200510030002.html>

Thailand

Alternative Education training in China *Jim, at Whispering Seed, writes:* Nao and I spent about three weeks in Yunnan Province in southwestern China in August. We were invited to lead a training to a group of mostly Shan and some Kachin (ethnic groups within Burma) in alternative education. It was a wonderful training and we were asked to stay a bit longer to work more in-depth with them. The training was held in a small border town just inside China along the Burmese border. It is illegal for this type of training to be held within Burma, thus they workshops had to be all held just over the border in China.

Conferences

April 27 - 30, **2006 Annual West Coast-USA International Conference on Montessori Educational And The Partnership Way** including The Voices of the Children - panels of present and former Montessori students exploring connections between democratic education and Montessori. www.montessori.org

April 29 - 30, 2006 **Creating the New Education Workshops** Danbury, CT. International Montessori Society www.imsmontessori.org

June 29 - July 1, 2006, The **International Association for Learning Alternatives** annual conference: Ocean Shores, WA. The conference host is the Washington Association for Learning Alternatives with the theme, Education for Everyone. <http://www.learningalternatives.net>

June 29 - July 2, 2006 The Alternative Education Resource Organization’s **3rd Annual Conference**. Russell Sage College, Troy, NY. Theme: “Educational Alternatives, Building our Commonalities & Celebrating our Differences.” Email: isaacgraves@gmail.com for more info. Or visit www.EducationRevolution.org

July 10 - 16, **IDEC 2006**, the International Democratic Education Conference, in Sydney, Australia For more details view our websites: www.idec2006.org

July 24 - 1, **HES FES 2006** The world’s biggest home education event. Essex, England www.hesfes.co.uk

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Revolutionary Times

FAMILY RUN SCHOOLS

Surviving isn't the most important thing a school can do. Schools that come and go can still have a great value for everyone concerned.

No one should be put off starting a school just because it may be hard for it to survive down the years. The most important thing about a school is the life that is in it while it is still going.

East Hill School, described here by Jonathan Bliss, the son of the founder, rolled along happily for a third of a century and now is gone. Its story shows how you can have a school which is really an extension of a family, that such a school can grow up and become an institution over time, yet still manage to keep its roots firmly planted in the family.

This particular school had great charm and originality and its founder, Dick Bliss, gave it subtle leadership. East Hill is an inspiring school.



East Hill School in Winter

a school on a farm (what one family can do)

By Jonathan Bliss

My father Dick Bliss, in a question aimed more at himself than at his audience, once asked a group of East Hill parents, "Why school?" Which some of those present took to mean: "What could we possibly teach children that would help them live in this strange and often pathological world?"

Being a provoking man, he might have responded to his own question a number of ways, but the answer he lived for 35 years was East Hill Farm.

In 1957 my parents bought 300 acres in Andover, Vermont, and the following year opened a summer program with four children, only two of whom paid tuition. The kids swam in a muddy pond, rode a borrowed horse, and built their own cabins. My father liked to remember that when the farm had visitors, he'd tell the four kids to slip from one activity to

another, hoping the guests would fail to notice that all the children looked alike on what he called "this pimple of a place."

The birth of my older brother Andrew in 1960 lent an urgency to my parents' work. Significantly 'retarded,' Andy would clearly require something more than the local public school. My parents were appalled by institutions for the retarded and mentally ill, and I doubt this approach was ever a real option in their minds. They were told he might not live past the age of twelve, but they sensed Andy had a chance if they could give him useful work and membership in a safe and thoughtful community.

Word of East Hill's summer program spread during the sixties, but in an early letter to his sister my father speaks of wanting "a total approach to the problem



Dick and Jonathan Bliss

of growing up.” The decision to open a school evolved – among other things – out of my parents’ realization that a working school community might help them raise their own family well. By the same token, the process could involve other children in a “small society,” one with its share of problems and possibilities.

An East Hill day began early, with chores: milking, making breakfast, cleaning, cutting wood. Everyone participated. The person In Charge for the day assigned the jobs. As on many farms, breakfast was a respite and a breathing space. The food was simple, whole, and usually plentiful – barring a major error by the cooks! As the day students arrived, everyone gathered for circle dances; “Hora” from Israel, “Zimmeratik” from Greece, “Road to the Isles” and “Going Down to Cairo” from the British Isles and America.

