

Education Revolution

THE MAGAZINE OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

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The 5th Annual AERO Conference "Moving From Ideas to Practice"

June 26th - 29th, 2008 - Russell Sage College - Troy, NY

The AERO conference brings together educators, students, parents, and many others interested and/or involved in educational alternatives from around the U.S., Canada, and the world. Many educational alternatives will be represented along with individuals from traditional schools and education backgrounds. Examples of the educational alternatives that will be represented include Public Alternatives, Unschooling, Montessori, Waldorf, Steiner, Choice, Democratic, Homeschooling, Open, Charter, Free, Sudbury, Holistic, Virtual, Magnet, Early Childhood, Reggio Emilia, Indigo, Krishnamurti, Quaker, Libertarian, Independent, Progressive, Community, Cooperative, and many more!

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Deborah Meier

Faculty at New York University's Steinhardt School of Education, Board Member for the Coalition of Essential Schools and Author of *Will Standards Save Public Education?* and *Many Children Left Behind* among many others.

Matt Hern

Author of *Field Day: Getting Society Out of School, Watch Yourself!*, *Why Safer Isn't Always Better*, and *Deschooling Our Lives*

Donna Barker

Doctoral Candidate with Dissertation on *Alumni from Democratic Schools & Parent of Students that Attended Educational Alternatives*

Mary Leue

Founder of *The Free School* and *SKOLE: The Journal of Alternative Education* and author and editor of many titles.

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Education Revolution

THE MAGAZINE OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

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.

The Mission of Education Revolution Magazine is based on that of the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO):

“Building the critical mass for the education revolution by providing resources which support self-determination in learning and the natural genius in everyone.”

Towards this end, this magazine includes the latest news and communications regarding the broad spectrum of educational alternatives: public alternatives, independent and private alternatives, home education, international alternatives, and more. The common feature in all these educational options is that they are learner-centered, focused on the interest of the child rather than on an arbitrary curriculum.

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Being There

WITH JERRY MINTZ

I've been doing a lot of traveling since our last issue.



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and forced curriculum are the norms. In the latter, that we support, the job of the educator is to provide the resources to support a learner-centered approach.

Another purpose of this seminar was to memorialize Alexander Tubelsky, who died this year. He founded the School of Self Determination, a public inner city experimental democratic school in Moscow. One day we got to visit the school. It is still a wonderful place, with a young principal who was a Tubelsky protégé. I didn't think people would know me there, but suddenly one girl broke down in tears when she saw me and ran over to hug me. She had met me at the IDEC in Germany in 2005 when Tubelsky brought a group of his students there. Shortly thereafter a couple of other students ran over. I had taught them table tennis at the IDEC, and they immediately brought me to the school's table tennis area so I could teach them more, and we were joined by several others students. Tubelsky's wife, who had come down to the school to greet us, warmly embraced me. I had once stayed at their house.

I walked around the school and found teachers and students happily engaged. There are 600 students in the school from K-12. One room, which you would never see in a USA school, was full of equipment for students to climb and jump on, with no teacher supervising. The rest of our group left before lunchtime to tour the Kremlin. The students asked me to stay at the school, which I was happy to do. I taught more ping pong, visited classes, and at the end of that day was invited to a remarkable event: In the culmination of a project which Tubelsky had initiated, at least 10 holocaust survivors arrived for ceremony in which newly created books of their recollections would be presented to them. There was a power point presentation of the creation of the manuscript. Individual students read from it. One girl could hardly finish before bursting in tears and briefly leaving the room. She returned to be consoled by the woman who wrote the words about events that happened more than 60 years ago.

Before we left Moscow Artiom Soloveychik took us down to his headquarters. It is a large building in which he puts together the First of September Newspaper, more than twenty specialty magazines for a variety of education fields, books and booklets for educators, as well as content for their top ranked website. It has many times more visitors, 400,000

I had been invited to be one of three keynote speakers at the Eleventh Annual Soloveychikovskie Reading, "School on the side of the child." This is an annual event which memorializes Simon Soloveychic who founded the First of September Newspaper, Russia's alternative education publication. It goes to 200,000 subscribers around Russia, is on the Internet free, and it is now the largest education publication in Russia, under the editorship of Simon's son, Artiom. He asked me to help contact Debbie Meier, a pioneering educator herself, in New York City and Boston. Debbie agreed to also keynote, along with Bret Schlesenger, who represented City as School, an important public alternative in New York City.

One of the purposes of the event was to try to save democratic education in a country in which democracy seems to be slipping away. In my presentation I tried to bring the delegates back to the time, during and after the coup that ended the Soviet Union, in which everything seemed possible in education and a lot of innovations were created. I then continued by describing some of the more innovative things happening now in alternative and democratic education around the world.

I defined the two paradigms that are afoot, competing for traction: One is that children are naturally lazy and need to be forced to learn. The second, which is embraced by alternative and holistic educators, is that children are natural learners. In the first approach, homework, competition for grades

a month, than the official one for the Russian department of education. They also have a new teacher-training program, online and local. He said that 85% of his employees have homeschooled their own children. I love his comment that, when things are going right with his hundreds of employees, he has nothing to do and can go out on his sailboat!

We visited Summerhill School in England on our way back from Russia. One funny incident happened after the school meeting banned Internet games in the computer room until 6 o'clock in the evening (of course, Summerhill is mostly boarding). The game diehards got around that by running the wires out the window and playing the games OUTSIDE the computer room (see picture)!

A few weeks later I was a keynote speaker at the 11th Annual conference of the Montessori Foundation and the International Montessori Council at the Clearwater Beach Hilton Resort in Florida. There were several hundred attendees at the conference from the United States and around the world, including India, Indonesia, South Africa, Senegal, Japan, Australia, and others. There were also a fairly significant number of Montessori students.

