

*The Magazine of Alternative Education*

# *Education Revolution*

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*Whispering Seed, a Village-Based Sustainable Living and Learning Community Center in Thailand, Shares Their Unique Program and Vision with Education Revolution Readers (see page 18)*

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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.

## Education Revolution

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# *From the Editor's Desk*

***By Ron Miller***



*Ron Miller*

Editing *Education Revolution* provides a wonderful perspective for observing the amazing variety of educational alternatives in which people are involved, in many parts of the world. We receive announcements and publications from many sources, and the more time I spend sorting through them to choose material for the magazine, the more I appreciate the idealism, imagination and dedication of the thousands of people who are trying to support genuine learning, democratic principles, and the full development of human potentials.

This issue, for example, features a broad range of approaches. We profile a homeschooling activist in the U.S. and a family in Germany that was harassed for trying to educate their own children, but while we certainly encourage homeschooling, we also recognize the value of good schools, and here we take a look at some models not often considered by alternative educators—schools that are based on ancient yoga traditions. In addition, Jerry Mintz tells about his adventure conducting a democratic meeting among 3–5 year old children, and we also bring news from the Waldorf and Montessori networks, among others.

While highlighting these positive ideas, we also investigate the nature of the system that pushes them to the margins and makes them “alternative.” In recent years, the monster called No Child Left Behind has forced mainstream schools to become more rigid, authoritarian, and inhumane than ever before, and this year it is in the public eye because it is due for reauthorization; this is our opportunity to challenge it and present a truly alternative vision of education.

People often turn to educational alternatives for non-political reasons: Their kids aren’t thriving in a conventional learning environment, or perhaps a family holds a particular philosophical or spiritual view that is expressed in a specific way of teaching (as in the yoga-inspired schools). Nevertheless, when we step back from specific forms of pedagogy, we can see that all education exists within a social, political, and economic context. How we think young people learn best—and what we think they should or shouldn’t learn—take on layers of meaning from this context.

This magazine won’t take explicit political positions, but it is important to address the larger context of NCLB and other defining features of contemporary education. In a thoughtful book review essay in this issue, our good friend Mary Leue (founder of the Albany Free School) explores the role of social class, ethnic identity and economic oppression in the history of education. If we are building a movement for educational democracy, we need to keep these realities in mind.

Our editorial message should be clear:

We support a great variety of efforts to redefine “education” in the modern world. In place of a standardized, centralized, authoritarian system that dictates what “all children should know and be able to do,” we call for educational freedom, diversity, and experimentation.

We call upon “alternative” educators and all those working to democratize the system to join together, to recognize the unique contribution that each component network makes to the larger whole, and to build a combined educational rights movement to challenge the domination of the authoritarian system.

I’d like to leave each reader with a challenge: Find one idea or news item in this issue that represents an approach outside the one with which you are already identified, and then think of an action you can take to support or encourage the people involved.

Write back and let us know what you did.

And please keep sending us news from your networks!

# *Being There*

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*with Jerry Mintz*

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A group of parents in New Jersey who were enrolled in our online school starters class have opened a new program called Wellspring in New Jersey, mostly at this point for their own children, but their intention is to grow into a full-fledged school, adding a “grade” per year. They have rented space in a church.

They asked me to do a consultation and demonstration of democratic process with their students. The challenge was that the oldest student is five years old!

As I drove over from Long Island I contemplated the situation. I had never tried democratic process with such a young group. Although I had confidence that the students would understand what we were doing and have ideas, I thought it might be necessary for me to come up with agenda items.

Upon my arrival the situation was a little chaotic, as they don’t usually have all of their students and parents there at once. Technically they are a homeschool resource center this year.

Some kids were yelling. Mothers were fussing with food for later. The children were playing with a sandbox and toy trucks. I talked with three of the students about what I planned to do. They seemed to understand it.

Finally we called the students together. They sat in small chairs around a low sectioned circular table. I sat at the table but the parents were sitting in a circle around it, “fishbowling.” We started the meeting and I explained to the students, who ranged from 2 to 5 years old, that at the meeting we could “talk about good ideas for the school or problems in the school.”

At about that point I thought I’d have to give them suggestions or examples, but no sooner had I gotten the words out of my mouth describing the meeting when hands immediately shot up.

Derek, a 4 year old, wanted to talk about healthy food. We put that on the agenda.

Sofi, also 4, wanted to talk about school cleanup.

Skyler, 3 years old, wanted to talk about “fight suit armor” for the school.

Each item was discussed and several points of view expressed. In the discussion about healthy food, the effects of caffeine and chocolate were brought up, and it was passed that they should only be consumed in the morning, if at all. Derek wondered how we could get everyone to eat healthy food.

When cleanup was discussed, I asked them what would happen if someone didn’t want to clean up, if that was a school rule. One said, “One of the teachers or parents should talk to them.”

When I asked what would happen if the student still wouldn’t help clean up, Derek said the student should be kicked out of the school! There was an immediate chorus of “No!” Everyone else felt that would be too drastic. It was finally suggested and passed unanimously that they couldn’t play with toys until they cleaned up.

Skyler’s item about the “fighting suit” was discussed. It would be a suit of armor, but of plastic and not metal. It was proposed and passed that Skyler and others would find out how much a suit would cost, to add to the school’s costumes, and the result would be brought back to the meeting.

I was sure that this was about the end of the meeting demonstration. After all, they were all 5 or under and they had been focusing for a while. But when I asked if anyone else had something to bring up, one of the kids brought up the issue about going outside on cold days. Some thought it wasn’t a good idea, but others said they liked going out when it was cold. It was finally passed that if you have a cold you couldn’t go out in the cold.

The students then unanimously agreed that they would like to have a meeting like that once a week and we ended the meeting.

I had a long discussion with the parents (the students were also invited) to discuss what they had just seen. As I was, they were surprised by how quickly the kids grasped the idea, and how practical their ideas were. I pointed out that one of the byproducts of this process was great growth in vocabulary. We discussed whether some kids might just be following others, but I pointed out that in the long run students learned the value of expressing their own opinion and voting their minds, and in fact, for the most part they had done that at this meeting. Many of the decisions

were not unanimous. Virtually all of the students stayed through the whole meeting. Even the very youngest, if they went away for a few minutes, came back to the meeting. Thirty minutes in total!

After speaking with the parents I did a demonstration of “organic curriculum.” In that process the students simply brainstorm any question they would like to know the answer to, and nothing is considered too “silly.” There were a number of questions like “How can you make a Christmas tree out of spaghetti?” One of the questions was “How do you make a song?” There were a total of a dozen or more questions. We voted on which ones had the most interest and began discussing them.

With the song question, it was clear that many students wanted to know how to write a song. Some played musical instruments and had a little idea that they could make their own melody. It was decided that the parents would be asked to bring someone in who could show the students how to write a song.

There was one question that had something to do with a video several of the students had seen at a library. The students seemed to understand what they were talking about, but I and the other parents could not understand it! In the end it will remain a mystery, a question that only the students could understand. They tried not to show their disdain at our inability to understand them!

Some in child psychology might think that such young children would not be ready or able to participate in such a process. The parents who witnessed the meeting discussed it later and came to their own conclusions. For one, the process did seem inappropriate:

- “1. The meeting was too adult driven. I felt that the kids’ responses were not really what Jerry was asking for and he had to prompt them too often to come up with ideas for improving the school or concerns they had.
2. When they did come up with responses, the quality of the answers was not stellar.
3. Regardless of what he said, the older children were highly influenced by their peer’s responses, and this causes me to question whether the children’ input is really authentic.”

On the other hand, a number of parents saw a lot of value in the meeting:

“I had this epiphany after Jerry came to do the demonstration last week and that was: there seems to be one answer to so many of our questions about how to “unfold” the democracy for these little kids. And that is, interest. When you sit them down and ask them what’s on their minds, what do they tell you? When you ask them whether they’d like to talk about something else, they’ll tell you yes or no. It seems that their INPUT is important wherever you ask for it and they give it.”

“One comment that stood out the most for me was when Jerry answered a question regarding educational materials presented to the children without their participation for part of the day and allowing the children freedom of choice for another part of the

day (which I think is what we are doing now). His reply was that although every school is different, by imposing our daily schedule and requirements onto the child’s daily rhythm we risk extinguishing a child’s natural desires to learn. I personally do not want to take the risk of stifling anyone’s intrinsic learning abilities and I feel that democratic education is for me and my children so I hope that Wellspring will become a democratic school. Of course I see the challenges to becoming democratic with such a young group but I think we should trust the process and know that what is meant to be will be.”

“I believe the desire for freedom, democracy and social justice is innate and that these natural impulses are often quashed by the establishment and the competing interests of others. So, it is easy for me and my libertarian husband to get our heads around this idea for our school. We all want our students to experience the joy of being free in a creative environment where they grow to love learning and respect people in spite of their sameness....

When we look beyond that and into a future for our school, my husband and I see the use of the democratic model in early childhood education as an excellent tool to teach kids about making choices, fostering consensus and resolving conflict. This approach to governance is no doubt consistent with our mission to educate the whole child and we support it wholeheartedly.... We just don’t know to what extent this group would use it comfortably since we recognize that on some level the adults are inclined or perhaps even conditioned to expect and prefer that our professional educators drive curriculum plans at this age.

Now, do I feel this way because I think that children this age are too developmentally young for this type of analytical thinking? I’m not sure. Perhaps their responses were weak because this was new to them and/or because they didn’t know Jerry. If (a teacher) had run the meeting, it may have been very different. That being said, I still think that having weekly meetings about general, nonacademic topics is a great way for them to practice being involved in a democratic setting, and time or practice dependent, the quality of these meetings will only improve until it really is fabulous! I know that it is possible.”