Next came singing and morning meeting, a time for the group to take stock of itself and its responsibilities. Between songs we heard from the inspectors, two kids who had looked the farm over for cleanliness and orderliness. Volunteers went to tidy up areas that fell short. A student read the rule for the day: “When going into the woods to work, there should be at least three people...”; “Pots and pans should be washed in the large sink...” Announcements were made and concerns aired.

My father regularly used this time to re-focus the farm community. “Dick’s lectures” were always sparked by – but never confined to – things directly at

hand. Was the farm working together? Were individuals treating each other with respect? He called these surface indicators “tone,” and was more concerned about them than almost any other element in the day.

It was sometimes hard for visitors to see the connection between my father’s leadership style and the intensely independent culture he was nurturing. In a school more democratic than most, his central role sometimes seemed a contradiction to outside observers. In fact, he knew that democratic principles, however high-minded, can always be manipulated by cynics, and he spoke more often of justice and compassion than of votes and the ruling majority. He was something of an heir, albeit a skeptical one, to the great headmasters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in that “head” connoted moral center, steward, facilitator, counselor, and goad. His influences included Gandhi, Jefferson, and Eugene Debs, and he often quoted St. Benedict’s Rule to the effect that a good Abbot listens as closely to the junior monks as he does to the seniors. He had large ears for the difficulties of growing up; he also had plenty to say, and often said it. When asked about his attitude toward kids, his response might be: “they need to know where I stand.”

He understood the power of metaphor, and balanced every direct confrontation with a story. There was the Enoch Puffer saga, about a young boy from Andover who explores America during and just after the Civil War; stories from my father’s own history, of World





psychic growth any more than you could physically separate the head from the rest of the body. Consequently, the reader is warned that anything I say about academics in particular will lead to an impression of fragmentation, something we tried at all costs to avoid at East Hill.

The structure of the farm's academic life was never rigidly set, and took many forms through the years. By the mid-80s, though, a general daily routine had been established. Class groups were composed so that group dynamics interfered as little as possible. This meant they were inter-aged, mixed-ability groupings, usually of from 6

War II and his coming of age; and the legendary Hunt Carlyle, an Andover boy who did *not* leave town, but remained behind to know and love it. Somehow – I think it was partly a strain of skepticism that complemented his idealism – my father managed the trick of dealing with morality without seeming above his own rhetoric. And Hunt and Enoch worked their way into farm tradition as touchstones for generations of East Hill kids.

“Hot blood is better than cold blood” was one of his favorite sayings, and somehow, paradoxically, this was a guiding principle for a man who called himself a pacifist. His critique, whether gentle or urgent, was always on target. He could (and often did) exasperate us all, but you could not dismiss him. People have spoken of his ‘passion,’ which it was, but informed by close observation and a good sense of timing. “There were times when I wanted to kill him,” a former student said not long ago, “but as I think

back I understand exactly why he was the way he was. Of all the influences in my life, he and East Hill are at the head of the list. His example of involvement, the way he insisted that we care for each other, is something I try to bring to everything I do.”

When morning meeting was over, the group separated for classes. This is one of the most difficult aspects of the farm to write about, not because it wasn't important or effective, but because it was integral. A basic notion of my father's was that you couldn't divorce intellectual growth from



to 10 kids. The curriculum was based on the Core idea, with the defining subject changing yearly – the Greeks, then Native American culture, then medievalism, then the Arabs, then discovery and trade, then industrialism. On Mondays, Dick or another teacher presented the older students with a lecture-story on that year's subject. Those of us who gave



because we placed academics in context, rather than allowing this part of a child's school experience to dominate. Most people—including the participants — agreed that kids here were, with a few exceptions, interested in being on the farm and alive to the possibilities it offered. I remember my amazement when I first talked to survivors of other high schools, and discovered how it had been for them. I had never liked *all* parts of my academic experience equally, but it had never occurred to me that being in school could be boring.

Wednesday, at mid-week, was music day. All morning kids gave and received lessons in recorder, guitar, piano, and violin. Every corner of our venerable Main House echoed. It was not literally

Core lectures tried to make our expositions visual and dramatic. It took only a few days at East Hill for a teacher to realize that kids respond to people, not discrete 'facts.'