During my keynote, after outlining what AERO does as an organization, Sharon Caldwell read a series of quotes of Maria Montessori she had discovered that show Montessori was a far more radical thinker than people may have thought, and far ahead of her time. As Caldwell said, "Does a Montessori school exist where children are truly free to choose any occupation at any time of the day—a principle which Dr. Montessori expounded but which has been seriously undermined in the pursuit of 'academic advancement?'"

In my talk I said: "Maria Montessori was way ahead of her time. If she were alive today her previous ideas would not only still be ahead of her time, but she would be looking at life long learning, democratic education, how to further empower her students, and modern brain research. After all, she was a pioneering doctor and scientist! She would cringe at the foolhardy last vestiges of the top down, teach to the test, 19th century approach which manifests itself in the No Child Left Behind fiasco." For my workshop I did a demonstration of democratic decision-making process with junior high aged students and teachers from two Montessori schools.

Here's an example of a Montessori quote:

"The question is neither pedagogic nor biological, but is a social matter because all men form part of society, even babies, and even young people from 10 to 20 years old. The men who make up this society have clear-cut characters. For example, we live in democracies but for this to be really true, *everyone must be democratic, or rather everyone must live in a democratic way, even those who come between the ages of 0 and 20.*" (On the Schooling of Young People v -4, Course Lecture, Rome, 1951 in *The Child, Society and the World.*)

Now, back in New York, I'm not planning much travel in the near-future as we get ready for the AERO conference in June and the IDEC in Vancouver in August. ●

FROM THE

Editor's Desk

BY RON MILLER

I think we've got some great writing in this issue of *Education Revolution*. Several visionary pioneers describe their programs—learning alternatives that truly nourish and respect everyone involved *and* contribute to a more caring and collaborative society. Personally, I like where this magazine is going. I don't take much credit for that, though; it's just that I'm in the fortunate position of receiving inspiring writings from a wonderful international network of exceptional educators.

My question for you, the reader, is whether *you* like where the magazine is going. *Education Revolution* (including its earlier identity as *AEROGRAMME*) was originally intended to be a newsletter, informing readers about events, breakthroughs and challenges that alternative educators and homeschoolers were experiencing in their own projects and communities. We're publishing far fewer of such news items these days, in part because of my own editorial temperament, and also because I just can't take the time to sift through the hundreds of postings on AERO's listserves.

So, what would be most useful and relevant for you? What do you hope to get out of reading this publication? Should we continue to focus on thoughtful essays and descriptions of innovative projects, or would you like more brief news items about what your peers and colleagues are doing around the world? What can the printed magazine offer that wouldn't duplicate what is posted on AERO's website and listserves? Are there specific topics that you'd like to see addressed?

Please write to me directly at holistic@gmavt.net and let me know what you think. And if you have news from your school, homeschoolers' network, or educational decisions by local or state officials that you think are relevant to the wider network of alternative educators, please send those to me as well. A few issues back, I started a feature called "Networking the Networks" that was intended to highlight important developments within each component group of the educational alternatives movement. I'd like to bring that back, but we need you to tell us what's happening out there, because we don't have a team of investigative reporters or researchers on staff. Help me make this *your* magazine. ●

Teacher Training in Peace and Democratic Education

at the Hope Flowers School, Bethlehem, Palestine

BY IBRAHIM ISSA AND PALDEN JENKINS

The educational program of the Hope Flowers School directly addresses the fundamental causes of radicalization in Muslim society. Radicalization arises from frustration and unhealed pain, generated from the real-life conflict experiences of young people, their families and communities.

When children see tanks in the streets, soldiers taking their uncles away or military bulldozers demolishing their family homes, these experiences lodge in their psyches as a nexus of confusion and hurt. A community which shares such experiences will tend, even if only unconsciously, to reinforce resentments, incomprehension and distress, especially when difficulties continue or escalate.

Since its founding in 1984, Hope Flowers has developed a unique bundle of methods to deal with this, arising from the pressure of real need, the ongoing nature of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the clarity of the school's starting vision and the dedication of its teaching and support staff. In recent

years, other Palestinian schools have requested guidance and training, and our new two-year teacher training course seeks to fulfill this need.

While ordinary Palestinians cannot influence Israeli and international policy and practice, they can do a lot to work on their own attitudes and values, thus strengthening their culture and its capacity to withstand hardship and assault without needing to resort to violence.

years, other Palestinian schools have requested guidance and training, and our new two-year teacher training course seeks to fulfill this need.

The course aims to help teachers, children and their families, their peers and community to move forward together by understanding their situation more fully, by helping to directly relieve pain and insecurity and replace them with constructive beliefs and life-ways.

This teacher training is designed to help schools manage educational under-attainment, post-traumatic stress, disrupt-

tion in class, bullying and similar issues. It gives teachers knowledge and tools with which to address these problems fundamentally at the very age when such patterns form, and before they consolidate into teenage frustration, beliefs and habits that can fuel future conflict.

While ordinary Palestinians cannot influence Israeli and international policy and practice, they can do a lot to work on their own attitudes and values, thus strengthening their culture and its capacity to withstand hardship and assault without needing to resort to violence.

EDUCATIONAL METHODS

This teacher training provides several interlocking approaches to the problem of radicalization. Summed up, they include the following:

■ A good quality education providing tools whereby children and their teachers may improve their lives, understand their world and learn valuable skills.

The training gives teachers knowledge and skills to take care of the wellbeing of students and other teachers at their schools, and develop a positive psycho-social culture at the school. One element is to help teachers form teacher and student support groups for correcting problems in school and the wider community.

■ Learning how to understand, interpret and deal with viewpoints that are very different from their own.