“When Fred came home that night-even before he had his coat off, Ethan and Isadora were interrupting each other trying to tell him about the meeting. They said they had a “kid meeting” and they wanted him to know about what their individual contributions were to the meeting. I agree that by seeing the results, the kids will have more confidence in the process.”

“The next day, Leah mentioned a few things to me out of the blue, such as “Mom, I really liked that meeting. Let’s do it again.” and a few other things of that nature. It took her a while to understand it in her 5yr old brain, but once she did, she really felt good there.”

I was only at Wellspring for three hours. We videotaped most of the process and can make it available by special arrangement. Overall, the parents seemed quite happy with the result, and as usual, I learned a lot!

# Reauthorization of “No Child Left Behind” Raises Fundamental Questions About Education in America

## by Ron Miller

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was originally adopted in 1965, as part of President Lyndon Johnson’s “war on poverty.” It was intended to provide resources to improve education in poor communities, to equalize educational opportunities and (significantly though less obviously) to provide more skilled workers to the labor market.

ESEA marked a significant shift in the fashioning of national educational policy, which the federal government had largely left to the states because the Constitution does not explicitly authorize federal involvement in education. The law needed to be reauthorized by Congress every five years, and as this has taken place periodically, ESEA has been considerably amended, reflecting the changing political realities of the last forty years.

In 2002 (the five-year schedule had fallen a bit behind), the Bush administration persuaded Congress to infuse ESEA with the draconian standards-and-testing agenda of “No Child Left Behind.” Still promising to “close the gap” between the privileged and the impoverished (and hence winning the support of liberals), NCLB represented a massive consolidation of federal control over the content and process of public education.

More insidiously, NCLB has effectively saddled the schools with a pedagogy of “transmission” (or “banking,” as Paulo Freire called it)—the coercive transfer of approved knowledge. NCLB’s ruthless standards leave virtually no room for such progressive/democratic practices as emergent or individualized curriculum, critical inquiry, artistic expression, or, in many schools, recess.

This year, ESEA/NCLB is due to be reauthorized again, and because of its far-reaching and controversial impact, both supporters and opponents of the standardization agenda have mobilized to influence the nation’s lawmakers. Activists on both sides are passionate and committed, and their argument goes to the very heart of what “education” should mean in the modern world.

In simple terms, the mainstream establishment—political and corporate leaders, the media, major foundations, and state education officials—believes that schools need to “produce” workers who are prepared to compete in the global economy, and that “high standards” and “accountability” are essential to this preparation. The “standardistos,” as Susan Ohanian aptly calls

them, believe that there is a particular body of knowledge that all students need to learn, and, furthermore, that there is an orderly, even “scientific,” way to present this knowledge.

Opponents of NCLB, on the other hand, believe that education for a democratic society must start with a basic respect for the diversity of young people’s learning styles, life goals, personalities, as well as family and community values; a democratic education must not aim to “produce” any sort of standardized human being. In this view, NCLB is more accurately labeled “Childhood Left Behind,” because the natural ways in which young people experience the world and make sense of it—through free exploration, play, and self-motivated curiosity—are throttled by the consuming regimen of standardized curriculum and relentless testing.

For those of us who find the current system of public education to be profoundly anti-democratic, and have chosen to support “alternative” learning opportunities, it is important to realize that many dedicated activists within the system share our educational vision and are still trying, even after decades of frustration, to rescue public education from the political and economic agenda

of standardization. Some of the strongest opponents of NCLB are public school activists. They seek to reclaim

the progressive purpose of ESEA—equality of educational opportunity—while exposing the ways in which NCLB actually undermines democratic education.

Unfortunately, the supporters of NCLB hold a great deal of power. In February, a bipartisan commission, chaired by two former governors and funded by Gates, Carnegie and other major foundations, released a report that promised to “move beyond the often heated and uninformed rhetoric” about the effects of NCLB policy. Despite this claim to objectivity, the report fully endorsed the dominant view of the elite establishment; indeed, one critic called the report’s recommendations “NCLB on steroids.” Warning that “our children are not prepared academically to compete with their international peers,” the report endorsed a beefed-up regimen of accountability, testing, and the goal of “adequate yearly progress.” There should be even tougher measures to assess the “effectiveness” of teachers and principals. The bottom line: “High standards are at the core of a successful education system,” where “successful” means economically competitive and little if anything else.

*“Anyone can confirm how little the grading that results from examinations corresponds to the final useful work of people in life.”*

*Jean Piaget*

Members of the commission have testified before Congress and have been given other public forums. Politicians, including Senator Edward Kennedy, whose committee will consider NCLB, and the news media, reacted favorably to the report. An editorial in the *Washington Post* (Feb. 15, 2007) endorsed the agenda of standardization, saying that “It’s time for the United States to move in the direction taken by other countries in formulating and administering a national test. All students, no matter where they live, should have to show proficiency in certain skills and knowledge. The reason no such test exists has more to do with politics than with education. . . . Efforts [to implement them] were quashed by conservatives committed to local control of schools and by liberals averse to more testing.”

We beg to differ. There are good educational reasons why no such test (yet) exists or should ever exist. There are educational reasons (as well as political and philosophical ones) why the agenda of standardization is antithetical to democracy. The people who are professionally trained to facilitate learning in schools, who actually interact with young people, are coming to recognize that NCLB is a disaster. As education professor Michael S. Shaw observes, “In all my years in education I have never felt such a high level of tension as exists today because of No Child Left Behind. In many of the schools and districts we serve, teachers have been bombarded with mandates and scripted programs that prevent them from using their professional knowledge and skill to respond to the needs of their students.”

Brent McKim of the Jefferson County Teachers Association (Louisville, Kentucky) has written, “Rather than its traditional role of addressing the whole child and empowering students to become critical, creative, caring human beings who thrive in a democratic society and diverse, changing world, the purpose of public education has been drastically diminished to merely improving “student achievement” (basic skills) test scores. These changes are very real and are reflected in almost every organizing principle and practice in today’s public schools. The consequence of this dramatic narrowing threatens an entire generation of citizens and perhaps even our democracy itself.”

Stan Karp, a 30-year veteran progressive teacher and leading activist with Rethinking Schools, has pointed out that “Every one of the 50 states has introduced legislation rejecting all or part of NCLB. Several have filed lawsuits against it. More than 10,000 schools have been put on NCLB’s infamous list of “schools in need of improvement” and face an escalating series of sanctions that address neither their needs nor their challenges.” Karp argues that “sanctions that have no record of success as school improvement strategies, and in fact are not really educational strategies at all. They’re political strategies designed to promote privatization and market reform in public education.” ([www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org))

Susan Ohanian expands on this view of the political/economic goals of NCLB: “Some corporate interests want privatization of education, sort of a capitalist free-for-all—for their own gain. But corporate gain goes deeper than how many books and tests

McGraw-Hill sells. There’s a larger pattern at work. We see a similar attack on the working class as seniority rights, pension benefits, health coverage are reduced. And outsourcing makes everyone vulnerable. It suits the power brokers to have a scared, compliant workforce where everybody is competing with everybody else for survival. In a dog eat dog world of cutthroat competition, there isn’t much hope for solidarity—or for democracy. So start ‘em early. Train young children that their standardized test score is all that matters and they will grow up to be workers who follow orders. Train young children that they will never be good enough, and they will blame their lack of success on themselves, not on a system designed for them to fail.” (interviewed on [www.educationoasis.com](http://www.educationoasis.com))

Sociologist William Spady, who has been involved in educational reform for decades (he was an advocate of the controversial “outcomes-based” approach), wrote a brilliant critique of NCLB in the widely-read publication *Education Week* (Jan. 10, 2007). Placing the policy in historical perspective, he called NCLB “the natural extension of a paradigm that has defined, shaped, and sustained our public education system for over a century—mimicking the much-admired factory assembly lines of the day, and within a few decades this industrial-age model of education became so institutionalized, legalized, internalized, and reinforced that it has been virtually impossible to change. . . . The No Child Left Behind law simply represents educentrism at its extreme, with a very heavy dose of threat, coercion, control, and punishment piled on top.”

Spady wrote that the dawning of the Information Age about 25 years ago challenged society to become “future-focused” or “stay the course and become obsolete.” The business world has adapted new models, but educational policy fell into a “great regression” that “moved education policy and practice further and further away from the new research realities: what we know and continue to discover about learners, learning, brain development and functioning, human potential and motivation, our ever-changing world, and successful life performance.”

Expressing the core of our “alternative” educational perspective in the pages of an influential mainstream publication, Spady argued that “these new realities continue to expand radically and open a vast array of options for educating our highly diverse population of children in more-effective and fulfilling ways—ways that true, noneducentric pioneers like John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Rudolf Steiner brought to our attention generations ago.”

He closed this remarkable essay by saying that official educational policy has gone, in the past twenty years, “from intellectual embarrassment, to operational travesty, to national tragedy.”

So what can we do? One of the most ambitious efforts to halt the perpetuation of this national tragedy is the recent founding of the Educator Roundtable, a network of educators, activists, and organizations opposed to the reauthorization of NCLB. On their website, [www.educatorroundtable.org/action.html](http://www.educatorroundtable.org/action.html), they state their mission forcefully: “Recognizing an American history rich with



*Well-Known NCLB Critic Alfie Kohn Speaks to 2005 AERO Conference Participants After Delivering a Thought-Provoking Keynote Address*

stories of oppressed groups working with others to change the conditions of their lives, we understand the power of concerted, coordinated, and unified opposition to injustice. Therefore, we call on teachers, students, parents, administrators, scholars, legislators, and other concerned citizens to join us in opposition to the individuals and organizations who have turned children into numbers and teachers into bureaucrats.”