For the rest of the week, the individual groups explored material presented in the story-lecture session, and followed students' interests. The idea was that looking intently at the Native Americans, for example, opened a door through which you gained access to a wide range of subjects: sacred ritual, hunting practices, building techniques, modes of travel, botany and the natural sciences, art, warfare, the dynamics of language, intercultural experience, mythology. Often, there were almost too many



true, as we often said, that everyone on the farm played an instrument. No one was coerced, and a few kids opted to work in the shop or at outside jobs on music day. But better than two thirds of the group usually played. The noon meal divided indoor activities from the wider, freer scope of the farm outside. Following reading aloud and a wild half-hour of active and (mostly) non-aggressive games, the afternoon was devoted to outdoor work – weeding in the garden, fencing, cutting wood, carpentry – and wood working, hiking, and art. Older kids led crews. The general theme was stewardship: the work of caring for the land, preparing for winter, or getting ready for the next farm festival. Balance was



successful afternoon, you began setting it up in the morning, finding crew leaders, checking materials. You talked to people before you asked a favor of them, you got a sense of the mood before you took command. You were consistent. In other words, you learned that respect is earned, and you learned to honor the possibilities and limitations of power.

If this was empty ceremony, it didn't feel like it at the time.

Over the years we observed a number of festivals and occasions, and by the late 80s had settled on five major celebrations: Halloween, Advent, Christmas, Passover, and May Day. Each one had its own rhythm, a mixture of tradition and innovation. The common

crucial. As on most farms, there was always more labor to be done than there were qualified workers, but for many eight-year-olds, finding the best climbing tree is work. Equally important, eight-year-olds need sixteen-year-olds to guide them – and vice versa. In the end we had to hold all work against a common standard: did it advance a positive farm tone, and was it creative?

From the beginning, each person over 14 took her or his turn being In Charge.

This was a student's most hotly anticipated (and dreaded) responsibility. Visitors who suggested it was ceremonial – "Dick runs the farm, after all" – missed the point. Kids were responsible initially to Dick for every aspect of the day. As they grew in the job they responded to challenges implicit within any group or community, challenges no teacher could or should manufacture.

Everyone had to be awakened thoughtfully, to get the day off to a good start. If you wanted a decent meal, you couldn't have two rivals on the breakfast crew. The guitar player for morning singing had to be right for the day – a strong leader for visitors, otherwise perhaps a novice and her teacher. If you wanted a



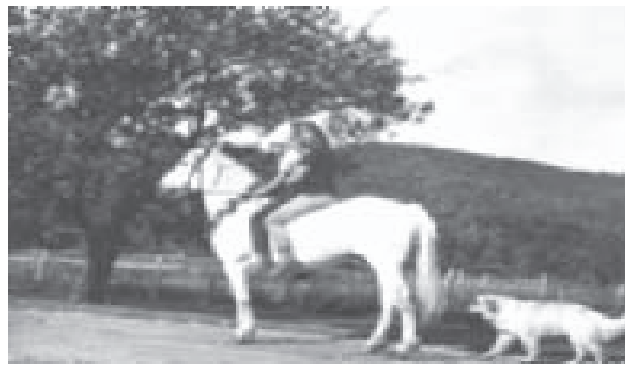
thread was an attempt to give a part in the celebration to each person on the farm. A good festival has room for actors, cooks, carpenters, musicians, and spectators. As a group which varied widely in age and ability, religion and temperament, we were each obliged to take seriously the task of making traditional festivals our own. When an East Hill celebration worked, we saw a critical element of folk culture in action: a feast day allows a participant to play a part, and a part can work its way into your blood. The jester mugs for the



crowd, and discovers his own humor and frivolity... the King Of The Day revels in his power, and is shown its responsibilities... Lady Marion speaks her lines from the text of the play and suddenly it is not a play, but a moment full of vitality and consequence.

In many ways, our attempts to make a festival work reflected East Hill's core: everyone had to be *engaged* for the enterprise to sustain belief, and adults could claim little credit for the most significant personal transformations.