Teachers are shown how to create a safe, empowering and supportive school environment. One method is to create a group of student conflict managers, who are trained by teachers to help resolve students' conflicts of interest. Methods include non-violent communication, Giraffe language, empowerment techniques and compassionate listening.

This involves examining different renderings of history and current affairs and discussing contrasting viewpoints. The training includes intercultural understanding and an English-language teachers' club, to help build cultural contacts and schools exchanges between the Muslim world and the West. We help teachers create a new, re-humanized image of the 'other', to minimize fear, misunderstanding and stereotyping and also to counteract extremist propaganda about Israel and the West and also from Israel and the West.

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■ Learning how to deal with difficult pre-conflict situations and the available response options.

Several steps are necessary before conflict transformation occurs. These are:

[1] *Awareness* – providing knowledge about forms of violence and alternative ways of dealing with it, and Islamic and traditional teachings that support people when formulating their awareness of their world and their reality;

[2] *Mental Clearing* – this helps make teachers aware of their *belief systems* and what lies behind radicals' calls to violence. Teachers learn how to build positive personal belief systems and think positively. They learn how thoughts create reality and how non-violent methods work in response to violence;

[3] *Building Vision* – teachers learn how to uncover a new sense of vision and mission in their lives and how to overcome obstacles to realizing their vision.

■ Learning about different faiths and world-views.

There are many stories from the *Quran* and the *Hadith* that illustrate tolerance within Islamic tradition. An educational system that respects others' beliefs, including secularism, emphasizes similarities with those beliefs and the value of respecting differences. Tolerance and respect have a fundamental counter-radicalization effect – and they're cool. Hope Flowers has assembled a collection of resources called *A Society of Peace and Justice in the Three Abrahamic Religions* which contains stories from the *Quran*, the Bible and the Old Testament, re-written in a simple way, appropriate to children's mental skills.

■ Learning how to communicate in their community.

When radical or violent ideas are advocated, teachers and children need ways to answer them or provide alternative viewpoints. Training includes speaking out in public, articulation of ideas, listening to and answering conflicting ideas, and personal diplomatic skills incorporating politeness and respect.

■ Learning how to identify and promote constructive and creative solutions to situations that arise.

This involves learning how to turn edgy situations into opportunities. These methods are used in everyday situations in the classroom. They include learning how to find the advantages available in complex situations, how to call for quiet and discussion and how to control one's own feelings.



■ Learning how to respect women and people of other backgrounds or persuasions.

Encouraging meeting them, reading books and newspapers and watching videos, followed by discussions. It involves learning how to recognize others' signs and signals, accept others' ways and communicate on an equal basis.

A COMPREHENSIVE, COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The Hope Flowers approach draws in the families of traumatized children, using counseling, discussion and mutual emotional-support mechanisms. This embraces parents, siblings, women, teenagers and other community members. It seeks to defuse tensions by promoting communication and mutual understanding, thereby changing the way extremist beliefs and incitement to violence affect individuals.

We also attend to the psychological welfare of teachers themselves, as social role models, such that their own trauma and frustrations can be identified, articulated and relieved. This reduces the unconscious replication of social frustration by teachers through short tempers, burn-out symptoms, low self-esteem, suppressed resentments or regrets about loss.

Many of these techniques are woven into the school curriculum and extra-curricular activities including art and drama, languages, play and horticulture, helped by visiting volunteers, summer schools and school exchanges.

Our teacher training helps teachers broaden their viewpoint and feel an integral part of the wider world, despite the constraints of their life situation in Palestine. This includes Internet usage, to give them access to global information sources and contact with teachers elsewhere.

Thus, our approach cultivates fundamental social-psychological conditions which soften extremism and prejudicial values and feelings in society. This is a long-term approach but, again and again, in such countries as Palestine and Iraq, earlier horrors and traumas make inhabitants develop



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extreme viewpoints and emotional dispositions tending toward violence and radicalism. People cannot be dissuaded from radicalism by argument alone, especially when they live in poverty or difficulty, unless their emotional predispositions are addressed.

No peace program can develop without the support of wider society, and this training encourages cooperation between schools and families. To reach out to a wider critical mass in Palestinian society, we show teachers how to organize community-based programs and form parental support groups. For example, with our World Café we organize monthly seminars for parents and the community, bringing moderate Muslim leaders and interesting speakers to talk about social alternatives and encourage meaningful conversation about violence, terrorism, civic society and education in an informal and relaxed atmosphere.

THE WIDER IMPLICATIONS OF COUNTER-RADICALIZATION

Without such fundamental social-healing work, violence and other social ills will tend quite predictably to reappear in future times. Our teacher training is not just a localized education project, solely benefiting West Bank people. It marks the beginning of a new social and educational approach which can, within one generation, contribute significantly to the moderation of social values and the maturing of social responses to difficult and changing circumstances.

Palestine is an ideal research and development arena for such methods, since it has suffered conflict for over sixty years and Palestinians have extensive experience in dealing with it. Awareness of Palestine's situation is widespread, and thus positive developments emanating from Palestine are likely to have a significant wider catalytic effect.

Radical movements thrive by providing simplistic views

of the state of the world and by channeling the frustrations of young people into extremist and destructive action. The solution thus lies in psychologically relieving these frustrations, broadening people's minds and undermining the recruitment process.

This is how the Hope Flowers teacher training program directly addresses the question of counter-radicalization. We believe this project represents a potent solution to many problems of war and violence, relevant not only to Palestine, Iraq or Afghanistan but also in peaceful countries, where unhappiness and frustration also dwell.

Ibrahim Issa is co-director of the Hope Flowers School, not only managing the school but also guiding its educational development and international fundraising. He was educated in the Netherlands, returning to Bethlehem in 2000 on the death of Hussein Issa, his father and the founder of the school. He lives in Bethlehem with his family.

