

The Magazine of Alternative Education

Education Revolution

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100 Years of Montessori Education!

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Education Revolution

The Magazine of Alternative Education

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Alternative Education Resource Organization (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 *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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417 Roslyn Road, Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2620

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

Fax: 516-625-3257

Email: info@educationrevolution.org

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

Executive Director: Jerry Mintz

ER Editor: Ron Miller

Education in the News Editors:

Carol Morley and Ron Miller

Printer: Brenneman Printing Inc., Lancaster, PA

AERO Advisory Board

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

From the Editor's Desk

By Ron Miller



Ron Miller

Education Revolution is a tool for connecting the efforts of parents, educators, activists and young people from diverse networks, movements, and perspectives on learning alternatives. This is an elusive goal, but at this moment of history it is a critical one.

For about the last thirty years, small and widely scattered groups of idealistic people have seen that the technocratic system of schooling discourages genuine learning and promotes a culture of wanton competition and consumerism, and so they have opted out of the system to start independent schools and community learning centers, or to educate their own children. Being widely scattered, they have had little impact on the culture as a whole, and they often struggle for resources. The system has become more totalitarian (e.g. No Child Left Untested) and young people are becoming more desperate. We need to unite into a massive movement for educational freedom.

It will be my mission as the new editor to point out areas of common ground between the diverse communities of education activists, and to encourage readers to explore these places.

In this issue, for example, I invite readers who until now have had little or no interest in Montessori education to recognize the extraordinary contribution Maria Montessori made to the theory and practice of child-centered learning. You don't need to endorse the specific model practiced in these schools to consider yourself an ally of the worldwide Montessori movement and to see how closely its larger agenda mirrors your own.

Similarly, in her essay Tanya Kinigstein asks readers who have pretty much rejected the institution of public schooling to recognize that there are dedicated progressive educators within the system who work for the same democratic values that motivate many of us outside the system. I entirely agree with her statement that "important alliances are waiting to be built." Given that only 2.4 percent of American children are enrolled in nonreligious independent schools (according to the first item in our Education in the News feature), and only another tiny percentage are unschooling, if we are truly working for educational democracy, then we absolutely must reach out to the activists—and young people—who toil within the system, for that is where the vast majority of the population is currently being educated.

In the previous issue (my first as editor), I invited readers to submit news items from their groups for a new section to be called "Networking the Networks." I even sent out some emails to key people in some organizations. So far, I've not heard much feedback, except that this is a good idea. Hey, it won't work unless YOU appoint yourself a correspondent for *Education Revolution* and start sending me updates about important events. Press coverage, political breakthroughs (or defeats), public recognition of a particular school or person—let's share these events from our individual networks with the larger circle of education activists.

We have a movement to build. It's up to us.

Contact Ron Miller at holistic@gmavt.net. Also visit his newly redesigned website, www.PathsOfLearning.net, featuring his writings and a new blog called *Education Alternatives*.

4th Annual AERO Conference

June 28th - July 1st

Russell Sage College

Troy, NY, U.S.A.

www.AEROConference.com

Being There

with Jerry Mintz

Five Unique New York Schools Covene in Albany



Albany and Brooklyn Staff Members Wrestle During this Student Initiated Activity

First the first time ever, five democratic schools in New York State had a gathering of its staff, students, and parents on December 8-9. They met at The Free School (Albany) and the new Harriet Tubman Free School, the new high school branch of The Free School. Also participating were Longview School and Homeschooling Center, from Westchester County, Hudson Valley Sudbury School, from near Kingston, and Brooklyn Free School. Over a hundred students from age 3 to 18 along with many staff members and parents participated.

There were group meals at the The Free School, a general introductory meeting at Harriet Tubman Free School, and a variety of elective activities, including bowling, gymnastics, wrestling, capture the flag, an open mic show in the evening, and "Apples to Apples," a card game to get to know people better.

Some of the students and staff members felt that the meeting was a revelation, as they often feel they are

alone and pioneering in their communities. It was very empowering for them to see five schools which all had a similar democratic approach.

There is now a special listserve online for the schools. Isaac Graves, a Harriet Tubman and AERO staff member along with Lily Mercogliano, a Brooklyn Free School staff member, were volunteer coordinators of the event, but everyone pitched in.

Alan Berger of Brooklyn Free school said the group hoped to continue meeting twice a year with schools taking turns as hosts.

Upon the return home to Brooklyn, Berger said, "I want to give everyone a personal thanks for your help, assistance, work and effort in planning and pulling off the event we held in Albany over the weekend. We are in the process of building something that I hope will grow and have staying power for many years to come and will benefit Brooklyn Free School, the other democratic schools in the state, and eventually other schools nearby and that are on the drawing boards. But we also hope to have an impact on the greater educational climate and debate and this association, along with others like the Alternative Education Resource Organization, the International Democratic Education Conference, and the newly formed Northeast Association of Independent Democratic Schools, are moving in that direction by growing, expanding their influence, and becoming better organized."

Related Links:

<http://www.brooklynfreeschool.org> (Brooklyn Free School)

<http://www.tubmanfreeschool.org> (Harriet Tubman Free School)

<http://www.hudsonvalleyschool.org> (Hudson Valley Sudbury School)

<http://www.longviewschool.org> (Longview School and Homeschooling Center)

<http://www.albanyfreeschool.com> (The Free School)



Two Young Students Enjoy Playing with Blocks at The Free School



Two High School Students Learn How to Screen Print at Harriet Tubman

Over One Hundred Attend the Community Dinner at The Free School During the Democratic Schools Gathering



One Hundred Years of

by Ron Miller



Photos (above, cover, facing page) courtesy of the American Montessori Society collection in the Archives & Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries.

On January 6, 1907, Dr. Maria Montessori opened the *casa dei bambini* (children's home) in a housing project in a poor neighborhood of Rome. It was a humble beginning to a global educational revolution that is still unfolding.

Montessori, the first woman to receive a medical degree in Italy, had for the previous ten years worked with "defective" (retarded or emotionally disturbed) children. Through her clinical experience and extensive studies of psychology, pedagogy, and physical anthropology, she had been developing a theory of child development that emphasized the free exercise of cognitive and motor abilities as these naturally and sequentially emerge. In this new project, she had a chance to demonstrate her theory at work with a group of impoverished but developmentally normal children.

The results were so impressive that people began talking about how children were "transformed" in this learning environment. Visitors came from many places, and Montessori launched a forty-five year career of writing, training teachers, and lecturing around the world. Thousands of "Montessori schools" have been established, the majority for young children, but also many that adopt

her model of "cosmic education" at the elementary and middle school levels.

Montessori's ideas have influenced educators and early childhood practices far beyond the schools that bear her name. Quite simply, she was one of the first and most influential theorists to proclaim that educators should observe and follow the natural patterns of human development rather than impose society's dogmas and prejudices. She was a spiritually-charged visionary who believed that by enabling young people to form themselves by acting freely and purposefully within a nurturing environment, humanity would be transformed and the ideals of peace and justice could be achieved.

Like all movements, Montessori education has attracted a diversity of followers and found expression in different, even contradictory forms. Religious sects, from Catholics to Sikhs to Bahai's, have adopted Montessori's principles in their schools. Yet the militant atheist Ayn Rand endorsed Montessori education as the most rational approach available. Progressive idealists teach radical ecological consciousness and global citizenship through the Montessori method, yet many professional middle class families

Montessori Education

admire the calmness, orderliness and manners cultivated in Montessori classrooms. The approach is seen as too restrictive and adult-managed by unschoolers and “democratic” educators, but in contrast to mainstream schooling Montessori education is decidedly child-centered, and its advocates have opposed standardization, testing, and authoritarian control.