The farm closed as a school in 1989 during a bad period in my father's last illness. Since then, we have had time to think about thirty-five difficult and exhilarating years. What did East Hill accomplish? It's hard to say. The things the farm stood for can't be measured in test scores and surveys of conventional achievement. On the other hand, people who spent time here can speak about things which matter to them now: success in relationships, fulfillment in work, clarity. They alone can say whether East Hill proved helpful in these areas. As I think about what we were and what we still are, it is clear that the farm offers room to breathe, and time. Visitors used to ask



Our special thanks to
Laura Bliss
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Real Schools - In Their
Own Words, edited by
Mary Leue, available from
www.EducationRevolution.org*



if we minded being cut off from the "real world"—as if there is such a thing, and as if you can be cut off from it! The farm was, and is, a microcosm; with all the challenges of the society beyond its borders, it brings reality close, and helps focus our lives.

What's ahead? More than ever, we need to engage children in bringing their own society into being. It hardly needs to be said that vital kids reflect our hope for a better world, and are the means of its achievement.

As for my brother, Andy can work the farm from the milking barn to the hay field, and on vacation he explores Long Island's Hallock's Bay in a 12-foot outboard skiff.

He calls her "Victory," a name which says it all.

Alternative Education Comes to Turkey

by Ron Miller

Turkey is a nation where schooling is highly centralized and serves the interests of the state. The revered founder of modern Turkey in the 1920s, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, proclaimed that education should promote modern, secular, “scientific” ideas including an ideal of national citizenship. Consequently, the educational system has not been especially open to alternative approaches.

Today Turkey is at a historical and cultural crossroads. Seeking membership in the European Union, the country is exploring what it means to go beyond twentieth century nationalism. Urban young people, in particular, are exploring sometimes radical ideas from Europe and North America. A “green” movement (ecology/sustainability) is growing, and there is a surge of interest in new ideas about education.

On November 26 & 27, 2005, more than 300 educators, university scholars, parent activists and a few government officials attended the First International Alternative Education Symposium, held on the grounds of Topkapi Palace (the citadel of the great Ottoman Empire) in Istanbul. The conference was organized by three lively young women, all graduate students in education – Eylem Korkmaz, Selma Cakmakli, and Burcak G.Morhayim – who were frustrated with the slow pace of educational change and hoped to jump-start an alternative education movement in Turkey. Judging by the enthusiasm generated at the conference, they may well have succeeded.

The organizers invited several Turkish scholars as well as speakers from outside the country to share their experiences and ideas. Yaacov Hecht came from Israel, Matt Hern from Canada, Cheryl Ferreira and Jason Preater from the U.K., and Jill Wolcott and myself from the U.S. Among us, we represented diverse educational approaches, including democratic schools (Yaacov), deschooling (Matt), Montessori (Cheryl), Waldorf (Jill), and the Summerhill model (Jason). I gave a

philosophical and historical overview of alternative education. We were treated like celebrities by Eylem, Selma, Burcak and their friends, taken out for meals and given a tour of the amazing city of Istanbul.

The symposium felt like a historic event—a potential turning point for Turkish education. Many people came up to us after our talks to describe projects they hoped to start and asking for advice and contacts. A closing session involved about 40 key people in brainstorming next steps, and it appears that an ongoing committee has formed to plan future events and publications.

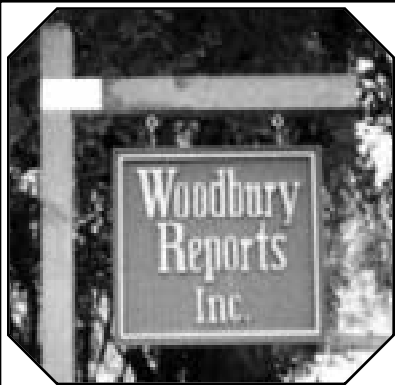
It is important to recognize that Turkey, although it is officially secular and has ties to Europe, is a Muslim culture. In addition to visiting beautiful mosques and seeing exquisitely written copies of the Quran dating back to the ninth century, we met with a number of people who are seeking to cultivate a deeper sense of spirituality in education – what we in north Atlantic culture call holistic education – influenced by the teachings of Islam. I was invited to speak at an organization called the Center for Values Education by Seyma Arslan, a young woman working on her doctoral

dissertation about educating according to the Islamic image of human nature. (It’s fascinating, and I’ve been encouraging her to publish something in the U.S.) I expected a small discussion group of 20 or 30 people, but was escorted into a lecture hall where another 300 people had come to hear about holistic education!