The Educator Roundtable proposes “15 steps toward an alternate educational universe and a healthier society.” These include a call for a “national dialogue on the purposes and aims of public

schools in a democratic republic” and a recognition that since “there is no single best approach that fits every learning context, encourage local choice in deciding curriculums and instructional strategies that are grounded in best practices as defined by teachers, researchers, and the professional associations that represent various disciplines.” Remember, these are primarily *public* school advocates, calling for a radical decentralization of educational authority. They are our allies.

The group has drafted a petition, for which it hopes to gather a million endorsements. The petition states: “We, the educators, parents, and concerned citizens whose names appear below, reject the misnamed No Child Left Behind Act and call for legislators to vote against its reauthorization. We do so not because we resist accountability, but because the law’s simplistic approach to education reform wastes student potential, undermines public education, and threatens the future of our democracy.” It then gives a list of sixteen reasons for opposing NCLB.

I personally urge every reader of *Education Revolution* to visit [www.educatorroundtable.org/petition.html](http://www.educatorroundtable.org/petition.html) and consider signing this document.

For further reading on NCLB and its damaging effects, a good place to start is the Rethinking Schools website, specifically this page: [www.rethinkingschools.org/special\\_reports/bushplan/index.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/bushplan/index.shtml)

# An Attempt at Autonomous Education in Germany

*by Matthias Kern*

We are a German family, consisting of the parents (Karen and Matthias), two daughters (Rebekka, born 1982 and Hannah, born 1984) and three sons (Jonathan, born 1987; Malchus, born 1990 and Josias, born 1993). All our children started their “school career” at state schools. And all our children had to deal with problems at school to some extent – boring lessons, time consuming homework, no possibility to follow their own interests, and bullying. Some of our children changed the school – in some cases the situation got slightly better, in others even worse.

Both being qualified teachers, we knew that learning can take place in other ways than formal schooling. In Autumn 2000, Karen started to work as a teacher (and headmistress) in a newly founded alternative school. Josias changed to that school, our other sons also would have liked to join, but they couldn’t because it was only a primary school.

Jonathan and Malchus saw that at the alternative school Josias learned without a prescribed curriculum, without homework and by following his own interests. By Autumn 2001 they couldn’t stand school learning and school hierarchy any more and they wanted to leave their schools. Just at that time we met a German home educating family. Jonathan and Malchus decided to learn autonomously at home and we accepted their decision. In November 2001 they left their schools.

Now we faced the problem of explaining the situation to the school authorities because the German school laws declare school attendance as compulsory; home education is illegal. Letters went to and fro but after nine months the school authorities stopped the dialogue and we received notices of payment for fines of 450 Euros per parent. We refused to pay and therefore the case was taken to court. In July 2003 we were sentenced to pay fines by the

local court but they were reduced to 200 Euros each. We wrote an appeal to the higher court which was rejected and another appeal to the federal constitutional court which also was not accepted. Eventually we wrote an appeal to the European Court for Human Rights which has not yet been addressed.

In the meantime Karen had stopped her paid work to spend more time with our children and Hannah and Josias had followed the examples of their brothers and had left school. Rebekka had passed her school leaving exams (high level) at school, Jonathan had passed exams (low level) as an “external participant.” But even after passing the low level exams, school is still compulsory.

In July 2003 we received a second series of notices of payment for fines. These eventually had to be dropped after a procedural error of the court (lapse of time).

In November 2003, our son Malchus decided to write a letter to the higher school authorities by himself. He was invited to a meeting at the office and this led to an agreement. The school authorities declared that they would tolerate his autonomous education. But they also declared that this agreement would not apply to his brothers.

We joined an initiative which planned to found a democratic school following the ideas of the Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts. But in Germany all schools are under supervision of the state and each school needs state permission. A school without a prescribed curriculum and without compulsory lessons is not regarded as a school and therefore there was no way to get permission. Nevertheless we started a learning center. All the children at the center were regarded as truants and so it faced threats from the authorities. In addition, there were financial problems. Eventually, after 16 months the group decided to close it.

Meanwhile, state exams had been passed by Hannah (high level) and Malchus (low level).

In June 2005 we received a third series of notices of payment for fines of 500 Euros per parent. Again, we refused to pay, the case was taken to court and we were sentenced to pay reduced fines of 250 Euros each. Again, our appeal to the higher court was rejected. And again, we wrote an appeal to the European Court for Human Rights.

(The two applications to the European Court for Human Rights are still pending and may not be taken up before next year. If the judges declare that they are inadmissible, then the legal case has come to an end because there is no way to pursue this any further. If they accept the appeal, and find a violation of human rights, the case will have to be reconsidered by the German courts right from the beginning.)

In addition to these court cases, the state – being my employer – started disciplinary actions against me in September 2005.

After the second prosecution in October 2005 we felt that the situation had to change. We decided to move out of the country. This seemed to be the only way to stop further actions. Karen and Josias moved to France for several months and deregistered as German residents. I stayed in Germany.

The disciplinary actions were dropped and for a short time no further actions were taken.

Some months later, Karen and Josias came back to prepare our move. The police showed up because neighbours had informed them about the “truancy.” Another court case was started – and this was not about fines but about child custody. We could prove that we were preparing to leave the country and eventually this case was dropped.

We had decided to move to the United Kingdom, which by far has the largest home education community within Europe. In August 2006 we moved to England.

We joined some of the numerous home education groups and found lots of friendly and helpful people there. We regularly take part in home education events ‘just around the corner’ (the estimated number of home educated children in the UK is 50,000 or more and around 500 in Germany).

And there are no more threats, no more pressure to send the children to school and no more court cases!

*Editor's Note: We have received news of further developments in Germany. See the latest in our International News section.*

*IDEC 2005 Attendee Marches in Rally for Freedom in Education in Berlin, Germany*



# Homeschooling Advocate John Munson

## *An Interview by Mary Nix*

*Reprinted with permission from Home Education Magazine November-December 2006*

John Munson is a longtime volunteer with New York Home Educators Network (NYHEN) - [www.nyhen.org](http://www.nyhen.org). One friend recently said that John is “an unsung hero” of homeschooling in New York State and after doing some investigating I heartily agree and I’m pleased to share his story with our readers. John Munson is the heart and soul of NYHEN, serving as the Webmaster to New York’s only secular, inclusive and statewide homeschool group. John and his wife Cathy Munson-Klein live and learn in New York with their two children, ten and thirteen.

I asked John how he got involved with NYHEN.

John: Around the time our kids reached “school age”, some of New York’s veteran homeschoolers were getting NYHEN off the ground. One of the organizational meetings was near us, so I attended. Being a computer geek, I offered to set up a website, and the job stuck to me like glue! I started out as “the techie”, but over time I learned the homeschooling issues and got into posting advice and opinions about them.

Mary: At the NYHEN laws and regulations page it states: “No matter what state you live in, it’s necessary to know your state’s homeschooling regulations. And in a highly regulated state such as New York, it’s especially important.” The page then lists the regulations and a wealth of information for the reader to utilize. John, could you please elaborate on the importance of each individual knowing their state’s regulations?

John: I’ve seen a lot of confusion about homeschooling regulations. Many people — parents and school officials alike — don’t understand the legal requirements. As a result, officials sometimes demand more from parents than is required (this is fairly common here in New York), and some parents go along with those demands. If you know the regulations, you can recognize when officials are telling you something wrong, and you can respond to them with confidence.

Also, knowing the ropes yourself can help you avoid being led astray by advice that conflicts with your educational approach. For example, if you’re an unschooler, someone else who favors a highly structured approach might tell you that the required paperwork has to be done in a very curriculum-oriented way. Knowing the requirements yourself helps you see how you can comply with them without having to shoehorn your approach into something that’s foreign to you.

Mary: John, you coordinate NYHEN’s several email lists. I’d like to focus on NYHEN-Support for a moment. As I understand it,

this discussion group is designed to help homeschoolers understand and follow NY’s complicated regulations and respond to any other concerns relating to homeschooling. This must be a tremendous help to new folks trying to understand the process. In a nutshell, how do you help folks comply with New York’s laws and still enjoy the freedoms that homeschooling offers?

John: Often, the first thing we do is help newcomers calm down! It’s easy to get overwhelmed when you read New York’s homeschooling regulation.

One important thing we do is dispel the notion that the paperwork has to be long and complicated. For example, New York requires that we submit an educational plan for the year, and many new people think this means that they have to write a huge curriculum document. I think there’s a lot of relief, especially among unschoolers, when we explain that they don’t have to do that. The regulation gives us the leeway to submit simple lists of materials or topics, for example. And by keeping things simple and general, we satisfy the requirements while still leaving ourselves free to educate our kids as we see fit.

On our email list, we often post examples of what we say in our paperwork so that people can get a feel for how to present things. And, because we use Yahoo Groups to run our email lists, we have a “files area” where some people post their paperwork documents for others to use as a guide.

Mary: I am aware that over the years you have helped homeschoolers who have run into difficulties with their local districts. How have you gone about doing this?

John: You might say that our mantra is, “Read ‘em the regs!” Many difficulties arise because districts demand things that the state regulation doesn’t require. So, we point out the parts of the regulation that parents can quote to their district. That does the trick in those situations. I can’t recall any such cases in which a district has continued to push its demands after the parents quote the regs.

We also tell parents to handle these cases in writing, so that there’s a paper trail to help keep the districts in line.

When the parents are unsure of how to present the information to the district, I’ve written letters for them to use as a guide. But I think it’s important that such letters come from the parents, so that the district realizes it’s dealing with people who will stand up for themselves.