I take these paradoxes as a sign that Dr. Montessori tapped into authentic and deep truths about human development and learning, for as some wise person said, the opposite of a profound truth is not falsehood but another profound truth. My own career in education began with Montessori training and working for two years in Montessori schools, and while I grew restless with the specifics of the method and the true believers who considered it the only valid approach, I have always respected Montessori’s original vision, which I consider to be one clear and powerful expression of the emerging *holistic* or *integral* worldview that is transforming our culture. *

So, on the centenary of Maria Montessori’s great educational experiment, I hope alternative educators of all stripes will join me in saluting our ancestor, a bold pioneer who challenged the educational orthodoxy of the modern age and declared that the child, the unfolding human being, must be at the very center of our efforts. May Montessori’s vision inspire millions more educators in the next century and beyond.

* I have written about Montessori in several essays, particularly “Nourishing the Spiritual Embryo” (a chapter in the collection *Nurturing Our Wholeness: Perspectives on Spirituality in Education*, edited by J. Miller and Y. Nakagawa) and “Education and the Evolution of the Cosmos,” published in my book *Caring for New Life: Essays on Holistic Education*. See <http://www.PathsOfLearning.net>.

Commemorating the Centenary

Montessorians around the world are holding special events to celebrate this anniversary. Here is information about some of the major events.

The **Association Montessori Internationale** (AMI) will hold a conference in San Francisco on February 16 – 19 and has posted a great deal of information on its website. See <http://www.montessoricentenary.org>.

AMI declares that the focus of the Montessori Centenary is a **call to action** – a call to reinvigorate the Montessori Movement, restoring it to its original dimensions, that of a social movement intended to **Champion the Cause of all Children**, in all strata of society, of all races and ethnic backgrounds, within and beyond the educational institutions.

The aim of the Centenary year will be to continue to fulfill Montessori’s core mission: To place all the children in our world at the centre of society and to assist them in becoming the transforming elements leading to a harmonious and peaceful humanity.

The American Montessori Society will celebrate 100 years of Montessori education with a conference in New York City, March 1 – 4. They are calling this “the largest gathering of Montessorians ever to assemble at one time.”

This is a major opportunity to convene the Montessori education community to reflect on our common history, to celebrate our achievements with children and youth, and to plan for the future. The conference will bring together individuals from around the country and around the world to celebrate Montessori education, an approach that is as innovative and inspirational today, as it was in 1907. See <http://www.amshq.org/nyc/index.php>.

And finally, **Teacher Magazine** online (see link below) recently reported that children at a Milwaukee public school using the Montessori approach “had demonstrably superior social skills and performed as well as or better than their public-, private-, and charter-school peers on a standardized reading and math test.” The study that led to this conclusion was one of the most comprehensive long term studies ever conducted, and is especially significant because the children at the school represented a typical cross-section of urban youths. The complete study report, from the journal **Science**, can be found at:

<http://www.montessori.it/home/pdf/scienceinglese.pdf>.
Teacher Magazine: <http://www.teachermagazine.org>



How to Start Your Own Alternatives

A New Course from AERO

by Jerry Mintz

One of AERO's most important activities is to help people who want to start new educational alternatives. There is no way to know how many new alternative schools AERO has inspired or helped to start. We do know that at any given time we have about 35 members of our AEROstartup listserve.

At last June's AERO conference, AERO Advisory Board member Tim Seldin of the Montessori Foundation suggested that we design an online course. AERO staff member Aleksandra Majstorac Kobiljski then began to organize one for people who want to start new democratic or alternative programs or schools. We announced it on our listserves and e newsletter. Eventually 22 people from the United States and three other countries signed up to take the ten week course. It started September 18th and was completed November 27th.

For course materials we posted PDF selections from a variety of sources, some of them very rare, such as Homer Lane's "Talks to Parents and Teachers." (Lane was the founder of the democratically run Little Commonwealth, a reformatory in England during the early 20th century, and was an inspiration to Summerhill's A.S. Neill.) We also posted phone interviews with many experts in the field and streaming video of many alternative schools and homeschool resource centers. We had four live chat sessions. There were also webcam talks and messages to participants.

The highly interactive course addressed participants' individual situations, and course members posted their ideas and some of their papers on the discussion groups for all to see and give feedback. We had lessons on vision, community organizing, legal questions, fundraising, facilities, democratic process, among others. Some schools are already started, such as Wellspring in New Jersey. Others will start next year, and some are still years away. But from the feedback we have been receiving it seems like the participants got the help and support they were looking for to move forward on their dreams.

People interested in taking future school starter courses or getting access to the materials in the course just completed should contact the AERO office at 800 769-4171. Also, there will be another school starter workshop at the next AERO conference, June 28-July 1st.

Here are some of the evaluations of the course:

"What an amazing, diverse group of people! I told my husband last night that I feel that I've found my tribe, in a way. It's really

the first time in my life that I've been surrounded by people who are thinking about all of the things that I am, who are concerned about the same things that I am, who are passionate about the same things that I am, who are dedicated to putting their thoughts into action like I am. It is truly wonderful!" -Mary

"This class has helped me spell out my ideas and put them out there in a safe place that is supportive and helps me see what potential they have. This class has also inspired me to discuss my vision more with others (in person) and let people know not only what I feel is necessary in education, but WHY I feel it is so necessary. I have developed more confidence in articulating my vision and by doing so, have gotten lots of valuable feedback and support in surprising areas. It is quite an exciting time for me seeing all of the ideas I have been playing around with in my head for so long finally come out and take shape into something that seems a little more realistically feasible each day!" -Katie

"I do feel the course has assisted in getting closer to my goal of opening my school. I have learned a great deal from the topics and the questions/comments posted by the collective group. I have a new sense of confidence and peace about this process. I do not see it as such a big thing now. I am already open for school everyday for my children and now I am just including some others with a little different twist." -Marianne

*"This course has been spectacular-- it really has opened many doors for me and made a *major* step in the right direction for me opening my school-- both in what it has taught as well as in the people I have met." -Alex*

"This course has been immensely helpful. Among other things, I've discovered that there is a considerable body of literature on the subject of alternative education, but the literature is NOT readily available. You won't encounter it as required reading in teacher preparation courses. You won't find it in most public libraries. One thing I could do, I suppose, and it would be tax-deductible, would be to purchase the available materials from The Education Revolution website and DONATE them to the library." -Robert

Editor's Note: What a great idea! If AERO supporters would purchase books and donate them to your local libraries, we could spread the vision of educational alternatives to a much wider audience. You could send a press release to your local newspapers to announce the donation.

What is Cedarwood Sudbury School?

By Steven Chao

Cedarwood Sudbury School, in Santa Clara, California, is one of more than 35 Sudbury schools worldwide based on the original Sudbury school founded in Framingham Massachusetts in 1968. Cedarwood opened its doors in 1995.

Students at Cedarwood are not made to follow a set curriculum. Each student sets their own, thus each student's experience will be different. Some students might spend a lot of time socializing while others, writing stories or doing science experiments. Classes only happen upon request so classes are therefore composed of students who want to be there, ensuring that they will not only learn the subject but also retain the knowledge.

Tests and homework are never given unless the students ask for them or they are a requirement of the class. More often, students will continue to study the subject independently after a class has finished. Some students never take a single class but do all their learning independently.

Students are not segregated by age. Students ranging from ages five to nineteen can be found talking, eating lunch together, or playing a game of baseball together. Part of the experience that all students share at Cedarwood is learning how to communicate with others, how to get along with others, and respect each other. Could there be a nicer sight than a six year old playing chess with a seventeen year old?

Cedarwood does not censor books, and along with having thousands of books in our library, also have science equipment, art supplies, sports equipment, and many other resources available for students. There is no restriction to the amount of time students spend on activities such as playing computer games or reading.

Cedarwood is democratically run which means that there is no single person in an authority position. In the weekly School Meetings students learn to make motions, amend motions, address the Chair, and listen to all sides of a discussion before voting. They participate in hiring and firing staff, (teachers) and writing any new rules the school

requires and deleting others when necessary.

Adults are not responsible for enforcing the schools rules. Students hear allegations of violations of any school rules at the weekly judicial meetings and after hearing from the complainant, defendant, witnesses, and seeing any evidence, decide if the defendant is guilty or not. Sentences given to the defendants are not met as consequences but a reminder for the person to not break the rules.