As Yaacov pointed out in one discussion, there is an international movement for democratic education—and a more democratic and sustainable civilization in general—that will grow stronger the more closely it builds connections across national and cultural borders. The ideals of democratic, progressive and holistic education are universal human ideals. They will have a different flavor, and express themselves differently, from one culture to another – a Turkish Waldorf school should do things differently from one in England or Germany, and an Islamic holistic education is not identical to a Quaker education in New Jersey or a Krishnamurti-inspired education in India. Still, it is exhilarating to go deeper than our surface differences and work together to promote more human values throughout the global village.



Jill, Matt, Jason and Yaacov at the entrance to Topkapi Palace



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THE VALUE OF THE THINGS THEY LEARN

By Martin Roberts

Have you ever asked yourself what is the purpose of education? Or had a conversation with your son or daughter, whom you bundle off to school each morning as part of your daily routine, about the value of the things they learn and the ways in which they learn them?

Three years ago I decided to become a teacher – a teacher of English, to be precise. To date I have spent a year training in South Wales, a year teaching in a State Comprehensive High School on the Isle of Wight, and a year teaching at a small democratic school in Devon called Sands School. Over this period I have been constantly asking myself these questions, but it is only in the last few weeks that I have felt I that am beginning to approach anything like a satisfactory answer.

Why am I a teacher? After leaving University I had a variety of jobs, ranging from shop assistant to recruitment consultant, but ultimately all of them left me dissatisfied. I wanted to inspire and be inspired, to stimulate and be stimulated. It sounds like something of a cliché, but I wanted a job where I could feel I was making a difference. I had been inspired as a youth by several teachers: maybe I could inspire others. So I enrolled on a PGCE course, jumped through a series of government-imposed hoops for a year, and finally took up my first position at the afore-mentioned Isle of Wight High School.

It is difficult to relate my experiences of my first teaching position without sounding negative to the point of utter dissent. I did not enjoy it. But I will try, for the purpose of this article, to remain

as objective as possible. After all, the reason it was such a difficult time for me, was that the whole regime simply did not suit my personality. And herein lies the crux of the issue.

The traditional school system, as I see it, works on the principle of uniformity. It assumes that what is good for one is good for all. As a consequence of this assumption, the financial constraints and the sheer number of people involved, it has to offer a 'best fit' scenario.

In order to work effectively it is necessary to have rules covering every aspect of school life; all students must adhere to them or face unpleasant consequences.

It is also necessary to construct a hierarchy, to assume that there is an inherent inequality between people, and to set up opposition between staff and students, and even between staff members of different levels of experience and expertise.

All of this is necessary to keep the machine in good order. That is what the state school system is - a machine. Head teachers own the machines and have overall responsibility for their output; teachers are the labourers; administrators are the maintenance crew; pupils are the commodities produced; GCSEs and A-levels are the packaging which demonstrates the relative worth of the product and gives it a market value. Without this packaging the commodity cannot be sold.

Despite my cynical rhetoric, I do not want it thought that I oppose the conventional system and everything that it stands for. I understand that it is a very effective system for many people – that many people need a structure in their lives that tells them exactly where they should be and what they should be doing at all times – and that it prepares young people very well for certain aspects of life outside education. The main problem I have with it is that it works on the assumption that everybody's needs develop at more or less the same age and in more or less the same way. It is a system which denies individuality, and which denies the fact that people develop at different rates and in different ways. Why does our society assume that unless people pass at least five GCSEs

when they reach age sixteen, they are not yet ready for the 'real world', or are somehow inferior to the moral majority? A friend of mine left school at sixteen with two GCSEs, feeling like a failure. Last year, aged twenty-nine, he passed his law degree with second class honours and is now working in the legal department of a highly reputable investment bank. He is one of the lucky ones.

At Sands School we do things quite differently. Firstly, we are a democratic school. That is to say that we have no head teacher, staff members have exactly the same rights as the students, and all decisions concerning life in the school are made by democratic process at the weekly school meetings. Issues are raised, and solutions sought by staff and students alike.

Secondly, we encourage our students to learn at their own pace. We do currently have a formal timetable, and we do teach to GCSE. Both of these structures are in place because the students and their parents want them (they too believe the myth!). The difference is that we do not coerce students into class; they come because they want to, or because they are ready to learn. We have no bells telling us where to be at any given time, and we have no punishments for people who are not attending class.