Mary: The NYHEN NY-Alert list allows homeschoolers to learn about and debate proposed legislative and regulatory changes that would affect them. What legislative issues are NY homeschoolers facing?

John: One issue is the compulsory attendance age range, which is currently 6 to 16 years old. That's the range during which we have to report to the districts. Our state board of education is urging the legislature to decrease the lower limit to 5. That would mean reporting our kids to the districts a year earlier.

Another movement involves tax credits for educational expenses. The legislature is considering tax-credit bills that would apply to all kinds of education, specifically including home education. Some parents like this idea, while others warn that the state might use this "goody" as a reason to heap even more so-called accountability on us.

Mary: You wrote and distributed annotations for a recent bill that would have changed NY homeschool regulations. Can you tell us more about the bill and the annotations you wrote? What was the outcome of the bill?

John: Boy, there's a soap opera for you. Everything in New York is complicated, so here's the really simple version! We have no homeschooling law. Instead, the State Education Department issued the homeschooling regulation in 1988, and they're in no mood to relax the requirements. So, several years ago, some homeschoolers got a state senator to introduce a bill that would go over the Department's head and eliminate some of those requirements.

This has been hugely controversial in our community, for a number of reasons. One is that it would legitimize homeschooling requirements by writing them into state law (some lawyers believe that the Education Department had no authority to write the current regulation in the first place). Another reason for opposition, which I've harped on, is that the bill is just a sloppily edited version of the current regulation and leaves lots of loopholes that the government could use to control us.

A friend suggested that I write the annotations you mentioned, in which I point out the bill's many flaws — undefined terms, loopholes, and just plain gibberish in some places. The annotations, which are on the NYHEN website, add up to a mind-numbingly detailed document, but as the saying goes, the devil is in the details.

Well, HSLDA and their New York affiliate enthusiastically supported this bill. We opposed it. Year after year, it failed to pass. Then, in 2005, the bill's sponsor deleted three words, making the bill much more hostile (those nasty details again). In a flash, the HSLDA crowd joined us in opposition. Today, the bill is still sitting there, with no support at all. I'm hoping it'll just disappear for 2007.

Mary: Is the group primarily online?

John: Yes. We had meetings and a printed newsletter early on, but online operations are so much more convenient and cheap that we evolved in that direction.

Mary: What advice can you share with others who would like to set up a statewide group?

John: Take full advantage of online options for running the group. As I understand it, NYHEN was not the first attempt to set up an inclusive New York group, but it's the one that managed to survive. I think that's probably because NYHEN was created at a time when the Web was becoming widely available and allowing us to connect more easily.

Mary: What is the most difficult part of maintaining a statewide group?

John: Keeping a consistent group of activists. Because we're all family people, it's tough for all of us to maintain a steady level of involvement.

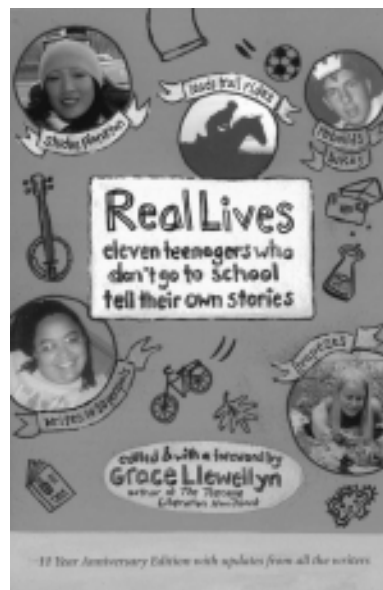
Mary: What is the most rewarding part of maintaining a statewide group?

John: Seeing everyone helping each other. I love to see nervous newcomers turn into confident veterans who share their wisdom with the next crop of parents.

Mary: Thank you for sharing your time here and in New York!

John: And thanks to you and HEM for giving all of us a voice.

More Information NYHEN - <http://www.nyhen.org/>  
New York State Homeschooling Regulations - <http://www.nyhen.org/>



AERO offers dozens of books on homeschooling, including *Real Lives: Eleven Teenagers Who Don't Go to School Tell Their Stories*. Visit <http://www.educationrevolution.org/books.html>

# Networking the Networks

## Alternative schools inspired by wisdom traditions of India

Thanks to Nitai Deranja, director of the Living Wisdom School in Nevada City, California, for contacting us to let us know about the growing network of Living Wisdom Schools. According to their website, [www.livingwisdom.org/index.html](http://www.livingwisdom.org/index.html), these schools are based on the educational philosophy of J. Donald Walters (Swami Kryananda), who was a student of Paramhansa Yogananda (author of the well known *Autobiography of a Yogi*) and the founder of Ananda Village in Nevada City.

The Living Wisdom School was founded at Ananda in 1972. A second school was opened in Palo Alto in 1991, another in Portland, Oregon in 1997, and in 2006, the newest Living Wisdom School opened in Seattle.



Class trip with 4-6 graders to see visiting Tibetan monks in Nevada City

The philosophy of Living Wisdom asserts that education should enable young people to live happy, balanced, lives—to express their highest potentials (which, in the yogic tradition to which Yogananda and Kryananda belong, reflect a transpersonal source). In an article at [www.livingwisdom.org/newsarticles/teachers/what\\_is\\_eft.htm](http://www.livingwisdom.org/newsarticles/teachers/what_is_eft.htm), Kryananda writes “This Education for Life system reflects an ever-expanding view of reality in which the child, the adult, and, on the deepest level, the eternal soul can grow to embrace broader and broader realities, until at last we can glimpse the infinite consciousness of God.”

The Living Wisdom website further explains that this approach “teaches universal truths that infuse all of life—values like honesty, kindness, success, willpower, patience, courage and other virtues that lead to happiness. So much of education today is focused on the intellect, while other, vitally important aspects of a child’s character are neglected.”

J. Donald Walters (Kryananda) described this holistic educational approach most fully in his book *Education for Life*, and Nitai Deranja extended the Living Wisdom principles in his own book,

*For Goodness’ Sake: Supporting Children & Teens in Discovering Life’s Highest Values.*

Both books are available from the publisher (see [www.crystalclarity.com/content.php?browse=category&topic=4](http://www.crystalclarity.com/content.php?browse=category&topic=4))

Being reminded about these schools brought to mind some other networks of schools inspired by yogic wisdom traditions.

For example, the Atma Vidya Educational Foundation promotes the “KPM Approach,” named after its founder, Sri K. Padmanabha Menon. On its website ([www.kpmapproach.org](http://www.kpmapproach.org)), the organization explains that “Central to the KPM Approach to Children is acknowledgement of the individual child. . . .

KPM continuously supports, values, and encourages the child which allows the child to develop a sense of self-worth and self-confidence; allows the child to develop personally, socially and academically in an integrated manner; requires adults to approach the child on a positive basis and help the child develop life-enhancing skills and qualities; requires adults around the child to develop a positive and trusting relationship with the child, by acknowledging and valuing the child’s feelings and opinions; acknowledges the child’s inner motivation for growth and development and allows the child to learn in his/her own way according to his/her liking and interest.”

KPM is put into practice at two Sri Atmananda Memorial Schools, one in Kerala, India, founded in 1987, and the other in Austin, Texas, started in 1995. (The Austin school will hold its first high school graduation in 2007.) Schools are currently being planned in the U.K. and France. Two books written about the approach are *Vital Impressions: The KPM Approach to Children* by educational psychologist Dr. Gary Borich, and *The Child’s World: The KPM Approach to Children* by the Atma Vidya Educational Foundation.

At [www.samschool.org](http://www.samschool.org), the Austin school provides a further description of the KPM philosophy:

“Other educational approaches impose a structure, either in the use of materials or the manner in which classroom activities are conducted, which limits the child’s development. Our approach is tailored to each individual child, without preconceived ideas about academic structure or how children use materials.

The KPM Approach to Children is based on regard for the feelings of the child. Our primary aim is the happiness of the children, and this becomes the foundation of their education. Most children quickly relax and feel happy in the school. . . . The children decide on their own what subjects to study, and how long to study them. The teachers recognize when a child’s interest is awakened, and then expand a particular subject or activity to include other subject areas. Under this approach, learning is constant.”

Still another educational movement with its roots in India is “neo-humanist” education. It springs from the work of an international service, meditation, and educational network, Ananda Marga, which was founded in 1955 by the Indian scholar/guru P.R. Sarkar. Rooted in the tantric yoga tradition, this movement promotes self-realization and service to humanity (see [www.anandamarga.org](http://www.anandamarga.org)).

The educational work of this movement is promoted by Ananda Marga Gurukula. According to their website (<http://nhe.gurukul.edu/about.htm>), “The Gurukula system of education is the oldest on our planet, tracing its roots back 10,000 years to the time of ancient civilization and dedicated to the highest ideals of all-round human development: physical, mental and spiritual... All the aspects of one’s personality are developed utilizing an integrated curriculum that empowers the student to know oneself and develop the confidence and empathy to utilize knowledge for serving the society.”

“Current educational practice works on a model of the individual as a singular entity pitted against the forces of the universe. Competition and the need to dominate and control are the hallmarks of this system. . . Neohumanist Education rejects this vision of humanity and proposes instead that we are all beings intimately linked with the fabric of the universe.”

Neohumanist Education is practiced in more than 1000 kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and children’s homes in over 50 countries.

For further reading, see *Neohumanist Education: A Documentation on NHE Schools Around the World* Edited by Didi Ananda Rama (available at <http://nhe.gurukul.edu>).

### **Solving the “Waldorf” Mystery**

In the Fall/Winter 2006 issue of *Renewal*, the journal of Waldorf education, editor Ronald Koetzsch explains the origin of the name of Rudolf Steiner’s method. While it is commonly known that Steiner helped start the first such school at the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany in 1919 (because the factory’s manager, a student of Steiner’s philosophy, wanted a school for children of workers), where did the factory get the name, which sounds like the famous New York hotel?