Because Cedarwood provides a supportive environment and are run democratically, students do not feel a need to rebel against the school. They know that their opinions matter. However, as we are a democracy it means that the majority rules. Therefore, a student can make a motion about something but not everyone might go along with it.

People have asked us if and how students at our school graduate when we have no grades, tests, or other forms of evaluation. Students are not handed diplomas though. They must write a thesis explaining how they have prepared themselves to be effective adults in the larger community and defend it in front of other students, staff, and parents. Some students choose not to go through this process.

Students (11 and 14) at Cedarwood Sudbury School Working and Learning Together



Education In the News

Edited by Carol Morley & Ron Miller

Trends in the Use of School Choice: 1993 to 2003. The National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education) recently released a report showing an increase in school choice opportunities. The report says that the percentage of students enrolled in their assigned public school decreased from 80 percent to 74 percent between 1993 and 2003, while this decrease was nearly offset by an increase in chosen public school enrollment from 11 to 15 percent between 1993 and 2003.

During this same time period, enrollment in church-related private schools remained stable at 8 percent and enrollment in non church-related private schools increased from 1.6 to 2.4 percent. This report also presents data on parental perceptions of public school choice availability and associations between the public and private school types children were enrolled in and parental satisfaction with and involvement in the schools.

About one-half of all students have parents who reported that public school choice was available in their community, with one-quarter of students attending assigned public schools having parents who considered enrolling them in a school other than the one they were currently attending, while 17 percent of all students and 27 percent of Black students attended a school other than their parent's first-choice school. Parents of students in private schools reported more direct involvement in their children's schools than parents of students enrolled in other types of schools. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007045>

Polls: Public Rejects NCLB Test and Punish Approach: Recent national and state surveys indicate that the public now believes there is too much emphasis on high-stakes testing, particularly as mandated by the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. "The public rejects the punitive approach found in NCLB, favors a broad curriculum, prefers more appropriate measures of school performance than a single high-stakes test," concluded William Bushaw, co-director of the Phi Delta Kappa annual national education survey. A statewide Texas poll found that 56% of respondents believe there is too much focus on testing, while an Ohio survey reported that 57% of those polled believe tests are not accurate indicators of students' progress and 55% think there is too much emphasis on testing. Similarly, a Florida study found that 59% oppose continuing to use the state FCAT test to "grade public schools, give financial rewards to the best performing schools and determine if students get promoted or graduate," with 78% of African Americans holding that position. <http://www.fairtest.org>

NCLB'S School Evaluation System is a Flawed Reform Tool,

Report Concludes, EdNews.org: Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the school evaluation system central to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, is fundamentally flawed and should be suspended until the premises underlying it can be confirmed or refuted by solid, scientific research, according to University of Vermont Professor William J. Mathis. NCLB mandates that schools make Adequate Yearly Progress on state standardized tests en route to having all children reach proficiency standards by 2014.

Mathis' policy brief, "The Accuracy and Effectiveness of Adequate Yearly Progress, NCLB's School Evaluation System," released by the Education Policy Research Unit at Arizona State University, examines the controversies surrounding the implementation of AYP and the proposals to improve it. "Although [U.S. Department of Education] Secretary [Margaret] Spellings has claimed the law is 99.9 percent pure, the scientific evidence tells another story," Mathis said. "Modest experiments with growth models, minimum group sizes, graduation rates and discussion of national standards simply distract from rather than solve the inherent shortcomings of the AYP system. In fact, many of these changes may make the system perform even less accurately."

Mathis concludes that: NCLB's 100-percent proficiency goal is unattainable; Current proposals to improve AYP, such as value-added models, cannot resolve the system's underlying problems; AYP is underfunded and the system fails to provide adequate programs aimed at off-setting the impact of poverty; therefore, schools attended by the neediest children are penalized disproportionately. Find this document on the web at: http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps/EPRU/epru_2006_Research_Writing.htm

From No Grades, No Tests At Free School: One recent day at the Brooklyn Free School, the "schedule" included the following: chess, debate, filming horror movies, and making caves for Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Not that the students had to go to any of these sessions. At this school, students don't get grades, don't have homework, don't take tests, don't even have to go to class. Unless they want to. "Free schools," which had their heyday decades ago, operate on the belief that children are naturally curious and learn best when they want to, not when forced to.

"Every kid here is definitely motivated to learn something, there's no doubt in my mind," said Alan Berger, a former public school assistant principal who founded the Brooklyn school, which launched in fall 2004. "Our belief is that if we let them pursue their passions and desires, they'll be able to get into it deeper.

They'll be able to learn more how to learn." At the Brooklyn Free School, much of the decision-making occurs in a mandatory (yes, as in required) weekly gathering called the Democratic Meeting. Here, students air grievances, pose challenges, propose rules and set policy. Even the youngest kids have a vote equal to staffers. Students are required to show up for a minimum of 5 1/2 hours a day, partly so that the school can meet legal definitions, but what they do with their time is up to them.

The student population — 42 students, ages 5 to 17 — is diverse racially, economically and in terms of ability, and the students are not separated by age. Even among some champions of alternative education, free schools are considered a bit too radical. Others say free schools could gain popularity if the emphasis on testing and regimented curriculums keeps up. "Not only is there more interest, this is the wave of the future," said Jerry Mintz, director of the Alternative Education Resource Organization. "The other approach doesn't work, and everybody knows it."

But what about the basics? Long division, spelling, algebra? Is it enough to let a child to decide when to learn those things? This concern is there, and a few parents use outside tutors for their children, Berger said. Some students said the flexibility made sense for the youngest and oldest, but not as much for those in the middle. In some ways, as the Brooklyn school evolves, it is becoming more structured. Students will soon have to meet a set of graduation "requirements," where they must present a portfolio showing proficiency in the areas such as communication, investigation and reflection. But the definition of proficiency, like much of the school, is flexible.

Search <http://news.google.com> for Brooklyn Free School.

Microsoft Designed School Opens: Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates has famously called high schools "obsolete" and warned about their effect on U.S. competitiveness. Now, his company has a chance to prove that it can help fix the woes of public education. After three years of planning, the Microsoft Corp.-designed "School of the Future" opened its doors, a gleaming white modern facility looking out of place amid rows of ramshackle homes in a working-class West Philadelphia neighborhood.

The school is being touted as unlike any in the world, with not only a high-tech building — students have digital lockers and teachers use interactive "smart boards" — but also a learning process modeled on Microsoft's management techniques. The company didn't pay the \$63 million cost — that was borne by the Philadelphia School District — but shared its personnel and management skills. About 170 teens, nearly all black and mainly low-income, were chosen by lottery to make up the freshman class. The school eventually plans to enroll up to 750 students.

Students — who are called "learners" — use smart cards to register attendance, open their digital lockers and track calories they consume. They carry laptops, not books, and the entire campus has wireless Internet access. Teachers, or "educators," rather than using blackboards, have interactive "smart boards" that allow teachers to zoom in and out, write or draw, and even link to the

Internet. There's no library, but an "interactive learning center" where information is all digital and a "multimedia specialist" will help out students. Instead of a cafeteria, there's a food court with restaurant-style seating. The performance center — where two sections rotate close to create a smaller space — replaces the typical auditorium.

The high school will use an "education competency wheel," patterned after a set of desirable traits Microsoft encourages among its employees. Officials, teachers and students are to be trained in dozens of skills, including organizing and planning, negotiating, dealing with ambiguity and managing relationships. Students have scheduled appointments with teachers, typed into their online calendars, instead of being limited to structured times for classes. Their laptops carry software that assesses how quickly they're learning the lesson. If they get it, they'll dive deeper into the subject. If not, they get remedial help. Lessons will have more incorporation of current events to teach subjects. In addition, students at the school must apply to college to get a diploma.