The third principal difference at Sands is that the emphasis is not on academic achievement, but on the happiness of the individual. That is not to say that we don't value academic success – it is possible to study for



eleven GCSEs, though most of our students aim for six to eight – it is more a belief that it is not until young people are happy and emotionally comfortable within themselves, that they are ready to pursue self-actualisation. Many of our students (by no means the majority) come to us already damaged by their experiences in mainstream schools. They may have been bullied because they didn't fit in with society's perceived norms (either academic or social); they may have been asked to leave because of their inability to abide by the imposed rules and structures, or their refusal to do so; they may simply have been ignored or lost within the system, consequently suffering a detrimental effect on their already fragile self-confidence. In the space of just one year as a teacher at Sands I have witnessed several students enter the school extremely shy, insecure, neurotic, with a distinct lack of their own sense of worth.

Within weeks they have transformed themselves into happy, confident, sociable young people. Their individuality is embraced, rather than ridiculed. They have little to rebel against, and so begin to take responsibility for their own development. Because we are a small school (about 65 students currently on roll), we are able to offer the individual attention that many young people need.

I am not saying that Sands School is a panacea for all of society's ills. I am not even saying that we are the solution for everybody – there are some students who do not thrive in our non-coercive environment, who need authority to guide them. The point is that we offer an alternative.

Sands School is one of a very small, but growing network of democratic schools around the world. We have to charge fees because the government continues to insist that there is only one

right way: their way. The majority of our society accepts this because we are all products of the same machine, but surely education is primarily for the benefit of the individual. Its purpose is to empower us, to give us the tools we need to be able to improve our lives. There must be far greater benefits to society from happy, constructive individuals than there would be from mass-produced conformists, or, indeed, from mass-produced rebels. We must take control of our future and the future of our children. We need an alternative.

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Sands School in Devon

Books etc.

by Aleksandra Majstorac Kobiljski

The Learning Coach Approach by Linda Dobson Linda Dobson is a well known author of books related to homeschooling. This time, she has written a book that can be of great help to every parent. It is an invitation to take an active part in the education of one's child, regardless of where that education takes place. She emphasizes the importance of nurturing curiosity and she helps you understand how that may happen.

Dobson makes a splendid and yet simple case for what it means to coach and teach ones child outside of the school or curriculum. She goes into great detail explaining techniques parents can use to create a stimulating learning environment. At the end of each section there are reading list recommendations for both children and adults for the topic that is under scrutiny – from family nutrition to puzzles and brainteaser sources.

It is much more than a book on what the rest of us can learn about homeschooling. It is a practical guide for parents who are not sure they can make it. This book can help you realize that you can make it.

Lessons for Tomorrow: Bringing America's Schools Back from the Brink by Edward L. Davis If you are looking for a book that goes beyond criticism and towards constructive designs for the future of education, this is a great book. It re-

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energizes the field of advocacy for a learner-centered approach by looking at the history (and future) of educational systems in relation to learning and human wellbeing. American schools are an example of what happens when homogenized education leads to intellectual poverty. Davis believes that “we are failing to educate because we fail to bring out what is within.” Schools are not only boring but they fundamentally don’t work anymore.

Particularly interesting is chapter 12, which outlines a number of conversations we need to have with children, educators and one another. It is a strong and grounded look at what is at stake in the movement for radical reform of education. How does one get from factory-model education to a learner centered approach? What is to be taught and learned and by whom? This book is a step towards re-thinking education. Those who like the book and can go to www.lessonsofthetomorrow.com and share their views with the author.

Saving Our Schools: The Case for Public Education Saying No to “No Child Left Behind” edited by K. Goodman, P. Shannon, Y. Goodman and R. Rapoport Much ink has been used both defending and criticizing the NCLB act. The book is a collection of essays and articles which look at the Act from different perspectives – both local and national.

But the variety of voices does not mean a dispassionate agenda. If you are looking for a detached analysis of the educational policy in the United States at the turn of the century, you will not find it here. This book, as its subtitle indicates, is about making a case against the NCLB. But it does so in a variety of different ways which offer a toolkit for building a personal and well substantiated case against the bill. It included both reputable reports on the first year of the implementation of the bill as well as first hand accounts from teachers.