The answer: Walldorf is a village in central Germany where Johann Jakob Astor grew up. Astor came to America in 1783 and made a fortune in the fur trade (Astoria, Oregon was originally a fur trading post founded by his company) and New York real estate. His descendents (one of whom was named William Waldorf Astor) founded luxury hotels in New York in the 1890s, the Waldorf and the Astoria, which

eventually combined into one. The Waldorf salad was created by a famous chef at the hotel. Finally, the Astor family also established the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette business, and the German factory was opened in the early 1900s.

So all of the “Waldorfs” are related, and they have their source in a small German village that gave birth to the founder of an entrepreneurial family dynasty.

*Renewal* is published by the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, 3911 Bannister Road, Fair Oaks, CA 95628. [www.awsna.org](http://www.awsna.org)

### **Holistic Learning: Breaking New Ground Conference**

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto  
Toronto, Canada October 26-28, 2007

[www.astralsite.com/holistic](http://www.astralsite.com/holistic)

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*“Leiya meditating” Meditation is Encouraged & Taught at  
Living Wisdom School as a Way to Feel Peace.*



# *Education in the News*

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*Edited by Carol Morley & Ron Miller*

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## **Nation's First Universal School Choice Bill Signed Into Law.**

**On February 12, 2007**, Utah Governor Jon Huntsman made history by signing the nation's first universal school choice bill into law. The "Parent Choice in Education Act," narrowly passed in the state legislature, provides every Utah parent with school-age children a voucher worth \$500 to \$3,000 based on family income, redeemable at any eligible private school. According to Elisa Peterson of Parents for Choice in Education ([www.choiceineducation.org/pressroom\\_press\\_releases\\_2007\\_feb\\_12.htm](http://www.choiceineducation.org/pressroom_press_releases_2007_feb_12.htm)), "This law gives all families — particularly those in the middle and low income brackets — the opportunity to get their children the best education possible for them. They're no longer denied choices that only wealthy families have. Plus, this leaves more money in the public education system while reducing class size." The PCE press release continues: "The signing marked the end of an intense seven year emotional—and at times vitriolic—battle to bring school choice into education reform. Recent data and a study completed by Dr. Susan Aud of Johns Hopkins University show that Utah's school choice program could save millions each year with a combined savings to the taxpayer of nearly 1.3 billion over 13 years." According to an article in the *Wall Street Journal* ([www.opinionjournal.com/diary/?id=110009624](http://www.opinionjournal.com/diary/?id=110009624)), "State Rep. Steve Urquhart, the bill's chief sponsor, says the breakthrough in winning House approval was the realization that it wouldn't harm public education. The bill stipulated that for five years after a voucher student left the public system, the district would get to keep much of the money the state had paid for his education. Given that the average district gets \$3,500 from the state and the average voucher is expected to be \$2,000, a typical school district would *gain* some \$1,500 every time a student left its system." Quoting Elisa Peterson of PCE, the *WSJ* article explained how school choice advocates built political momentum: "Legislators who vote for school choice know we will be there to defend them—and if they vote against choice, they know there will be consequences. The teachers union isn't the only game in town anymore." The article also mentioned one legislator, a vice principal at a junior high school, who said during the floor debate that "everyone knows how I make a living" and that he had wrestled with his conscience on how to vote. He said he believed public education needed the innovation that choice could bring.

**100 National Education, Civil Rights, Religious & Disability Groups Call for Overhaul of Federal "No Child Left Behind" Law; Urge Replacing Failed Test-Score Sanctions with Systematic Reforms to Improve School Quality and Close Achievement Gaps:** As the fifth anniversary of the "No Child Left Behind" law draws near, 100 national civil rights, education,

disability advocacy, and religious groups have signed on to a "Joint Organizational Statement" calling for major changes in federal education legislation. The statement urges that "the law's emphasis needs to shift from applying sanctions for failing to raise test scores to holding states and localities accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student achievement." The number of organizations signing the statement has nearly quadrupled since it was launched in late 2004. The Joint Statement outlines 14 recommended changes to NCLB including: Replace over-reliance on standardized tests with the use of multiple achievement measures in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of student and school performance; Supplant arbitrary proficiency targets with ambitious achievement targets based on rates of success actually achieved by the most effective public schools; Authorize interventions that enable schools to make changes that result in improved student achievement instead of sanctions that do not have a consistent record of success; Enhance the knowledge and skills teachers, administrators and families need to support high student achievement and improve state and district capacity to assist them. Among the 100 organizational signers are the Children's Defense Fund, Council for Exceptional Children, League of United Latin American Citizens, Learning Disabilities Association, NAACP, National Center for Fair & Open Testing, National Council of Churches, National Education Association, National Parent-Teacher Association, National School Boards Association, National Urban League, People for the American Way, and United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries.

## **Hurried Lifestyle and Heavy Academic, Extracurricular Load Taking Toll:**

A new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says free and unstructured play is healthy and essential for helping children reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones as well as helping them manage stress and become resilient. The report, "The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds," is written in defense of play and in response to forces threatening free play and unscheduled time. These forces include changes in family structure, the increasingly competitive college admissions process, and federal education policies that have led to reduced recess and physical education in many schools. Whereas play protects children's emotional development, a loss of free time in combination with a hurried lifestyle can be a source of stress, anxiety and may even contribute to depression for many children. <http://www.aap.org/pressroom/play-public.htm>

**From To fix US Schools, Panel Says, Start Over; A high-powered Group Recommended College for Some 16-year-olds and Preschool for All**, by Amanda Paulson, *Christian Science Monitor*: What if the solution to American students' stagnant performance levels and the wide achievement gap between white and minority students wasn't more money, smaller schools, or any of the reforms proposed in recent years, but rather a new education system altogether? That's the conclusion of a bipartisan group of scholars and business leaders, school chancellors and education commissioners, and former cabinet secretaries and governors. They declare that America's public education system, designed to meet the needs of 100 years ago when the workplace revolved around an assembly line, is unsuited to today's global marketplace. Already, they warn, many Americans are in danger of falling behind and seeing their standard of living plummet.

"We've squeezed everything we can out of a system that was designed a century ago," says Marc Tucker, president of the National Center on Education and the Economy, and vice chairman of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, which produced the report. "We've not only put in lots more money and not gotten significantly better results, we've also tried every program we can think of and not gotten significantly better results at scale. This is the sign of a system that has reached its limits."

One of the biggest proposed changes - the state board examinations that would allow qualified 10th graders to move on to college - would eventually add up to \$67 billion in savings that could be reallocated elsewhere, the report estimates. In the transition period, commission members acknowledge, significant but feasible costs would be necessary.

Adults, too, would get access to the education needed to pass the new state board exams, and the commission suggests creating "personal competitiveness accounts" - created at birth and added to over time - that would help pay for continuing education throughout an individual's work life.

Another proposal: Scrap local school funding for a state-funded system that offers more to the needy districts but doesn't diminish the resources of wealthy districts. The report then calls for giving schools far more autonomy - making them, in essence, contract schools run by teachers or others who are monitored by districts but not owned by them.

**Brooklyn Free School receives media attention.** Here is how the Associated Press explained democratic education to the public: Think about your typical school day: reading, math, maybe a geography quiz. Raise your hand. Sit down. Stand in line. At the Brooklyn Free School, a typical day could include horror movies, chess and making caves for Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Not that students have to go to any of these sessions. At this New York school, kids don't get grades, don't have homework, don't take tests. They don't even have to be in class. Free schools, popular decades ago, operate on the belief that kids are naturally

curious and learn best when they want to, not when forced. That old idea is getting a new look from parents tired of the required tests, homework and rigid schedules in public schools.

"Every kid here is definitely motivated to learn something," said Alan Berger, who started the Brooklyn school in 2004. "Our belief is that if we let them pursue their passions and desires, they'll be able to get into it deeper."

A similar school, Fairhaven, opened in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, in 1998. "We assign as much responsibility as freedom," staff member Mark McCaig told KidsPost. The message for the school's 75 students: "You are responsible for your education."

Hundreds of free schools existed in the 1960s and 1970s. Those still around often give students a say in running things. At the Brooklyn Free School, much of that decision-making occurs in a mandatory weekly gathering - yes, the school does require some things - where students air grievances, pose challenges, propose rules and set policy. Even the youngest kids have an equal vote. One agreed-upon rule: no sword-fighting inside.

The school's 42 students, ages 5 to 17, are required to show up for about 5 1/2 hours a day. What they do with their time is up to them. The school costs \$10,000 a year per student, but many parents pay only what they can afford.

Not everyone is a fan of free schools. Jeanne Allen, president of the Center for Education Reform, worries that they might not prepare students for the real world. "You don't get rid of all structure and standards if you want your child to be able to deal with all different settings," she said.

**From Montessori Makes Inroads in High School; Milwaukee's Marshall is at vanguard as hands-on learning adapts to upper grades**, by Sarah Carr, *Journal Sentinel*: Antonio Davis, a freshman in high school, is one of a small, and growing, number of students in a new effort to expand Montessori into the upper grades. The hands-on teaching style groups children of different ages together. It also puts a large emphasis on the classroom environment, which often is full of plants, animals and other objects designed to stimulate learning. The teacher serves as more of a guide than a lecturer, and the student's instruction is self-directed. Until now, Montessori has been much more popular and prevalent for younger students. But in a handful of cities, including Cincinnati, St. Paul, Minn., and, now, Milwaukee, that is changing. Milwaukee opened its first high school program, the Marshall Montessori International Baccalaureate High School, this fall. A dozen or so other groups opened Montessori high schools in the last few years. Montessori programs "are not just one-classroom preschools anymore," said David Kahn, executive director of the North American Montessori Teachers' Association. "They want to reach adolescents." While the push for Montessori high schools reflects the surging popularity of the learning style, some experts caution that teachers exploring the high school terrain have their work cut out for them: The writings by Maria Montessori, the

movement's creator, are much more scant when it comes to adolescents.