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14724570>

Union Calls for Moratorium on New Charters in Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers has called for a moratorium on the creation of charter schools in an effort to close the district's \$73.3 million deficit. Philadelphia schools chief Paul Vallas said that \$4.6 million of the district's deficit could be attributed to higher enrollment in charter schools than expected. Larry Jones, president of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Charter Schools, said the state's charter legislation was designed to give families' more educational choice. "I could see it if there wasn't a demand, but there is a demand," said Jones. "You have 26,000 students on charter-school waiting lists. The people have spoken." Philadelphia Inquirer, (11/08/2006)

<http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/news/local/15954785.htm>

Pittsburgh Parents Risk Jail Time to Keep Children Enrolled in Charter Slated for Closing. Families are risking a \$300 fine and possible jail time for refusing to withdraw their children from Career Connections Charter Middle School and enroll them in Pittsburgh Public Schools. The local board voted Sept. 27 to revoke the charter and close the school. The board questioned the suitability of the Boys & Girls Club building where classes are held. The school has continued operating, claiming that there is nothing wrong with the building and that the school board has exceeded its authority.

Parents said they will stand their ground because of the school's curriculum, small class sizes and welcoming environment. Only two of the school's 75 sixth- and seventh-graders have transferred since the district began warning of truancy citations if students were not enrolled in district schools. Patti Jones, whose granddaughter attends the school, said she refuses to be threatened by the district's warnings, which she "filed in the garbage." If necessary, "I'll go to jail," she said. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, (11/09/2006)

<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/06313/736858-298.stm>

From School Failure May be Linked to Lack of Play in Early Childhood Years, Say Experts, by Joan Almon: Too little time for unstructured play leads to increased stress for children and parents, according to a new clinical report issued this week by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Nevertheless, many parents and policy makers continue to believe that pressuring young children to learn earlier and faster will help them succeed in school. In fact, it may have just the opposite effect. Experts say there is a serious disconnect between scientific knowledge of child development and popular ideas about how and when to introduce formal instruction, according to the nonprofit Alliance for Childhood.

Parental pressure combined with flawed policies are among the reasons why creative play, long considered the foundation of the early childhood curriculum, is now disappearing from preschools and kindergartens, says Alliance President Joan Almon. Many experts in child development link the increased pressure on young children and the decline of play to later school failure. A “Call to Action on the Education of Young Children,” issued by the Alliance for Childhood and signed by more than 150 leading educators, physicians, and other experts, calls for a reversal of education policies that cut time for child-initiated play and emphasize formal instruction. “We are deeply concerned that current trends in early education, fueled by political pressure, are leading to an emphasis on unproven methods of academic instruction and unreliable standardized testing that can undermine learning and damage young children’s healthy development,” the Alliance statement says.

“Justified concern for low-income children...has been a powerful force behind the current overemphasis on early instruction in literacy and math,” the statement continues. “This well-intentioned but misguided policy may actually put children at increased risk of school failure by denying them positive early learning experiences.” Almon says she hopes that the new report by the Academy of Pediatrics will go a long way toward educating parents and policy makers about the central importance of play in healthy development and dispelling the widespread but false idea that play is a waste of time. “The AAP has done children and families a great service with this report,” says Almon. “When children play, family life is enriched and children learn more deeply. Everyone concerned with the well-being of children should read the report and take it to heart.”

<http://www.allianceforchildhood.org>

From One for the Books — Tutoring Gets Outsourced: by Vanessa Hua, SF Chronicle: In the latest incarnation of outsourcing, overseas tutors are teaching U.S. students math, science, English and social studies. And parents are paying half as much as they would for face-to-face instruction. At least a half-dozen tutoring companies operate from India, including two with Bay Area ties: Growing Stars is headquartered in Santa Clara, and TutorVista in Bangalore received \$11 million in venture funding from Menlo Park’s Sequoia Capital this year. Online tutoring, which began in the late 1990s, has grown in the past five years, education analysts say, as communication technology im-

proved and became more affordable. It accounts for about 6 percent of the \$2.2 billion U.S. private tutoring market, which reached 1.9 million K-12 students last school year, according to Tim Wiley, senior analyst at Eduventures, an education and research consulting firm in Boston.

Between \$20 million and \$25 million of the roughly \$132 million spent on online tutoring – or one-sixth – now goes to tutors in India, but Indian tutors may make up an even larger share of online tutors because they are paid much less than their U.S. counterparts. TutorVista pays its employees \$300 per month, and Growing Stars pays \$350 to \$450 per month, for roughly a 40-hour workweek. That’s a lower-middle-income salary, said Ashok Bardhan, a senior economist at UC Berkeley’s Haas School of Business. By comparison, in-home tutors in the United States charge \$40 to \$60 an hour. Growing Stars, which began offering tutoring in 2004, serves 400 students who pay \$21 to \$25 per hour. TutorVista, which started in November 2005 and charges \$20 for a 45-minute session or \$100 a month for

HOME EDUCATION NEWS

Home Education Magazine: Homeschool Information Night: If you would like to present a homeschool information night, but don’t know where to begin the award winning Home Education Magazine offers many free resource that can help. “Let’s Put on an Information Night!” by Carol Narigon was published in Home Education Magazine’s September-October “Ask Carol” Column and it is also available online for free at Home Education Magazine’s web site. Ms. Narigon says, “Putting together a homeschool information workshop can be daunting the first time you do it. Once you’ve set one up, pulled it off, and learned whatever lessons you need to learn, it becomes much easier.

There are as many ways to inform people about homeschooling as there are methods of homeschooling, but I think an information night (or two or three) is one of the most effective ways to reach a wide number of new or potential homeschoolers, whether your intention is growing your group or just helping out a fellow homeschooler. For the ones who have already decided, the support is invaluable.” Another useful freebie for your Homeschool Information night is Home Education Magazine’s Introduction to Homeschooling Booklet. It offers a free, one-of a kind Introduction to Homeschooling that provides answers to the questions homeschoolers ask. Home Education Magazine also offers a free Homeschool Pocket Guide that is often used at Homeschool Information Nights. This is perfect for handing out to those who are interested in homeschooling.

<http://www.homeedmag.com>

From No School, and the Child Chooses What to Learn, by Susan Saulny, NYTimes.com: As the number of children who are home-schooled grows — an estimated 1.1 million nationwide — some parents are opting for what is perhaps the most extreme application of the movement’s ideas. They are “unschooling” their children, a philosophy that is broadly defined by its rejection of the basic foundations of conventional education, including not

only the schoolhouse but also classes, curriculums and textbooks. In some ways it is as ancient a pedagogy as time itself, and in its modern American incarnation, is among the oldest home-schooling methods. But it is also the most elusive, a cause of growing concern among some education officials and social scientists.

There is scant data on the educational results of unschooling, and little knowledge about whether the thousands of unschooled children fare better or worse than regularly schooled students. There is not even reliable data on how many people are unschooling, though many experts suggest the number is growing. In Chicago, a group called the Northside Unschoolers has 100 families registered on its online list. There are similar organizations coast to coast, including the San Francisco Bay Unschooling Network, Unschoolers Unlimited in Guilford, Conn., and the Unschoolers of the Ozarks, serving Missouri, Oklahoma and Arkansas, although accurate figures for the number of families they serve are hard to come by.

Adherents say the rigidity of school-type settings and teacher-led instruction tend to stifle children's natural curiosity, setting them up for life without a true love of learning. Unlike the more familiar home-schoolers of recent years, unschoolers tend not to be religiously motivated. They simply do not approve of ordinary education, and have decided to rearrange their lives around letting their children explore their worlds, unencumbered by the usual pupil-teacher relationship. "As school choice expands and home-schooling in general grows, this is one of those models that I think the larger public sphere needs to be aware of because the folks who are engaging in these radical forms of school are doing so legally," said Professor Huerta of Columbia. "If the public and policy makers don't feel that this is a form of schooling that is producing productive citizens, then people should vote to make changes accordingly." Pat Farenga, an author and advocate of unschooling, said the fears were unfounded. "One criticism I hear over and over is that children won't be ready for the real world," Mr. Farenga said. "That's ridiculous. We're saying get them out of the classroom and into the real world."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/26/education/26unschool.html>

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

International Democratic Education Network has a new website: <http://www.idenetwork.org>

IDEN stands for the International Democratic Education Network. It is a network of schools, organizations and individuals from around the world that uphold such ideals as:

- respect and trust for children
- equality of status of children and adults
- shared responsibility
- freedom of choice of activity
- democratic governance by children and staff together, without reference to any supposedly superior guide or system.