Palden Jenkins is the school's webmaster and British representative, himself the founder of three community-based educational projects. He lives in Glastonbury, England, with his family. ●

The Hope Flowers School has guest and conference facilities, welcoming visitors from all over the world. It is an independent school, relying on international support and funding. Please visit the Hope Flowers website for full information: www.hopeflowersschool.org

Your feedback on this article is welcome and could be directed to hopeflowers@palnet.com.

Hope Flowers School, PO Box 732, Bethlehem, Palestine.

Hallmarks of an Education for Life School

BY NITAI DERANJA

When you visit an Education for Life School you will find that each classroom seems unique. There is no standardized “look” to the classrooms, no set outward curriculum that each teacher follows, and no fixed style of learning for students. What then, are the distinguishing features of an EFL school?

First and foremost, EFL teachers are trained to appreciate that life itself is a school. Throughout our lives, the events that come to us offer a series of lessons that can lead to an ever-deepening sense of personal fulfillment and happiness. Put slightly differently, life continually offers us the opportunity to expand our consciousness. From this perspective the primary goal for the years of formal schooling becomes the development of the skills and attitudes that will help us take full advantage of these life-lessons.

A hallmark of an Education for Life classroom then will be the modeling of a cheerful openness to life and the unexpected lessons that might come our way. Although teachers will bring appropriate lesson plans to class, there will always be a readiness to embrace and make use of whatever special experiences a particular day presents. In the early grades opportunities for growth might present themselves through an unexpected visitor, unusual weather, or a spontaneous incident from the playground. In later years there will be a concerted effort to involve students in the broader streams of life outside the classroom.

In every instance, an EFL teacher will strive to help students discern whether their responses to new events produce an expansion or contraction of consciousness. Specifically, the teacher will guide students from reactions of fear toward courage, from judgment toward compassion, from sadness toward joy. In our school’s philosophy this directionality of attitude is referred to as Progressive Development.

This focus on the gradual expansion of the student’s consciousness leads naturally to the next essential component of an EFL classroom, a child-centered curriculum. While every school must address the standard topics of modern education, the EFL curriculum will be child-centered in the sense that the teacher looks primarily to the students’ readiness for particular kinds of growth in determining the specific activities that will take place in the classroom. By knowing each student’s interests, talents, and potential, the teacher is able to present the lessons in a manner that maximizes student involvement and progress. Thus while a teacher may work with the same basic material over a period of years (fractions, world



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history, etc.), each class will manifest a unique expression of the learning process. EFL curriculum categories such as Understanding People, Cooperation, and Wholeness, as well as our small teacher/student ratios, facilitate this approach to learning.

The emphasis on a child-centered curriculum also contributes to a feeling of mutual respect between teacher and student. In paying close attention to individuals, the teacher develops an appreciation for each student’s positive qualities. Children, on the other hand, sense that the teacher is seeking to adapt the learning process to their interests and abilities as opposed to imposing a rigid program of prearranged lessons. In this way teacher and students can partake in the excitement of co-creating the curriculum.

The final characteristic of an EFL classroom is also rooted in the goal of preparing children to find happiness and fulfillment in life. In responding to life’s challenges, we have four primary tools at our disposal: the body, feelings, will, and intellect. The proper development of these “Tools of Maturity” lies at the heart of Education for Life. In our schools we emphasize one of these tools in each 6-year cycle of the child’s growth.

The stage from 0–6 encompasses the “Foundation” or preschool years. During this period the child is primarily

occupied with learning to relate to physical realities, especially those of the body. An EFL preschool will promote physical vitality through a healthy diet and generous amounts of exercise, sunlight, and fresh air. Frequent nature outings will be interspersed with activities specifically designed to promote physical agility and coordination. The Foundation Years are also a time for cultivating the physical senses through creating a beautiful classroom environment and involving the children in painting, crafts, music, dance, and other activities that refine the children's capacities for hearing, seeing, feeling, etc. Storytelling and role-playing are popular venues with this age for sharing initial insights into human behavior. The preschool years also provide an opportune time for establishing lifelong habits of cleanliness, cooperation, and kindness.

The next cycle of growth covers the period from 6-12, the "Feeling" or elementary years. During this stage we shift our emphasis from the body to working with and through the child's emotions. For a beginning step, children are helped to notice the different kinds of feelings and their varying effects on people. Students learn to appreciate and cultivate the uplifting influences of kindness, cheerfulness, and even-mindedness. Conversely, they can learn to redirect the disturbing energies that produce anger, greed, and jealousy. Techniques for working with these energies include breathing exercises, affirmations, yoga, and meditation. Of crucial importance during these years is the cultivation of the calm, centered state that leads to clear intuition.

As their capacity for refined feelings develops, students learn to discriminate between the positive and negative effects of different kinds of activities and environments. Teachers will also utilize feelings as a powerful stimulus for other kinds of learning by emphasizing the awe of nature and scientific exploration, the sense of order and symmetry in mathematics, and especially the encouragement to be gained from the study of inspiring and saintly people.

Properly understood, the "Willful Years" from ages 12-18 present some of the greatest opportunities for the child's development. Adults can help students avoid the self-involved negativity and rebelliousness that can plague the junior and



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senior high school years by encouraging positive applications of the will. Realistic, yet challenging goals must be set for these young people; goals that are in accordance with their own higher sensitivities as well as their individual talents and interests. Through faith in their positive potential and consistent adherence to appropriate disciplinary procedures, adults can support the students' efforts to gradually learn such lessons as perseverance, self-sacrifice, responsibility, and self-control.