The leaders of the new Montessori high schools sprouting up throughout the country say Montessori may not have written a lot about adolescent education but what she wrote was instructive. At many of the high schools, the learning resembles what is known as project-based study. Kahn said a fundamental characteristic of the Montessori philosophy is its optimism, the belief that "society is worth entering into and contributing to." Each Wednesday at the Marshall Montessori International Baccalaureate High School, students spend time working, volunteering and learning at a different community organization. The goal is not for them to simply become do-gooders but to learn subjects such as biology and history at the same time. The Milwaukee school has a unique challenge because it's trying to merge Montessori with the International Baccalaureate program, a highly sequenced program aimed at giving students exposure to the subjects and intensity they will encounter in college, particularly in their final two years of high school. The school also is offering a Mandarin class and isn't sure how to integrate that with other courses in a way that would be true to the Montessori concept.

**Students of New Orleans Historic "Little Red School House" Inspire Contributions to City's Rebirth:** Music, art and originality – three words often used to describe the flavor of the city of New Orleans. They also perfectly describe the unique talents of the 420 students and teachers of McDonogh 15 School for the Creative Arts. Affectionately known as "The Little Red School House," McDonogh 15's mission is to empower students with the academic skills and character traits they need to succeed in competitive high schools and colleges. McDonogh 15 is an open-enrollment public charter school that unites a rigorous college-preparatory academic experience with a focus on the creative arts. This year it is celebrating its 75th anniversary.

The school is part of the national Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) network of schools. 80 percent of graduates of other KIPP network schools have enrolled in college, compared with only 25 percent of public high school students in New Orleans. Recently, the digital imaging company Konica Minolta Business Solutions, USA, Inc. decided to support the city's revitalization efforts through education. With a short-term goal of raising up to \$200,000 to fund building and park renovations and digital arts equipment for McDonogh 15, Konica Minolta has also instituted an ongoing program to provide annual high school scholarships. Each year, three \$15,000 scholarships will be awarded to best-in-class students – one based on academic performance, one for achievement in the visual arts and another for proficiency in the musical arts. [www.McDonogh15.org](http://www.McDonogh15.org)

**The Waldorf Way: Integrating Heads, Hearts & Hands into Every Lesson:** Implicit in the Waldorf educational philosophy is the belief that everyone — assuming no obvious handicap — has the ability to do everything well, though that ability often has to be discovered, or rediscovered. We all can do music, do art, do

mathematics. Most of us conceive of learning how to do something as acquiring a new set of skills, writes David Ruenzel. But for Waldorf educators and adherents, the emphasis is quite different. They see learning as a kind of massive reclamation project: You reclaim what has always been in you – the ability, for example, to paint or do mathematics — but was never brought out, in part because schooling steered you away from things in which you could not score a quick success. For if acquiring ability in some specific area is less a matter of learning something from scratch than of reclaiming some dormant capability, then it is never too late for any of us. This is at least as true for adults as it is for students, as author and educator A.C. Harwood points out, if a teacher cannot paint, "then he must endeavor to recapture the ability which his own education destroyed." In the teaching of children, exuberance counts for more than knowledge. Teachers experiencing something miraculously new for themselves will inspire their students with that very emotion. In a world in which increasing numbers of educators are clamoring for more computers and academic acceleration, Waldorf educators remain unapologetically contrarian, playing the tortoise to the hare. [http://www.jlc.net/~faiman/waldorf\\_way.html](http://www.jlc.net/~faiman/waldorf_way.html)

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

**The Academy for Educational Development** works internationally with communities, government agencies, the United Nations, and other NGOs to develop effective, democratic, self-sufficient institutions. One of their projects, called PEAKS—Participation, Education, and Knowledge Strengthening, is working to decentralize and democratize educational practices in several developing countries. "Education in many ways really is the key to democracy," says Alison Price-Rom, senior program officer. "It is about more than just teaching facts and skills. It is teaching children to participate in society." Instead of teaching the whole class at the same pace, teachers respect each individual student's progress, and each student's achievement guides his or her instruction. "This is ultimately more successful," says Price-Rom. "Top-down models of education focus on one level of students, and those not learning at that level are left behind." See <http://aed.org/News/NewApproaches.cfm>

**German Homeschooled Child Sentenced to a Child Psychiatry Unit.** According to the Homeschool Legal Defense Association ([www.hslda.org](http://www.hslda.org)), homeschooling was first banned in Germany under Adolf Hitler, and that ban is still enforced today. German parents have been fighting for the right to homeschool for the last seven or more years. However, all efforts have failed in the face of the stubborn German government and their official response that they cannot "allow a counterculture to exist." There are over 40 cases currently in court or being appealed, and many homeschooling families have fled the country. Homeschoolers remaining in Germany are hoping to legalize homeschooling in one state and thereby make a safe-haven. However, the German homeschoolers are so few and the attacks so intense that it is hard to make any progress in this area. The situation is getting worse each week. Earlier this year, a 17-year-old homeschooled girl was forcibly removed from her parent's custody by over 15

police officers, and placed in the child psychiatry unit of the Nuremberg clinic. Social workers and police officers first came to her family's home and took her for four hours of questioning. Then two days later, they returned to remove her from her family. According to her father, this treatment was justified by the psychiatrist's finding that Melissa was supposedly developmentally delayed by one year and that she suffered from school phobia.

## RESOURCES

**The Pulse: Education's Place for Debate** is an online forum sponsored by *District Administration: The Magazine for K-12 Education Leaders*, that opened in September, 2006. Editor Gary Stager has posted some thought-provoking writings by leading progressive critics of standardization and NCLB such as Susan Ohanian and Ken Goodman, and other provocative pieces including one of John Taylor Gatto's essays from *Dumbing Us Down*. Stager himself writes thoughtful essays, including "An Inconvenient Truth: Questions about student happiness are neither rhetorical nor frivolous" ([www.districtadministration.com/viewarticle.aspx?articleid=1054](http://www.districtadministration.com/viewarticle.aspx?articleid=1054)). This is one of the most radical publications available to public school administrators, and it may be worthwhile for advocates of educational alternatives to connect with them through this vehicle.

See [www.districtadministration.com/pulse/default.aspx](http://www.districtadministration.com/pulse/default.aspx)

**Reimagine Growing Up** is a new 6-cd set of interviews with visionary educators including David Orr, Rachael Kessler, Ron Miller, David Marshak, Dee Dickinson and others. Eric Utne, founder of *Utne Reader*, has since become involved in the Waldorf school movement and he is also part of these fascinating conversations. The overall theme is: How do we find a way of life that nurtures children and supports parents, strengthens communities and builds a sustainable society? The interviews were conducted by Michael and Justine Toms of New Dimensions Radio. The set is available from New Dimensions Media: See <http://www.newdimensions.org/program.php?id=S899> or call 707.468.5215.

**A new online journal on alternative learning.** Submissions are invited for the inaugural issue of the new, online peer-reviewed publication, the *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning* (JUAL), to be published as papers become accepted. JUAL seeks to bring together an international community of scholars exploring the topic of unschooling and alternative learning, which espouses learner centered democratic approaches to learning. JUAL is also a space to reveal the limitations of mainstream schooling. Authors of original research interested in submitting manuscripts to be considered for publication in JUAL should review the website ([www.nipissingu.ca/jual/index.asp](http://www.nipissingu.ca/jual/index.asp)), in particular the link to Submissions.

**Earth Day Network** ([www.earthday.net](http://www.earthday.net)) connects activists, organizations, communities, and educators to grow and diversify the environmental movement worldwide. The Network aims to mobilize communities, increase civic participation, train new

environmental leaders, and raise awareness about ways to achieve a more sustainable planet. Two projects of particular interest to educators include the 2007 Earth Day School Greening Initiative, which will involve students and their communities in projects to improve energy efficiency and learn about biodiversity, and the National Civic Education Project, which gets school communities involved in local environmental issues.

**The Wilson School Archives** and the **Don Glines Archives** at Minnesota State University, Mankato, contain materials on one of the premier alternative schools of the 1970s, and the revolutionary educator who led it. Don Glines has written numerous books and articles on educational alternatives, flexible year-round school models, and personalized education. Reflecting on his experiment at the Wilson School, he says, "As in King Arthur's time, there honestly was a Camelot in education, though it seemed to disappear. How can we create a new wave of innovators for the future who can go beyond what was accomplished in the past?"

A catalog of the Wilson School Archives can be found at [lib.mnsu.edu/archives/fa/msu/msu307.html](http://lib.mnsu.edu/archives/fa/msu/msu307.html) and the Don Glines Archives are described at [lib.mnsu.edu/archives/fa/smhc/smhc229.html](http://lib.mnsu.edu/archives/fa/smhc/smhc229.html)

**Self-Ed: A system of individualized education for K-12 Charter Schools.** Independent educator David D. Douglas has formulated a model that breaks away from conventional school practices. In Self-Ed,

- Each student has his or her own personal curriculum tailored to one's specific needs and abilities, and students advance in each academic area at their own best pace. Lectures are replaced by teacher-assisted independent study.

- Classrooms become labs, shops, and resource centers, and the surrounding community is used as a valuable educational resource.

- Students aren't confined to what is expected for their age group, and develop friendships with others of mixed ages.