Members are self-selected; their names and addresses and a

minimal description appear in a database on the website, and they receive two or three newsletters a year, mainly giving information about recent and future IDEN conferences.

INDIA

The Barefoot College of India wins the \$1 Million Alcan Prize for Sustainability. The third international Alcan Prize was awarded to a grassroots, alternative learning center after 200 organizations and projects from 55 countries were considered.

Barefoot College began in 1972 with the conviction that solutions to rural problems lie within the community. It now exists on several campuses across India. The College addresses problems of drinking water, girl education, health & sanitation, rural unemployment, income generation, electricity and power, as well as social awareness and the conservation of ecological systems in rural communities.

The College benefits the poorest of the poor who have no alternatives. It encourages practical knowledge and skills rather than paper qualifications through a learning by doing process of education. The Barefoot College is a place of learning and unlearning. It's a place where the teacher is the learner and the learner is the teacher. It's a place where NO degrees and certificates are given because in development there are no experts-only resource persons. It's a place where people are encouraged to make mistakes so that they can learn humility, curiosity, the courage to take risks, to innovate, to improvise and to constantly experiment. It's a place where all are treated as equals and there is no hierarchy.

"The Barefoot College is a remarkable organization that impressed and inspired us with their sustainable impact on environmental, economic, social and cultural issues. They have affected great change through strong leadership and partnerships, which coupled with their grassroots approach serves to empower the poorest of the poor," said David Runnalls, Chairman of the adjudication panel and President and CEO of International Institute for Sustainable Development.

<http://www.barefootcollege.org>

<http://www.alcanprizeforsustainability.com/2006/en/prize2006/winner.asp>

JAPAN

From **Child Suicides Prompt Probe into Bullying**, The Yomiuri Shimbun: Student suicides in Hokkaido and Fukuoka Prefecture have prompted the Education, Science and Technology Ministry to conduct an emergency survey on bullying at all primary, middle and high schools across the country, ministry sources said. During the next academic year, the ministry will join forces with the police and other authorities to establish a system aimed at preventing student suicides, which will include a manual for teachers. The ministry conducts a survey on bullying, suicide and truancy at public primary, middle and high schools every year.

According to the findings released in September, there were 105

student suicides in academic year 2005, a sharp fall from the peak of 380 in 1979, but since the survey did not list suicides caused by bullying, some experts said it did not reflect the changing situation in schools. The survey will also target state-run schools affiliated with national universities and private schools to get an overall picture. In the next academic year, the ministry also plans to contact relevant organizations, including the police, to obtain more accurate suicide figures.

The survey will be conducted at all public, private and national primary, middle and high schools and will analyze each case to figure out the causes and enable discussions aimed at mapping out preventive measures. The ministry has invited experts to discuss how to prevent student suicides and also plans to compile a manual listing concrete measures that can be taken to deal with students who have tacitly expressed an intention to commit suicide, and to detect signs that a child may be suicidal. The ministry will ask prefectural governments to gather city, town and village education board officials for an emergency meeting, as well as check student guidance methods.

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp>

UNITED KINGDOM

From **GCSE pupils can shine in English but never read a book**, by Liz Lightfoot, telegraph.co.uk: Standards have slipped so low that it is possible to get a top grade GCSE in English literature without having read a book, according to a report by a university professor and a secondary school head of English. The teaching of literature by extracts has replaced reading for pleasure, understanding and appreciation to such an extent that some pupils believe *Romeo and Juliet*, the Shakespeare tragedy, has a happy ending, they say. Pupils can get through the whole of their compulsory secondary education without reading any book from cover to cover, they claim.

Exam boards and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the Government's curriculum advisers, are blamed for encouraging teachers to concentrate on bite-sized chunks of text instead of the full novel, play or poem. English literature has turned into a comprehension exercise with self-contained chunks of texts reproduced in exam papers on which pupils can answer questions without the need to show an understanding of the whole work or its genre, they say. David Jesson, a professor at the Centre for Performance Evaluation and Resource Management at York University, says the cult of extracts has replaced reading for pleasure.

Anthony Farrell, the head of English at St Ives School in Cornwall, who co-wrote the paper, said model test answers and assignments were silencing pupils' voices and creative instincts. "It is quite possible to achieve an A* English GCSE without having fully read a novel or play," he said. Teachers were being encouraged by the "assessment-led and data-driven regime" to drill their pupils to perform in tests and exams which meant concentrating on the extracts rather than reading more widely. "There's no time for that because of the reductive exam syllabuses and pressure to

get results," he said. A spokesman for the Department for Education said: "It is only possible for a child to go through Key Stage Three without reading a whole novel if the teacher chooses such a reductive route and their subject leader approves."

AUSTRALIA

A new independent, self-funded democratic school is now being planned for Booroobin in Australia.

It will be a school in which human rights and responsibilities, democratic values and institutions, economic, environmental, social and spiritual sustainability, and natural learning will be fundamental, enduring principles. Its aim will be to support young people to prepare for their lives as independent, responsible, effective adults.

The Booroobin Sudbury School operated at Booroobin from 1996 to 2003. In 2003, the school's accreditation was cancelled, after a battle with the Queensland Non-State Schools Accreditation Board and the Minister for Education that lasted several months. As reported in the previous issue of *Education Revolution*, parents decided in 2004 to operate without accreditation as The Booroobin Sudbury Democratic Centre of Learning and self-fund their day to day operation. The Centre operated successfully for over two years. Students, staff and parents were even more satisfied and happy than they were with the school during its 8 years of operation. Then in July, 2006, during IDEC 2006 in Sydney, on the advice of Solicitors, the operation of the Centre was suspended. The Minister for Education had threatened criminal action and fines against Directors of the governing not for profit company on the grounds that the Centre appeared to be operating as an unaccredited non-state school.

A new Constitution of a new incorporated not for profit association has been prepared. An application for accreditation is being developed. The Committee is interested in hearing from prospective students, families, people with real life skills, potential staff, including those who can obtain Queensland Registered Teacher qualifications. We will be especially seeking staff with high level mathematics and science skills that can be related to real life activities and who can understand and interpret State requirements with respect to students' self-directed learning activities. Donations will be welcome to assist in establishing the new school.

Booroobin is located in the hills of the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast of south east Queensland, Australia. Contact details can be viewed on their web site www.booroobin.com The web site will be resurrected when more decisions are made and details are available.

New Publications on Educational Alternatives

Journal of Educational Alternatives is published by **Lock Haven University's** Masters degree in Alternative Education Studies. Nathaniel Hosley, coordinator of the program, writes "We began the journal as a component of two grant programs...one

for alternative education and one that is about urban partnerships and school improvement. I think we have published four issues or so and it is really beginning to become a pretty good read. Our distribution has been limited to 4000 teachers in alternative education, members of PA ASCD, and teachers in our urban partnerships in Philadelphia. The journal began as a way to work toward substantive discourse among professionals working in alternative settings. It is beginning to catch on...but we are now looking to create a way of continuing the journal once grant funding goes away in 2007."

Alternative Education Studies
Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania
Annex Building
Lock Haven PA, 17745
Phone:(570) 893-6247
Fax: (570) 893-6248
altdinfo@lhup.edu
<http://www.altd.lhup.edu/Portal/Home/tabid/52/Default.aspx>

Journal on Alternative Schooling is an academic publication that provides a forum for the examination of evidence-based best practices in nontraditional education settings. The journal is a rare source of information on quality alternative models for educators, policymakers, researchers, and administrators and practitioners in environments such as charter, magnet, and residential schools; schools-without-walls; and educational centers.