Classroom applications of this approach will emphasize a "hands-on" style of learning where students can apply their energies to life-like situations. Science projects, debates, service projects and challenges of physical endurance are especially appropriate for this age group. A primary goal of the EFL teacher is to help each student identify and realize individual areas of expertise, thus providing a basis for the healthy development of the will. In an EFL school students of this age are asked to share in the responsibility for financing field trips and other special activities, even to the point of earning part of their tuition.

The final EFL cycle covers the "Thoughtful" or college years from 18-24. During this period the intellect is trained to work in conjunction with the three complementary tools of the body, feelings, and will. Intellectual insights are coordinated with the energy and enthusiasm produced by physical vitality, the intuitive feel for the rightness of an idea that comes from clear, calm feeling, and the ability to overcome obstacles that results from a dynamic application of the will. In this way the intellect becomes an effective tool for gaining the insights needed to lead a productive and fulfilling life. ●



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Education for Life is based on the teachings of the well-known Indian spiritual teacher Paramhansa Yoganada, developed by his disciple J. Donald Walters. Nitai Deranja started the first Education for Life School in 1972 and currently serves in the high school and teacher training program. There are now seven schools on the West Coast and one in Italy that practice this philosophy, serving students from preschool through college. See www.edforlife.org/

Humane Education for a Better World

BY ZOE WEIL

What if, by the time they had completed 8th grade, all children were aware of the people who make their clothes and electronics and realized that their money and choices represented their vote for working conditions throughout the world? What if they understood the relationship between the food in their cafeteria, growing obesity rates and ill-health, water pollution and soil erosion, and the suffering of farmed animals, so that with their school administrators they changed the food service so that it offered healthy, humanely-produced meals?

What if, by the time these students graduated from high school and college, they could readily identify sustainable practices in various industries that were not only ecologically sound but also profitable, and this model became their personal standard as they forged their own careers?

What if, in essence, we raised a generation to care – to know that what they do matters, not just to themselves but also to everyone their lives touch; to understand the connections between both their personal and cultural choices and the fate of other people, other species, and the Earth, and to take responsibility for creating a better world?

Humane education helps us raise this generation by inspiring young people to identify the values that will guide them through life, and then teaching them the process of embodying these values in the face of complex problems and needs.

Quality humane education uses a four-element approach that includes:

- [1] *Providing accurate information* about the interrelated issues of human rights, environmental preservation, animal protection, and culture.
- [2] *Teaching critical thinking* so students discern fact from opinion and resist forms of manipulation, whether from advertising, media, peers, or social norms.
- [3] *Inspiring the 3 Rs of reverence, respect, and responsibility* so students have both the passion for and the commitment to bringing about positive change.
- [4] *Offering positive choices* so that students can become part of a growing effort to develop sustainable, peaceful, and humane systems by which to live.

Our world faces a host of problems, from genocide, escalating worldwide slavery, and extreme poverty to global

warming, resource depletion, and the loss of this planet's biodiversity to institutionalized animal cruelty in numerous industries. Young people are rarely educated about more than a few of these problems, or taught about the connections between them, or inspired to come up with viable solutions. Nor are they prepared to take their place as citizens and future professionals whose role will be to change systems of oppression and destruction into ones that are healthy and humane.

In the humane education classroom, young children are offered not only the traditional tools for learning, but are also given plenty of opportunities to experience reverence and respect, whether outdoors in nature, by meeting and learning from wise members of the community, or by hearing stories about heroic, compassionate historical figures.

We do our youth a disservice if we do not prepare them to be practically and creatively engaged in these issues. While it's important not to give young people a laundry list of disasters, it's imperative that we make surviving well into the coming centuries the centerpiece of education and help students develop the skills for innovative responses to global challenges. Our children deserve no less than real preparation for the real world and inspiration for an exciting journey toward restoration and peace.

What does humane education look like in practice? In the humane education classroom, young children are offered not only the traditional tools for learning, but are also given plenty of opportunities to experience reverence and respect, whether outdoors in nature, by meeting and learning from wise members of the community, or by hearing stories about heroic, compassionate historical figures. Older students are taught how to analyze products, advertisements, and the media so that they can discern truth from hype and news from public relations, and then make truly informed choices. They are not only taught about the challenges that confront us, but are also given the opportunity to meet visionary inventors



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and leaders who are creating technologies and systems to meet those challenges, and they are encouraged to work together to generate their own solutions to problems.

In terms of specific subjects, math classes teach how equations, statistical analysis, and algorithms can be applied meaningfully to solve real-life concerns. Teachers of language arts choose books in which wisdom, integrity, and courage enable protagonists to successfully prevail over injustice. History might explore such books as Jared Diamond's *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, in order to understand how and why cultures crumble or thrive and explore methods for achieving a sustainable and peaceful society on a global scale.

In a humane education school the categorization of subject disciplines sometimes disappears. Imagine, for example, a course simply titled "Food" that examines what we eat and its myriad effects through economics, nutrition, history, government, mathematics, marine science, political science, anthropology, psychology, law, health, ecology, genetics, and ethics, to name some of the subjects connected to food. Students might examine a fast food meal in an effort to unravel a web of interconnected problems and determine dietary choices and farming practices that are actually sustainable, humane, and healthy.

The times we live in call upon us to make the acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills, and commitment to living ethically, sustainably, and peaceably on this planet *the very purpose of education*. This is the goal of humane education. ●

Zoe Weil is the author of *The Power and Promise of Humane Education* and *Above All, Be Kind: Raising a Humane Child in Challenging Times*. She is the president of the Institute for Humane Education (IHE), which offers a distance-learning M.Ed. in humane education through an affiliation with Cambridge College and a Humane Education Certificate Program. IHE also offers weekend humane education workshops throughout the U.S. and Canada. Visit: www.HumaneEducation.org for more information.