- Students are directly involved in the operations of their own school, through an elected democratic student government.

For more information about the program or David Douglas's book *Education—As Viewed from Another Planet*, see [www.self-ed.org](http://www.self-ed.org)

**IALA – International Association of Learning Alternatives** publishes a free monthly blog newsletter, edited by Dr. Wayne Jennings, a school reform leader for decades. See [www.learningalternatives.net](http://www.learningalternatives.net). IALA will hold its annual conference at Villanova University near Philadelphia June 20-22. The keynote speaker will be *Education Revolution's* editor, Ron Miller.

**[www.AEROConference.com](http://www.AEROConference.com)**

**[www.EducationRevolution.org](http://www.EducationRevolution.org)**

# Correspondence

Folks: We talk about documenting the results of what is possible with our approach to education. Here are some recent results that I'd like to share.

Each year, Maine gives what are called MEAs—Maine Educational Assessment. They test all 4, 8 and 11th grade students. Last year was the first time they used the SATs as the test. The results were just released last week for all the secondary schools in Maine. Liberty School scored the highest in Hancock County which includes many high schools—I'm not sure how many. In the State, we scored 2nd in reading, 3rd in writing and in the top 5 in math. The school that scored at the top is the Maine School for Math and Science—a special magnet school that draws the best students from around the state. Students are selected to go there.

When I announced these scores to our community, I said—though we do well on these tests, they do not measure the most important results of our education. What's interesting is our non-traditional approach is still able to do well in comparison to traditional schools.

In many studies comparing the democratic approach to the more authoritarian approach, there is often not much difference in the results. But the students in the democratic approach say in interviews they enjoy learning more. This is important because students who enjoy learning usually continue and those who don't avoid being challenged.

What I value more about our approach is how students learn to manage their time and learn how to learn. Also, we emphasize "how to think" not "what to think." It's process oriented.

Anyway, the news that we scored highest in our county and have done well for the last five years, makes people wonder.

Arnold Greenberg

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To Whom it May Concern,

Whispering Seed (WS) is a village-based Sustainable Living and Learning Community Center as well as a Home for Children coming from orphaned and abusive backgrounds. We are a US-registered non-profit charitable organization, located in a Karen village along the Thai-Burmese border in western Thailand. We provide emotional, medical, and nutritional support and care, as well as housing and learning opportunities for Burmese refugee children and displaced and disadvantaged people from Burmese, Karen, Karang, and Mon ethnic minority groups in the region. Our mission is to provide models for sustainable living and learning consistent with the traditions of the varied local cultures.

For more than forty years, children and adults in the Thailand / Burma border region have faced hardships created by the ruling Burmese authoritarian-military dictatorship. Ethnic minorities constantly face issues such as forced labor, rape, use of child soldiers and widespread torture and murder. Under the rule of this repressive regime, political, economic and social conditions have become so intolerable that Burmese citizens have fled from their country to save their lives and those of family members. For these reasons, many have fled to Thailand.

By living and working directly with the communities that we serve, WS uses a different approach than other organizations in the region in assisting the local disadvantaged population. With our sustainable approach, we consider the entire situation, working together with local villagers and displaced people, assisting them to identify the problems they face, and supporting them to create long-lasting solutions for themselves by addressing the roots of their struggles, rather than by pacifying surface issues. WS maintains a family environment, living and learning together in small groups, allowing personal care and attention for all.

Children and families in our care, most of whom have never attended school, learn skills for successful lifelong learning. Through individualized learning in a supportive environment, they progress at their own pace intellectually, socially, physically, and emotionally. The simple, rural environment of WS facilitates these objectives as children and adults alike learn to appreciate and protect the natural world.

## Whispering Seed seeks funding

WS seeks financial support for its comprehensive plan, allowing us to expand existing programs and to begin new initiatives. The ongoing programs include the following:

### 1. Youth Empowerment

- a.) Ongoing care for orphaned and refugee children as well as young single mothers, including those affected by HIV/AIDS
- b.) Community service learning trips for local Karen, Karang, and Mon children
- c.) International cultural immersion programs for local and international youth, partnering with other organizations
- d.) Local youth weekend workshops and camps with university students from Bangkok; activities include bird watching, water detective activities (to test river water quality), games, stories, and music
- e.) Workshops and training in supporting Karen culture (language, dance, singing, and weaving)

### 2. Holistic Education

- a.) Teacher training for educators from ethnic minority groups within Burma and along the Thai/Burmese border, including Shan, Mon, and Karen
- b.) Natural child development and skills training for young mothers
- c.) An alternative education film festival in collaboration with Shikshantar from India
- d.) Conferences and gatherings to support alternative democratic

models of learning with participants from Japan, Korea, Russia, India, Laos, Thailand, and the United States  
e.) International networks to support alternative schools and children's homes throughout S and SE Asia  
f.) A permanent library at Whispering Seed

### **3. Sustainable Living**

- a.) Living & Learning in Community, a three-month internship program
- b.) Permaculture certification courses for local Thai and Burmese as well as foreigners
- c.) Training in sustainable living
- d.) Earthen-building training and workshops
- e.) Organic agriculture training
- f.) Instruction on use of appropriate technology

### **4. Traditional Culture and Crafts**

- a.) Building a museum and cultural center for Moken people (sea gypsies) displaced by the 2004 tsunami
- b.) Flowers from Real Leaves; natural crafts supporting local indigent women
- c.) Documentary filmmaking and the production of *claymation* films
- d.) Illustration and design of children's books
- e.) Film and photography
- f.) Traditional weaving, spinning, and natural dyeing

**WS is also seeking funding for several new programs including:**

### **5. Teacher Training Program**

Creating a comprehensive teacher training program for ethnic Karen, Shan, Mon, Burmese and Thai teachers working in the border region of Thailand and Burma.

### **6. The Training of Local Wisdom Teachers**

Creating employment opportunities through training local men and women in weaving, natural dye, herbal medicine, sewing, flower making, and woodworking

### **7. A Local Cooperative Store**

Selling and promoting the handicrafts of local women in cooperation with other local organizations

### **8. A Mobile Library Project**

Including books, arts & crafts materials, and theater activities. Acquiring a vehicle expressly for the mobile library project will allow us to share the resources of WS with Karen, Karang, Mon, and Burmese peoples in remote areas along the Thai/Burmese border

### **9. The Teaching of Earthen House Building Techniques to Local Refugees Inside Camps**

Providing displaced people with useful trade skills, while allowing them to construct their own homes

### **10. An Alternative Educational Resource Center**

Providing necessary educational materials for formal and informal education in both the Thai and Burmese languages, including translation of many alternative education texts in Thai and Burmese

### **11. The Tung Yai Narasuan Wildlife Sanctuary**

Through cooperation with local and regional governments, the Development for Children and Youth Foundation, and the Kemp Chai Foundations in Bangkok, creating educational and cultural projects for nine remote Karen villages that include:

- a.) A new curriculum for grades 1-6, to better reflect the local Karen culture and traditions
- b.) Training Karen teachers
- c.) Developing an alternative curriculum for grades 7-12
- d.) Creating a Karen cultural museum to promote the diversity and richness of Karen culture
- e.) Constructing a mud-brick dormitory for students in grades 7-12 attending a government school

Thank you kindly for taking the time to learn more about WS and the programs we offer to the local community. If you need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

James F. Connor (President)

Whispering Seed

PO Box 30

Sangklaburi, Kanchanaburi Province, 71240 THAILAND

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*James Connor Planting Rice With Children from Whispering Seed*



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- ♦ **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/](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.strugglingteens.com/archives/1995/10/oe06.html)



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# Books etc.

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by Mary M. Leue

## **Recollections of the Ferrer Modern School Colony of Stelton, New Jersey**

*To be published by Friends of the Modern School, April, 2007.*

This book of first-hand recollections of the families and children of the Ferrer Modern School Colony of Stelton, New Jersey, beautifully exemplifies the history of radical American education. It also recapitulates a largely untold aspect of American history chronicling the hopes and ideals for a new life of the waves of immigrants from oppression from other countries during the opening decades of the last century.

The educational dream of these immigrants is one we would do well to ponder in this new century at a time when our ignorance of other cultures threatens to create both dishonor and defeat for our country's policies abroad. Further, it is our failure to internalize the lessons of educational and community experiments like this one which has begun to manifest itself in the growing incidence of both violence and suicide among our school-age children – especially in public schools.

With the exception of John Dewey's home-grown progressive school movement, most of the reforms that have actually taken hold throughout the history of American education have been based on models which originated in Europe and only eventually migrated to this country, where they were taken up by the private sector of the educational establishment. By and large, these reforms ended up benefiting mainly the families of prosperous middle class suburban dwellers who were loath to expose their children to the strictures of public education. Whatever exceptions to this generality there are apply only to selected public schools within the precincts of prosperous localities.

The middle-class origin of these privileged American schools reflects the fact that their existence has seldom represented a desire to benefit any other children than "their own kind" – i.e., children of the middle-class, except on a purely theoretical basis. In this respect, most Americans seem to me blind to the implications (by default) of the class orientation of our society. I believe this blindness stems from unacknowledged prejudice toward the lower classes in America and a need to deny their existence – particularly by past members of that class! We are a nation of upward-mobile people bent on denial of our origins, whether those origins be "native" (meaning either white Anglo-Saxon Protestant or immigrant prior to the 18th century) or more recently immigrant, especially non-white and/or with names not derived primarily from the British Isles. Most of us have

conveniently forgotten our own actual origins in the slums, villages and shtetls of Europe.