The Journal invites authors to submit manuscripts that contain information that is practical and has direct applicability with regard to this diverse population. The editors accept for review manuscripts that contain critical and integrated literature reviews, objective program evaluations, evidence-based strategies and procedures, program descriptions, and policy-related content. As appropriate, manuscripts should contain enough detail that readers are able to put useful or innovative strategies or procedures into practice. To submit a manuscript, visit:
<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/heldref/joas>

Authors must prepare their manuscripts according to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Fifth edition*. All manuscripts require an abstract, preferably no longer than 120 words, and 3—5 key words to be used for indexing purposes. Key words should capture the precise content of the manuscript. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the content. Manuscripts should not exceed 20 pages in length, including references. The managing editor screens manuscripts to determine their appropriateness for distribution to the editorial board. Manuscripts will be edited for clarity and readability, and editors may make changes so the text conforms to the journal's style.

Heldref Publications
1319 Eighteenth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-1802
800.365.9753

fax: 202.293.6130
<http://www.heldref.org/html/question.html>

International Journal of Progressive Education began publishing in Feb. 2005. It is an academic periodical concerned with issues such as:

- Critical Pedagogy,
- Multicultural Education,
- New Literacies,
- Cross-cultural issues in Education,
- Theory and Practice in Educational Evaluation and Policy,
- Communication, Technology in Education,
- Postmodernism, Globalization and Education.

IJPE is published three times a year in Chinese, Turkish, Spanish and English. For subscription information contact Mustafa KOC, Assistant Managing Editor, 2108 S. Orchard Street #203, Urbana, IL 61801 or see <http://www.inased.org/ijpe.htm>

Print copies of past issues are also available for purchased by contacting the Customer Service department subscription@inased.org.

Correspondence

Supporting Unprincipled Schooling?

I was interested to read an email the other day from the California Unitarian-Universalist Legislative Ministry soliciting opinions pro and con regarding the California statewide propositions on the ballot in the upcoming November 7 election. I mustered all my courage and posted this argument against Proposition 88 (a tax measure to support California public school) on the UU Legislative Ministry website in the Pro/Con comment section, but have been disappointed to find absolutely no replies to my post either pro or con.

I feel this issue is like the elephant in the room among Unitarian-Universalists. We have these wonderful humanistic principles and yet we strongly support the institution of state schooling that, as best as I can see, violates all our principles. In the interest of provoking dialog and the search for truth wherever it might lead I want to address this.

This past year, for the first time in my life, I have started to vote no on measures for additional funding for public schools. All my adult life (I've been voting for over 34 years), I have been a solid yes vote for school bonds. But being a parent who has watched his two kids try to navigate their way through the public school system, and doing a great deal of reading on the subject of education, I now see our public education system as a big bureaucratic authoritarian institution that I believe is doing more harm than good to many, if not the majority of the youth enrolled, and contributing to the deterioration of the democratic fabric of our society.

From what I can see through my kids' participation in Los Angeles public schools, and my participation as a parent, public schools consciously and systematically violate all seven of our UU principles:

1. We affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Though public schools are committed to teaching every youth, they treat kids mostly like widgets in a factory and push them through a one-size-fits-all program and do not have the staff, other resources, or even the basic inclination to tailor a program to the individual youth's needs or interests. I see this in no way affirming the inherent worth and dignity of each individual youth.

2. We affirm justice, equity and compassion in human relations.

What justice can youth have in an institution where they are regulated by rules they have no say in and are constantly judged by others than their own peers? What sort of compassion is it to throw all these youth together, struggling to discover their own unique gifts, their own self esteem, and subject them to constant evaluation, grading and ranking that focuses not on them as unique individuals, but constantly compares them, better or worse, with others.

3. We affirm acceptance of one another and encouragement of spiritual growth.

A state mandated standardized curriculum built around high stakes testing, delivered to youth in generally a rigid and regimented classroom environment, with a strict schedule for what is learned when with uniform expectations for individual student progress, seems to me anything but an environment for spiritual growth, or any other kind of real growth.

4. We affirm a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

Our youth are coerced to go to school by force of state law. They are forced to receive instruction in a state mandated standard curriculum that leaves little room for them to pursue other learning that interests them. My daughter was in several high school classes where the majority of her classmates did not want to be there. How are our youth free in this setting and responsible for their own learning, their own search for truth and meaning?

5. We affirm the rights of conscience and the use of the democratic process.

Our public schools are about the most undemocratic institution imaginable. The majority of the people within the institution (the students) have absolutely no role in the significant decisions of how the school is run, how it is staffed, and what can be learned or taught. Even the teachers have less and less of a say these days in these huge bureaucratic institutions that are run by far away district and even farther away state boards and bureaucrats.

6. We seek world community with peace liberty, and justice for all.

What liberty is there in mandated school attendance, mandated school curriculum, with little or no opportunity for the youth or their parents to choose an individualized course of study, liberty adults have when they participate in an educational institution such as a college or technical school.

7. We affirm the interdependent web of all existence.

Schools break up the interconnected aspects of life into generally unconnected subject areas of English, social studies, math and science. Shallow learning of a broad spectrum of subjects to prepare the youth for high stakes testing replaces deep learning in a few areas of real interest.

Again, I put this argument out there to spark a dialog on this important issue of youth, learning and education, with the hope of focusing us UUs on imagining and creating a more humane society.

Cooper Zale, Northridge, CA, czale@socal.rr.com

To everyone regarding charter schools as freedom/democracy schools:

As most of you know, I hope, our freedom/democracy school, Village School, did not have our contract renewed by our sponsor, the Northfield (Minnesota) district. We had operated for more than nine years as a public school free/dem school.

It is not just NCLB that prevents the school—or prevented our school—from becoming a real alternative. It was also state standards, which were legislated and mandated, and which were mostly content standards. The state also kept a close eye on us as to “curriculum delivery,” so that we were judged as not successful because we did not use standard curriculum. We couldn't even argue that we were using alternative, progressive methods to achieve similar goals. They kept demanding to see our “reading curriculum.”

There is a whole culture of conventional schooling that must be adhered to in order to satisfy the endorsing boards, regardless of what state you live in.

We are now called the Village Learning Community. We are still a school, and actually a much better school, a more authentic and true freedom/democracy school now that we are out from under the iron fist of the state. We got by for awhile, but it became more and more intolerable. There is also a sort of moral drift that occurs as a state-sponsored school. Little, daily compromises are made until you hardly recognize yourself anymore. The toll on our students (and us) was tremendous.

I have a blog, which I try to add to as often as I can, that outlines who we are. Check it out at befreeschool.blogspot.com

Also check out our more comprehensive and recent educational endeavor at <starwalkers.org>.

I'd appreciate feedback and observations and all regarding our new real freedom/democracy school and learning opportunities.

Olivia Frey

Upcoming Conferences

You are cordially invited to the Alternative Education Resource Organization's fourth annual AERO conference. For the fourth year in a row the AERO conference will bring together educators, students, parents, and many others interested and/or involved in educational alternatives from around the U.S., Canada, and the world. From Public Alternative to Unschooling we will have a many educational alternatives represented (some more examples include: Montessori, Waldorf, Steiner, Choice, Democratic, Homeschool, Open, Charter, Free, Sudbury, Holistic, Virtual, Magnet, Early Childhood, Reggio Emilia, Indigo, Krishnamurti, Quaker, Libertarian, Independent, Progressive, Community, Cooperative, and many more!).

This year's conference theme is "Widening the Circle," but even with the theme, the conference will in no way be limited to just that. Workshops and presentations will be made on a wide range of topics. In fact, there will be open workshop time throughout the conference where workshops, presentations, and special events will be entirely up to the attendees to organize! Last year we had over seventy-five unique workshops and presentations run by the attendees. This year we fully expect to match and possibly eclipse that number! A complete listing of workshops that have already been scheduled and our a complete listing of workshops from last year can be found on our website.

This year we have seven wonderful keynote speakers: John Taylor Gatto, Sara Bennett, Matt Hern, Gail E. Thomas, Joel Spring, Arnie Langberg, and Lynn Stoddard. We will also have a number of special events including documentaries, keynote panel discussions, workshops by Lynn Stoddard, Arnie Langberg, Gail E. Thomas, Matt Hern, Jerry Mintz, and Chris Mercogliano, plenty of entertainment throughout and much, much more! All keynote talks and presentations will take place in the beautiful Julia Howard Bush Memorial Center at Russell Sage College in Troy, New York which is beautifully adorned with Tiffany stained glass windows (the most per square mile in the world in fact!).