IHE offers two kinds of workshops throughout the U.S. and Canada: *Sowing Seeds* and *MOGO*.

The *Sowing Seeds* humane education workshop will teach you how to offer empowering, effective, and transformative humane education programs and to communicate about important global issues in a positive and inspiring manner. This workshop is highly recommended for educators, activists, and people who are considering applying to our M.Ed. or Humane Education Certificate Program. Please visit www.HumaneEducation.org or email sowingseeds@HumaneEducation.org for more information about upcoming workshops.

The *MOGO (Most Good)* workshop will help you live a life that deeply reflects your values. You'll learn about the ways in which your everyday choices, your work, your activism, and your volunteerism can do the most good and the least harm. Part retreat, part educational workshop, *MOGO* is recommended for anyone who wishes to learn how to make their lives a manifestation of their greatest vision for the world. Please visit www.HumaneEducation.org or email MOGO@HumaneEducation.org for more information about upcoming workshops.

Deschooling Yourself

Shedding the unconscious habits of school

BY CHARLES EISENSTEIN

Coercive schooling exemplifies a mode of being that no longer serves humanity (if indeed it ever did). As we awoken to that truth and work to create different institutions, we want to be careful not to perpetuate the old ones unconsciously. So many revolutions have failed when they have torn down one system only to replace it with another embodying the same unconscious habits and beliefs. Horror and injustice are sure to follow when a revolution doesn't touch deeply-held habits of thinking, doing, and being.

An education revolution is no different. How to avoid recreating the old within the new? How to prevent the same underlying disease from expressing itself in new form? Ideological vigilance is not enough (in fact it harks to the old system). In myself, I have noticed time and again the habits of schooling infecting what I do, so that sometimes I end up perpetuating the fundamental mindset of schooling even when I speak out against it!

That is why I have decided to “deschool” myself—to

... in school we learned that it is important to be right—to hold the right opinion and be able to produce the right answer. Then we get points, credit, self-esteem. Well what about letting go of being right, and just listening without judgment?

bring these unconscious habits and beliefs into the light of awareness and dispel them. In this endeavor I have received crucial help from some extraordinary people and books. Deschooling is surely a process of mutual illumination. In that spirit, I offer you this list of 28 habits/beliefs of school that I've noticed in myself and others, along with some commentary as space allows.

None of these are exclusive to school, just as school itself does not exist in isolation from other institutions of our civilization. These habits and beliefs are ambient in the culture. School is just one of the main ways of enacting and reinforcing them.

- [1] Seeking “credit” for the right answer.
- [2] Seeing problems as having a right answer, and thinking that by articulating the solution, I have solved the problem.
- [3] Seeking external validation for choices, as in “What should I do?” I can't just choose, can I? How do I know it's the right choice? I'd better go ask someone.
- [4] Unthinking trust and respect for authority OR reflexive antagonism toward authority.
- [5] Being on time OR willfully resisting being on time.
- [6] Work: a matter of completing assignments.
- [7] Life: a process of graduating from one externally-provided program to the next.
- [8] Status: defined by rank within an institution.
- [9] Personal worth: dependent on external evaluations.

Wait! As you read through these, do you notice any habits of schooling operating within yourself? Are you skimming over them to simply check if you “know” them already (as if for a quiz)? Are you evaluating each one to determine whether it is right or wrong? Because after all, in school we learned that it is important to be right—to hold the right opinion and be able to produce the right answer. Then we get points, credit, self-esteem. Well what about letting go of being right, and just listening without judgment? Listening truly and deeply to another person is a new habit for me, one that is inconsistent with school habits of constantly evaluating myself and others, or listening only enough to garner information. Because another belief of schooling is that...

- [10] Knowledge equals information, and to know about something is to know something. This is related to:
- [11] Knowledge and intelligence can and should be quantified, or at least evaluated, and thus:
- [12] Constantly evaluating oneself and others. Meditation techniques can throw the habit of self-evaluation into sharp relief. It is an enormous, unconscious burden we carry around

I remember one time in front of a Penn State classroom, I saw my entire teaching and writing career as one long attempt to be right... what creates rich and fruitful relationships is not being right, but providing things to people that are useful to them in some way. In other words, giving.

with us nearly all the time. Sometimes I lead a short—caution: school word—“exercise” designed to short-circuit this habit and give people an experience of the lightness, clarity, and freedom that is our birthright. Afterwards, the old habits reassert themselves. Nonetheless, just knowing that another way of being exists, and what blocks it, can be revolutionary.

[13] Measuring performance by external standards.

[14] Seeking external validation for ones performance and achievements.

[15] Wanting to be recognized as “smart”.

[16] Wanting to be recognized as right, and simply

[17] Wanting to be right.

I remember one time in front of a Penn State classroom, I saw my entire teaching and writing career as one long attempt to be right, and prove my rightness to whomever would listen. Well guess what? No one cares if you are right. You don't get any bonus points from God or anyone else for holding correct opinions your whole life. You can maybe impress people sometimes, but so what? They will walk away impressed. But what creates rich and fruitful relationships is not being right, but providing things to people that are useful to them in some way. In other words, giving. Establishing ones own rightness is actually a subtle form of taking. It took me a long time to learn this, and I wasted many hours on Internet listserves, taking turns being right with everyone else. It was as if we all thought that the world's problems would be solved “if only everyone would agree with me.” This is another variation of the school habit of thinking that if you can write down the right answer, the problem is solved.

[18] Learning starts from the basics.

[19] The mind is more important than the body and its feelings. In fact, the body and feelings must often be denied for the sake of learning.

[20] Learning, therefore, is hard.

[21] Making people do what's “good for them” (through coded incentives and threats).