It is ironic to note that these imported European reform movements derived their inspiration from impulses to better the conditions of the children of the poor, largely urban, working-class populations of Europe. The reforms they proposed aimed at modifying the draconian practices of church-based and governmentally-funded European school systems designed to nip the rebellious impulses of working class families in the bud, as it were. The children of the rich and prosperous middle class were seldom affected by these strictures, as their children were sent mainly to private schools. But something happened when most of these reforms crossed the ocean. What accounts for the fact that they ended up enhancing or replacing the curricula of hundreds of little private schools in this country? – a sea change from reforms originally aimed at the poor to small, private programs enhancing the well being of the prosperous.

This change occurred in Montessori and Waldorf programs during the third quarter of the 20th century, as well as in "alternative" (renamed from "free") and "holistic" educational programs all over the country. Interestingly, it is Waldorf education which has finally begun to return to its roots, in the training programs for "disadvantaged" students at centers like Rudolf Steiner College in Fair Oaks, California – but even here, such changes are largely barred from affecting public-sector schools, as Waldorf-trained teachers very seldom get themselves hired to teach there!

The early kindergarten movement which grew from the child-friendly ideas of the nineteenth century Prussian reformer Friedrich Froebel did at least make it into many of our public schools; and even today, despite the "academization" of kindergarten, traces of his humanistic methods with five-year-olds can still be found in some American public school kindergartens. But even among the imitators of A.S. Neill's Summerhill in this country, the 60s and 70s "free schools" came largely from a relatively prosperous (albeit "alternative lifestyle") socio-economic stratum, as Jonathan Kozol pointed out scornfully in his classic, *Free Schools*, published in 1972.

The one reformist group in the US that established a school that "made it" relatively intact in its original form on this side of the water represented some of the outcasts themselves as carriers of the proposed reforms, rather than solely the ideas of distinguished pedagogical reformers. One of the first of these radical schools, an Anarchist/Socialist Sunday School, had been organized in London in 1907 by Nellie Ploschansky, a thirteen-year-old Jewish refugee from the Ukraine who had arrived in London at the age of seven. Nellie's little Sunday school was to have a role to play later on in the Stelton Modern School when she and her husband Jim Dick, like so many other anarchist refugees, immigrated to the United States, and joined the staff.

But before the Dicks came the anarchists. Lest I be branded as a naïve ideologue, it is perfectly plain to me that the original group of twenty-two anarchists and anarchist sympathizers who initially sponsored the Francisco Ferrer Center in St. Mark's Place in New

York City's lower east side in 1911 were not themselves members of the working class in any strict sense of the term - nor were the group of thirty-two who became the first occupants of the new colony in Stelton, New Jersey. To quote from Susan Spayth Riley's Introduction, they were "radicals, free thinkers, immigrants and bohemians," many of them refugees from persecution in Russia and other European countries because of their ideas of radical reform. As Riley points out, the center was primarily a gathering place for lectures, discussions, theatricals and arguments and among these groups, which raged unabated among them all. She quotes one of them, Konrad Bercovici, as having written of these meetings, "...the political disputes raged from table to table. At one table the Marxists advocated organization, discipline and dictatorship of the proletariat. At the adjoining table the philosophical Anarchists shouted back that the world would be no happier a place to live in under socialism than it was under capitalism, and that a policeman with a socialist badge was no less a policeman than one with a capitalist badge. The Marxists, the anarchists shouted, wanted power and not the happiness of mankind. The socialists sneered at the anarchists and called them foolish utopians. The philosophical anarchists, the Kropotkinists ... didn't advocate bomb-throwing. They believed that people could be educated to a degree that would make every form of constraint superfluous. To achieve that, these anarchists published the best literature, translated the best books from a dozen languages, and organized amateur theatricals, concerts and lectures ... The anarchists of East Broadway believed in the goodness of man"

The motivation to organize a school came from the confluence of elements from all of these groups, families with children, who began meeting together at the newly organized headquarters of the Ferrer Association, inspired by its leading founder anarchist Emma Goldman, along with members of the families of other radicals. The Ferrer Association was founded by Goldman and others to honor the memory of the Spanish educator Francisco Ferrer, who had been executed in Spain in 1909, a martyr to his anti-church ideas. Ferrer had devoted his life to the establishment of anti-clerical, libertarian schools in Spain, believing as he did that education would eventually save mankind, primarily by freeing them from the dogma of the Catholic Church, as Riley tells us.

It was this poignant memory of the martyrdom of an advocate of educational freedom, which became the spark that was to ignite the fire necessary to unify the twenty-two founding families of the Modern School Stelton colony. But with the coming of Jim and Nellie Dick to the school, it fell also under the influence of the working class tradition of libertarian education which had grown up in London, and came from the anarchistic ideals of Jewish refugee groups from the Ukraine, Poland and Russia.

The history of the Stelton Modern School has been chronicled by Paul Avrich in his *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (1980), and his *Anarchist Voices* (1995), and the philosophy of education introduced into the school by Elizabeth and Alexis Ferm in her posthumously

published *Freedom in Education* (1949). We are indebted to Jon Thoreau Scott for having taken on the monumental task of putting it all together as editor in a volume rich with stories and pictures of those years. (Jon, by the way, is Chairman (Emeritus) of the Department of Atmospheric Sciences at SUNY Albany. Pretty good for a guy who didn't learn to read until he was ten or eleven.)

This collection of firsthand stories of those who actually lived in the colony and so were the recipients of that communal and educational experiment is a totally different kettle of fish from these other accounts. Its whole tone puts a very different slant on this social experiment from one a reader of the Avrich or Ferm books might come away with. The difference is striking. Suddenly, one is *there* in the story, sharing a sleeping bag on the floor of the huge, barren barn room set aside for a dormitory as the adult members of the school community begin transforming their newly acquired farm property to the motley group of refugees and reformers, the artists and intellectuals, the individualists and idealists who made up this colony of The Modern School of Stelton, New Jersey.

We follow the changes, the disagreements, the gradual growth of the little group as it begins to develop into a real colony with the building of house after house, primarily by refugees from New York City. These are the voices in the book who are willing to let us in on what they did, what they felt, how their lives really were. These are the voices of real people, not unlike ourselves.

Interestingly, it is *experiences* and *people* who are important, not subject matter or political theories about mankind. Viewing the colony from this perspective brings to life the ordinary, everyday nature of its history, the interwoven nature of school and community, of individual and the group, of families and experiences. To me, this is a far more profound reflection of the true nature of school in society than one seen from the curriculum or from the philosophy of pedagogy of any one model. The organization of the telling of this history, initially by Victor Sacharoff, is by *houses*, of which he lists two hundred nine, and, within this framework, the *families* and *children* who lived in those houses.

My own reason for writing this review is that, unlike most of the other varieties of successful educational experiments, this story has been largely ignored by educational historians. I don't think that is because of the relative brevity of the history of this one, which went from 1911 to 1958 - nor is it because the quality of the education enjoyed by the children of the colony was in any respect inferior to any other better-known "brand" of educational philosophy. In fact, as Elizabeth Berne Ferm, who, along with her husband Alexis, taught at the school from 1920 on, tells us in her book *Freedom in Education*, her training as a teacher had been in Froebelian methods and philosophy. Other influences were the progressivism of John Dewey as well as the libertarian beliefs and practices of the Fermes themselves and other teachers.

It is my contention that the reason this occurred is because of its radical origins, stemming as it did from the Escuela Moderna of

Francisco Ferrer and from the ideals of Prince Pyotr Kropotkin, in both of whose views division into classes plays no role whatsoever. The nature of the ideological journey from Spain to the urban slums of New York, and, ultimately, to the fields and streams of Stelton, New Jersey, makes it clear that this model of education is rooted in both community and in families, whose lives and experiences intersect the pedagogical roles of school *per se* in a degree of interweaving that points up by contrast the inferiority of segregated formal schooling.

In taking a look back at the lives of the families who were actually a part of this project, we are reexamining a sector of our heritage which has yet to be factored into the educational equation – namely, the submergence – and sometimes, as in the case of anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, active suppression by example and by association – of anarchistic ideals in America by both the media and the government during the 1920s, because of their fear of overthrow of the capitalist system in America.

The great depression of the 1930s, which created a national ordeal of virtually universal unemployment among working class people, created a reemergence of radical thought and action, primarily among the organizers of labor unions, but was prevented from becoming a real revolution by Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs, which more or less saved capitalism in America by putting people back to work, and by providing governmental safeguards like Social Security against the recurrence of such a general economic crisis. Alas, educational reforms for the children

of the millions of unemployed workers never did become an important factor in those ideas and actions focused on the injustices of the working class.

I suspect we as a people still suffer a kind of trauma in the memories of those hard times of the thirties passed on to us by our parents which has carried over into the schools of our country, such that respectability, even prudery, are the order of the day advocated for our children in most of our public schools, and adherence to discipline and obedience is still the recipe prescribed for success as a universal goal. No wonder the incidence of suicide and violence have become so alarmingly frequent among the children who fail to be totally captured by such melioristic doctrines.

It would be delightful to believe that the publication of this account of the actual experiences of these Stelton families, these children, so real, so lacking in conspiratorial mythologies, might help to lay to rest a few of the demons that continue to dog our culture and effectively prevent us from adopting the radical reforms that would be needed to help transform the nature of American society. I cannot really indulge in such a wishful fantasy – but oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if all our schools could take their cue from these halcyon accounts of life as it was lived by those fortunate families and by the lucky children who played in those games, created those plays, wrote those stories, painted those pictures, roamed those fields, climbed those trees and learned about nature by dabbling in that stream! Thank you for sharing your lives with the rest of us!



*Religious Studies Class at Harriet Tubman Free School (Albany, NY)*

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**Mesa Online Academy**

**P.O. Box 430**

**Roy, NM 87743**

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