Simply put, with the success of last year's third annual conference and the dire need for change in the education system, the stage has been set for this year's conference to have quite a far-reaching effect.

Website: <http://www.aeroconference.com>
E-Mail: isaacgraves@gmail.com
Phone: 412-445-3235

April 24 – 27, 2007. National Charter Schools Conference. Albuquerque, NM. Celebrating the 15th Anniversary of charter schools. An opportunity to network with and learn from more than 3,000 charter school colleagues from across the country. Over 120 breakout sessions focused on Quality, Policy, Advocacy and Capacity. The future of chartering will be considered as we look to "the next 15 years" of the national charter school movement. Enhanced Exhibit Floor with over 200 exhibits, Model Classroom Demonstration Area, and more.
<http://www.nationalcharterconference.org>

June 20-22, 2007. 36th Annual IALA Conference. Villanova, PA. The International Association for Learning Alternatives brings together people from diverse models and programs. The conference will feature strands on democratic education, progressive homeschooling, charter schools, virtual (Internet) learning, Montessori education, and other approaches. There will be sessions on government policies involving high stakes testing, evaluation and graduation requirements.
<http://www.learningalternatives.net>

September 8th – 16, 2007. International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC). Near Sao Paulo, Brazil. For the first time in Latin America, we are proud to announce the dates and venue of IDEC 2007: It will be held in Mogi das Cruzes, at 52 km of São Paulo, Brazil and is planned to run from 8th to 16th of September. Part of the conference will be held in association with the World Education Forum in Alto Tietê (13th to 16th September).

The preparations are in charge of IDEB Institute for Democratic Education in Brazil and our most important goal now is to articulate the institutions and people interested in alternatives to conventional education to create a powerful net and support each other projects.

All topics of the evaluation document made at IDED '06-Sydney are being carefully taken to help our organization committee. At this time doubts and other questions can be forwarded to the coordinator Carol Sumie (casumie@gmail.com).

For more information on the IDEC, we suggest visiting:

Official IDEC 2003 Website (held in Troy, NY, U.S.A.):
<http://www.idecny.com>

Official IDEC 2004 Website (held in Bhubaneswar, India):
<http://www.idec2004.com>

Official IDEC 2005 Website (held in Berlin, Germany)
<http://www.idec2005.org>

Official IDEC 2006 Website (held in Sydney, Australia):
<http://www.idec2006.org>

International Democratic Education Network:
<http://www.idenetwork.org>

Democratic Education is Not Neutral

by Tanya Kinigstein

We know that we are interested in creating an education that uses the practice of democracy to empower students by undoing the hierarchical, and ultimately oppressive power structures between children and teacher. Yet there are also many other oppressive hierarchical power relationships that rub against us in all our interactions and sometimes do not get addressed in the context of democratic schools, such as the legacy of white, male, and heterosexual supremacy in the culture of this country. Dismantling these other power structures must also be embedded in every aspect of the school if it truly wishes to work for freedom.

An advocate of free education might respond that to bring up issues of oppression is to try to mold children into what you want them to be, to make them “political,” to infringe on their freedom, to try to indoctrinate them, to doubt their ability as natural learners. Hell, to even bring the stuff up is to create divisions and differences between people that weren’t necessarily there before, right?

Well, no. First of all, there is no neutral educational system. To act “neutral” is to fall into the trap that so many of us do where neutral or normal coincides with dominant, which is white, male and heterosexual. In education a crucial decision is made: whether one wants to perpetuate the current system of relationships that we live under or to encourage the forging of new ones, without their foundations in domination. There is no neutrality because not addressing other structures of domination is to collude with them.

Theoretically, if the people in the school take a good long look at our social conditions and way of living from multiple perspectives (not just the dominant one) and decide that is how they want to live, than of course, that is their right. But to not provide the opportunity to see these things from multiple points of view is very much in collusion with the current dominant culture and not neutral at all. If you don’t include an understanding about how racism, sexism etc. shape (all) our lives in the foundation of the school, and how you teach and interact, than you are essentially perpetrating them.

Without the specific attention to creating this kind of space, it seems easy for the school to default into space that is “liberating” but where the same hierarchies and oppressive tendencies still exist. An example of this is all white activist communities, places that preach radical politics but still make themselves unavailable or alienating for people of color, or men tirelessly committed to radical politics and liberation, who nevertheless rape, discount or constantly talk down to women. And there are countless instances of radical communities that don’t make themselves accessible or comfortable to people in the queer community or disabled folks. Democracy is only a liberating process if it guaranteed to

everyone.

When you add up the effects of all the systems of oppression that affect our interactions *all the time* (racism+sexism+homophobia+classism+ablism+all the rest of the fear and prejudice we are meant to heap on people of different religions, different gender identities, ethnicities, body sizes, languages, etc) not many people escape them, and with them not many people can be free. To create a liberatory education is to try to understand what limits us, and keeps us from being free. And it is to then try to move beyond these limits individually, and as a community. It is an attempt to fully actualize democracy, by trying to work through anything that could keep it from being realized in its entirety.

From the moment we are born, we are molded intellectually, emotionally and spiritually by social forces to be either the colonizer or the colonized, the strong or the weak. To try to create a democracy without an account of the structural oppression that cripples people in different ways is attempting to create a democracy in which only some can participate, and even they not fully.

To have a consciousness of unequal power relations based on sex, race, sexual preference, is not necessarily to be a lecturer-er, a talker-at-er, a holier than thou-er, a demagogue. There must be constant effort made not to talk at people, not to talk for them, think for them, or get mad at them if they make the wrong decision, but to really encourage people to think and decide for themselves, and determine for themselves what they want and need from the school and from life. This is democracy. But it is not possible if everyone is made to fit into the standards that reflect only a faction of the population.

Creating a *pluralistic* philosophy can be great as well to make sure that everyone is exposed to a variety of views and experiences. Pluralism is the act of joyfully expanding our ways of viewing the world to include multiple perspectives and diverse points of view. Implicit in that way of seeing the world is the questioning of the dominant account of history and way of seeing the world.

When you begin to take specific effort to be inclusive in your view of the world you realize how much is kept away from popular knowledge and you must question why. Pluralism says that to truly understand the world we need to see what everyone has to say, and trust people to tell their own stories. This is more than tolerance, it is necessity, it is joy and love. (An excellent article on pluralism in education can be found at: http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/92_docs/Thompson.HTM)

It is also important to look at yourself honestly and look at where prejudice has influenced your thinking. This is hard, but

necessary for creating a liberating space, and most especially for personal liberation. No one can be free if people are holding oppressive views, even the person holding them. Oppressive structures, of course, are worst for the people they are aimed at. But they are also deeply destructive to the people holding them.

The spirit of questioning one's acculturated feelings towards people who are different from you is an important thing to be embedded in the culture of the school. To see teachers, and other figures engaged in processes like this can be very inspiring for the students, and is important for them to see. It's not about being perfect or not making mistakes, it's about putting the effort into moving beyond them.

There are many ways to begin this process, though much of it must be distinctly individual. One way I have tried is to spend a year reading books only by people of color. Friends have also done that, reading only writing by women or queer people. Learn a bit about the nature and effects of imperialism. Talk to people active in fighting for equality, or just people who you respect. Maybe you will cry. Or feel really bad. Or maybe you will feel really good.

If you want to chat, please email me at Citric789@aol.com. Meanwhile here is a list of resources for people interested in learning more about building inclusive classrooms and communities. Many of them are written from the point of view of public school teachers. Do not see this as a weakness; important alliances are waiting to be built between people working on radical education both within and without the public education system. This can work to strengthen the movement and make it available to as many people as possible.