[22] Making myself do what's “good for me” (through internalized incentives and threats).

[23] Laziness (a natural response when work is compelled).

[24] Wistfully gazing out the window. When will I be let out?

[25] Obsequiousness: showing off knowledge to the person in power.

[26] Looking good to the person in power.

[27] Displaying submission cues to the person in power. (These last three might be effective sometimes out of school, in other institutional settings. But they are less effective than we think even there).

[28] Thinking that success will come by pleasing someone more powerful than myself, who will then dispense to me favors and privileges.

This list represents just a few of the habits of schooling that have been present in my life. No doubt you can think of many more. Maybe you can even find some, still unconscious to me, in this essay! However, comparing oneself to others and critiquing them is another habit of school that is rarely useful in the real world. Let us cease schooling ourselves and each other. “Don't school on me!” Only then can we really hope that our children will create a more beautiful world. ●

EDITOR'S NOTE: Charles presented a workshop on this topic at the AERO conference this year. He is the author of an amazing book that examines the deep historical roots of our current cultural disintegration, The Ascent of Humanity, recently published by Panentheia Press.

School Could Take a Lesson From Summer Camp

BY JESSICA ARENDS

This summer I had the honor of volunteering at an overnight camp in the mountains. Like those I had attended as a child, we had camp fires, dusty cabins and showers shared with insects. I relived the joy of creek swimming and having the day dictated by meals rather than bells or meetings. I also remembered how much I loved camp, and with my adult perspective, understood why.

There are many obvious reasons as to why camp is just so good. Bed time is flexible, you sleep in a bunk of kids your age, and you revel in independence from mom and dad but are still anxious for their letters. There is no act of balancing piano lessons, orthodontist appointments and soccer practice with nightly homework assignments. As I continue to teach high school, I watch this mad scheduling increase every year. School and after-school activities are about becoming the perfectly polished college candidate. I meet with parents who fear one non-honors or advanced placement class will keep their child from that educational edge over his or her peers. Camp is one of the few places left where kids can just be themselves. The importance of watching grasshoppers and the nightly changing stars trumps earning higher SAT scores.

Many elements of camp can serve as valuable models for us school reformists. Schools could learn from camp as it capitalizes on intrinsic motivation, gives instructors freedom and allows for increasingly-advocated authentic assessment.

“Why are we writing a compare and contrast essay?” my inquisitive and insatiable students ask me. Because we have to. Because the district says that in order to be eligible for a diploma, you must write one. “Why do we have to read this book?” Because one day, you will read a newspaper headline that will allude to this story and your life will be better fulfilled. Because it will make you a more global thinker. Because you will be able to make literary conversation with a cute girl that will be in your freshmen English Comp class. These are the challenges I have in winning over my English students as learners.

What I observed at camp, however, was very different. The workshops offered at camp let each camper decide what they want to do with their time. Several activities are offered: camp staples such as print making, face painting and pottery; but, there was also filmmaking, songwriting and Arabic lessons. Because the campers were given many choices, they were able to find a topic they were genuinely interested in. In observing the workshops, I saw a level of involvement that would be the envy of any teacher. Students taught each other about their topics, produced high quality products

and behavior problems were just about non-existent. Indeed, when students are producing something in a class they are interested in, that intrinsic motivation carries them through the process. No lingering threat of a failing grade or parental disappointment from the teacher is needed. You would not find a camper ready to ask: Why am I making this clay pot? It is not to understand the chemistry of the mud and water or to develop artistic abilities. The simple answer is: Because I would like to make a pot to put a few flowers in.

Another lesson available to schools from camp is the opportunity for more instructional freedom. Disentangled from standards, counselors have almost total control in the choosing, planning and executing of their workshops. They decide their workshops based on their own interests. They simply get director approval and are free to teach as they like. This allows the counselor’s talents and knowledge to shine; and, creates a contagious passion for the campers. This also expanded the types of workshops available. For example, one counselor with Middle Eastern heritage decided to teach Arabic. Campers varying in ages 9 to 13 studied the alphabet, learned to write their names, and made baklava. When asked if they would like to continue studying the language, they answered unanimously yes. The freedom to choose for the instructor was just as powerful as the campers’ interest in determining the educational value of the workshop. Any teacher who has been given the green light to teach what is close to their heart has seen this valuable and contagious passion ignite in the classroom.

The final lesson schools could learn from camp is that of authentic assessment. As teachers, we continually strive to answer: How will we know they know what they know? As the pendulum in the political arena favoring standardized assessment has yet to swing back to the center, this remains an integral part of school reform. Assessments must be authentic, in other words, meaningful, applicable, useable, realistic and valuable to the learner. You must teach them how to write the essay, but it has to be for a purpose.

Camp is very successful at this. In another workshop, the campers designed a field guide for the camp. They went out to “magic spots” to observe the wildlife then made notes as to their findings. Using bird and plant books, they looked up interesting facts and identification methods to create their own camp guide. The field guide will stay at camp for other campers to use and build upon. Each page was designed with the same layout: a description of the species, a picture, warnings or medicinal uses and a color-coded map of the camp to in-

dicate where it could be spotted. Then each camper presented their pages to the entire camp. During the presentations, you could see the pride in each camper as they become experts in their particular subject. And of course the audience was interested- who knew stinging nettles could be made into a tea to aide in digestion? Who wouldn't want to know where to avoid the poison oak? Their learning had a direct and meaningful impact for the campers and their peers. Isn't it possible to help

create the same meaningful experiences in school?