There is one more remarkable thing about this book, its monumental value as a history of the movement for the educational alternatives. It documents widespread discontent with our educational system that has only been aggravated and galvanized by the NCLB act but was not created by it. It is a great read for all those who worry about long term consequences of the bill on American schools and society.

DEAR AERO

Hi Jerry,
this is our quick story how AERO has helped us.
We were unhappy with public schools, talked about it during a visit to Germany where my cousin told me about Summerhill and democratic education. Back here (USA) I sat on the computer searching and came across your website. It was great because it lists schools by state. I checked one out in Oregon, didn't like it, checked out the Circle School, loved it and moved from Michigan to PA just this past May. We all love it!
Thanks
Sonja Stroukoff

DISCOVER THE ADVANTAGES OF MEMBERSHIP:
www.EducationRevolution.org

Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students by Kathleen Cushman Those in the alternative and democratic education movement have known for a long time what this book is telling. School is not the best place for education. What is interesting is that despite these statements written explicitly by high school students the book is dedicated to improving schools, by making learning more interesting. Indeed it is a valuable source for strategies to make something better out of a failing system. For those who have given up on the traditional concept of school, the book has little news. But it does show that alternative ideas are entering the mainstream.

Counseling in Schools by H.L. Kaila This is a book that calls for serious attention to be given to the institution of school counseling. The book outlines major challenges that counselors face in their work and in that section the rich experience of the author gives an added strength to the narrative. In this regard the book offers a valuable set of practical advice and guidelines for school counselors. Stress and anxiety of both children and parents is often at the crux of the school environment and school counselors are often called on to help parents as well as children. This brings them into the center of the complex web of human relations that center on school as an institution but are influenced by myriad other institutions of the society. The book is attempting to create a niche for counseling in schools as a way to improve the experience of both adults and children in them.

The Kid's book of Awesome Stuff by Charlene Brotman, illustrated by Jeila Gueramian This book is indeed an awesome and not pretentious activity book. It is splendidly illustrated. While it is oriented towards nature and outdoor activities, the book is a four-season thrill with a balanced mix of activities for all times of day and year. In all honesty, while your children will find it fun, parents will be having a hilarious time rethinking poop, and learning about Rachel Carson and how to make the Milky Way Galaxy using a box of salt. It is a great book for homeschoolers and kids with a break or two on a horizon. For those in free-school, the book is highly recommended as a textbook. We can only hope that Brotman will keep them coming.

Going to School in India by Lisa Heydlauf It is all about experiencing diversity. This book, from Global Fund for Children, is about various ways children in India experience going to school, which involves walking, taking a rickshaw, or riding a school bus. Children walk across bamboo bridges, navigate noisy city streets teeming with traffic, or trek through deserts. One would ask why they go? This book conveys the strength of the belief in education that stimulates these kids to travel long and interesting paths to their classroom. You will meet and hear inspiring stories that will make you want to go to school – in India. It seems that the trip to the place of learning can be a learning path in itself. But it is also a book of how children, who fight for their educational opportunities as hard and as self-consciously as these kids do, take control over their education as well. It is, as all good kid's books are, a learning challenge for adults as well.

Check out the AERO bookstore!
www.educationrevolution.org

The Alternative Education Resource Organization's 3rd Annual
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This Year's Theme: Educational Alternatives

**"Finding Our Commonalities
& Celebrating Our Differences"**



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- *** New School Starters Workshop
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- *** Educational Alternatives Panel Discussion (experts from 15 different alternatives!)
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Keynote Speakers:

*** **John Taylor Gatto**

Former New York State Teacher of the Year & Celebrated Author of *The Underground History of American Education* & *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*

*** **Mimsy Sadofsky**

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*** **Ron Miller**

Author & Editor, *Creating Learning Communities*, *Caring for New Life*, *Paths of Learning Magazine*

*** **Susan Ohanian**

George Orwell Award Winner, Author of 25. Articles have appeared in *The Nation* & *USA Today*

*** **Jerry Mintz**

Director of the Alternative Education Resource Organization, Author & Alternative Education Expert

*** **Tim Seldin**

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John Taylor Gatto



Mimsy Sadofsky

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