When initially developing your school it might be nice to go around to both traditional and alternative public schools in your community and talk to them about their experiences teaching in the area. To create a partnership with local public schools can be very important for both parties, giving democratic school kids possible access to the resources of the public school and giving public schools kids access to an alternative environment as well as everyone more friends!

Radical Teacher (magazine): <http://www.radicalteacher.org>

Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network—huge library database, tons of interesting articles: <http://www.glsen.org>

National Association for Multicultural Education:
<http://www.name.org>.

Teaching for Change: <http://www.teachingforchange.org>

Really good practical article on multicultural education:
<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/initial.html>

Articles by antiracist educator Enid Lee:
<http://www.enidlee.com/enidleereader.htm>



Art Class at New Democratic School, Harriet Tubman Free School

Books

A School of Our Own: Parents, Power, and Community at the East Harlem Block Schools

By Tom Roderick with a forward by William Ayers

Anti-Bias Curriculum Tools for Empowering Young Children

Edited by Louise Derman-Sparks

Because We Can Change the World: A Practical Guide to Building Cooperative, Inclusive Classroom Communities

By Mara Sapon-Shevin

Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development

Edited by Enid Lee, Deborah Menkart and Margo Okazawa-Rey

Building Communities of Learners: Collaboration Among Teachers, Students, Families, and Community

By Sudia Paloma McCaleb

Critical Teaching and Everyday Life

By Ira Shor

Culture, Difference, & Power (CD-ROM)

By Christine Sleeter

Debunking the Middle-Class Myth: Why Diverse Schools are Good for All Kids

By Eileen Gale Kugler

Dreamseekers: Creative Approaches to the African American Heritage

Edited by Anita Manley and Cecily O'Neill

Education is Politics: Critical Teaching Across Differences, K-12

Edited by Ira Shor and Caroline Pari

Everyone's Kids Books: A Guide to Multicultural, Socially Conscious Books for Children

By Nancy Braus and Molly Geidel

It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School (DVD)

By Debra Chasnoff and Helen Cohen

Keepers of Life

by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac

The Light in Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities

By Sonia Nieto

Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education

By Sonia Nieto

Women Teaching for Change: Gender, Class and Power

By K. Weiler

De Colores Means All of US: Latina Views for a Multicolored Century

By Elizabeth Martinez

Racism and Antiracism in Real Schools

By David Gillborn

Creating the Nonsexist Classroom: a Multicultural Approach

By Theresa Mickey McCormick

Power, Knowledge and Anti-Racism Education: a Critical Reader

By George J Sefa Dei & Agnes Calliste (editors)

Answering Back: Girls, Boys and Feminism in Schools

By Jane Kenway & Sue Willis

Challenging Lesbian and Gay Inequalities in Education

by Debbie Epstein (editor)



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- ◆ **THE PARENT EMPOWERMENT HANDBOOK™ - 2005/2006 16th Edition:** The Parent Empowerment Handbook is designed to empower parents seeking positive solutions for teen behavior problems. With over 100 of the best private therapeutic, emotional growth, I.D, wilderness schools and programs nationwide, the Handbook also includes numerous essays, visit reports, and current information on experienced educational consultants and transport agents. www.strugglingteens.com/store/
- ◆ **WOODBURY REPORTS NEWSLETTER:** This 32+ page monthly publication is designed as a networking newsletter for professionals who work with children and young adults. This Newsletter focuses on Residential Schools and Programs for at-risk teens. www.strugglingteens.com/store/

Helpful Articles....

- ◆ **TEN COMMON MISTAKES PARENTS MAKE:** (In making residential placements) This article addresses ten of the most common mistakes I have seen parents make during my experience working with parents of struggling teens. I present this with the hope that parents who are beginning to search for residential schools and programs will rethink their initial assumptions to avoid self-defeating choices... www.strugglingteens.com/parents/tencommonmistakes.html
- ◆ **THE STRUCTURE SPECTRUM:** (A tool for matching children with the right program): So your child needs something more! One of the most terrifying and confusing experiences a parent can have is to realize their child is making extremely poor choices. The trick is to find a school or program which provides a quality and professional experience, and fits the needs of your child... www.strugglingteens.com/archives/1995/8/oe03.html
- ◆ **HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT PROGRAM:** One of the most difficult decisions a parent will ever make is to place an acting out child in a residential school or program. This decision becomes necessary when a parent realizes that local resources are not working, that the child has become his/her own worst enemy by a consistent series of poor decisions, and that intensive 24 hour a day intervention is the last hope to get their child back on track. www.strugglingteens.com/archives/1995/10/oe06.html



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Books etc.

by Mary M. Leue

Homeschooling Our Children: Deschooling Ourselves is the best book on homeschooling I've seen in recent years - including John Holt's foundational books - because of the way author Alison McKee addresses the subject: not objectively, as a "viable option," but as a responsible parent who also happens to be a teacher, wanting to do the best, the most conscientious job she can for her children; struggling to find out which "brand" of education will be best for them in the long run. As any parent can tell you, this is no easy task, and in recent years governmental policies intended to beef up educational practices in the schools have made it even harder. I'm thankful not to have to be struggling with that issue for my own children in these scary times!

Alison pays her readers the compliment of letting her – and her husband's – anxiety hang out in plain view. As a parent who, like so many others, faced the same issue of whether permitting my own child to "stay home from school" might end up damaging his whole life, despite John Holt's reassurances, this is a great boon, enabling the reader, as it does, to follow the progress of her family's bold move away from public education every step of the way.

Alison's book reads like a novel or an autobiography. She had been trained as a teacher to work with certain blind children, with the eventual goal of guiding them through a gradual process of assimilation into ordinary classrooms. During this process, she was able to observe directly how teachers handled their large classrooms of children in various stages of educational development, and to visualize placing her own child in this environment. What she saw did not encourage her to take the risk of exposing her child to the periodic unkindness or indifference toward individual children she was observing on the part of overworked teachers, nor to want what she saw happening to many of the other children who were experiencing the educational process there.

Having read most of John Holt's books, Alison was aware that removing the opportunity to choose their own activities was having a dampening effect on children's enthusiasm for the learning process – and, in some cases, damaging their sense of self-esteem and confidence. And this process came about with the children who were *not* necessarily being individually targeted for negative attention by the teacher. In the end, she and her husband decided not to risk exposing their children to the danger of encountering such an anti-educational atmosphere in public school.

Alison's account of the homeschooling process itself which they chose for their son and daughter is meticulously detailed, as is her running commentary as both a parent and a teacher on her son's experiences in choosing what he wanted to learn. I especially liked her willingness to tell the truth about the extent to which she felt periodic doubts about his entire process of self-choice – and her subsequent ability, in spite of her acute anxiety, to return again and again to her initial belief that kids *can* be trusted to make their own choices.

What especially struck me was the fact that this experience of self-doubt on her part did not stop midway through her children's schooling, but needed to be tried and tested by her as a basic truth about her children's way of learning throughout the years until they were finally on their own as maturing adults. The issue that brought her and her husband back to the "conventional wisdom" of the need for adult guidance was that kids don't know enough about the "real world" - so adults need to help them avoid future pain, even help them stay out of trouble with the authorities. She learned this the "hard way:" – by intervening to some degree in her son's own process, only to see his initial boundless enthusiasm dwindle and finally die following her attempt to "guide" him along the way.

This account helped me to understand more fully why some schooling alternatives such as the Steiner and Montessori processes, which involve adult "guidance" to some degree, don't work for all children. I know that my own efforts as a teacher in the early years of The Free School to introduce Cuisinaire rods to the children as guides to mathematical processes met with universal indifference on the part of my students. I liked them a lot better than they did. Reading *Homeschooling Our Children: Deschooling Ourselves* has helped me to understand, at least partially, why that might have occurred!

Editorial Note: AERO's extensive online bookstore will soon (if not already) carry Alison McKee's Homeschooling Our Children: Deschooling Ourselves. Check <http://www.educationrevolution.org> to find out the availability. If it is not yet on the website, contact Isaac Graves at isaacgraves@gmail.com and one will be special ordered for you at discount. Simply mention this note.

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