Granted one of the beauties of camp is that it is not school. I would never suggest abandoning academics for year round camp. But perhaps a balance could be found to provide better educational opportunities for our students. And we as teachers and administrators will find our clock-watchers and day-dreamers becoming self-motivated, articulate and successful learners. ●

The 2007 IDEEC in Brazil

BY HELENA SINGER AND MILENA DURANTE

The 15th International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC) took place between the 8th and the 16th of September 2007, in Mogi das Cruzes, 65 kilometers from São Paulo. The Conference was organized by the Politeia¹¹ Institute of Democratic Education, the Laboratory of Studies and Researches on Teaching and Diversity of the University of Campinas (LEPED- Unicamp), the Social and Environmental Institute (ISA) and the School of Education of the University of São Paulo (FE-USP) as a parallel event to the World Education Forum of Alto Tietê (FME-AT). The World Education Forum was created in 2001 as a result of the World Social Forum, an international movement that aims at uniting initiatives that offer alternatives to the neoliberal hegemony. Organizing IDEEC in partnership with two of the best Universities of the continent and also with FME had two main goals: on one side, to question the real possibilities of democratic education being able to formulate public policies and, on the other side, to make them become a subject of academic debate.

Regarding figures, the Conference could be described like that: about 170 people gathered at the event: students, educators, researchers, parents – belonging from 65 organizations in 13 countries: Brazil, Peru, Mexico, Canada, United States of America, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Ukraine, Israel and Japan. When the activities were also open to the World Education Forum's audience, there were up to 800 people taking part in them. The schedule of the Conference was built based on the assessment done during IDEEC 2006 in Australia and also on the suggestions made by the Latin American organizations, which the questionnaires mentioned in the beginning of this article were sent to, besides the suggestions that were placed in the collaborative virtual environment that was created a few months before the Conference.

Based on these suggestions, some more complex themes of democratic education were treated in different formats: panels, debates, workshops, exhibitions – offering an opportunity for all the participants to deepen their thoughts about issues such as educators training courses for democratic

schools, democratic assessment, procedures that allow democratic management and educational possibilities in cities.

But not only the debated themes allowed the experience of democratic education. As well as in democratic schools, the organization of the Conference happened through meetings that took place almost every day, in the beginning or in the end of activities. The participants of IDEEC could also experience democratic education in different languages such as theater, music, dance, yoga and photography. And also visits: after the Conference, many foreigners visited organizations that practice democratic education in different regions of the country.

A piece of news that impressed those who participated of IDEEC – both who attended it personally and also the virtual participants, that were following the Conference by the e-mail discussion list – was the number of democratic schools in Asia announced by Kageki Asakura, from Tokyo Shure University: 100 democratic schools in Korea – that, not by chance, will be the host of IDEEC 2009 –, and almost 300 in Japan. Even though most of these schools are small, this fact emphasizes the movement of children who refuse to attend the strict local schools in these countries. In Japan, there is an estimate of two to three thousand children that refuse to go to school. Although the homeschooling legalization process is still being debated, several family associations that practice it have already been created as well as the democratic schools that come as an answer for this need.

IDEC 2007 has accomplished its goal of placing Latin America at the network of democratic education. The European, Asian and North American participants were able to learn more about the experience of democratic education on this side of the world, where the history of community education, the movement for inclusive schools and the indigenous schools experience offer new possibilities for the democratic education movement. And the Latin American participants were able to learn about the vast and diverse experience of democratic education in private and public schools in different countries of the North Hemisphere. ●

Conferences

IDEC 2008

IDEC 2008 will be held in Vancouver, Canada. It will be organised by SANE, the Society for the Advancement of Non-coercive Education, a collaborative group of former and current teachers, students, parents, founders, researchers and supporters of Windsor House, Canada's longest running democratic school. David Gagnon, of the hosting committee, can be contacted at idec2008@gmail.com.

EUDEC 2008

The European regional IDEC will be held at Leipzig University from July 25th through August 3rd. It is being hosted by the Free School Leipzig in co-operation with the University of Leipzig, the National Association of Free Alternative Schools in Germany and the Sudbury Initiative Leipzig. Additional support and input is being provided by a European-wide planning group made up of students and educators from schools and organisations throughout Europe.

The website is www.EUDEC2008.org, and the contact address is leslieocker@aol.com.



Technology and Education:

ANOTHER CONFERENCE WORTH NOTING

ICICTE 2008 will be held on Corfu, Greece, July 10-12, 2008. It will address the many challenges and new directions presented by technological innovations in educational settings. It will bring together an international community of scholars and practitioners in a forum setting. Opportunities for discussion on current thinking and practices in applications of technology to education are enhanced by the limited number of participants.

Conference themes include:

- The use of technology in education to promote democratic ideals, freedom, equality.
- The architecture of learning; accessibility; the evolution of the classroom
- Pedagogy in the evolving tech environment
- Informal and formal adult education
- Multi-grade education
- Instructional design and delivery; evaluation and assessment
- Strategies and tools for teaching and learning, simulations and gaming
- Impacts on educational institutions: effects on faculty, staff, administration, and students; curriculum and program development
- Ethical considerations in the use of information technology in teaching and learning
- The internationalization of institutions and of education
- Open/Distance learning
- Building communities of teachers/educators; cooperative learning
- Teacher training

For information see http://www.icicte.org/ICICTE08_About.htm

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News & Communications

National.....

The Forum for Education and Democracy aims to re-center the democratic purpose of our public schools. We work to promote education for democratic life based on the following guiding principles: High quality schools and teachers focused on educating for democracy; Equitable and adequate school resources for all children; Appropriate democratic control of public schools. In pursuing its mission, The Forum uses the following guiding values, among others: Public education is foremost about enabling each young person to develop his/her strengths, use his/her mind well, and become connected to his/her community; The work in schools should be intellectually challenging, connected to the skills needed for real world success, and personalized so that students are known to those who teach them; Public education is fundamental to a democratic, civil, prosperous society; Parents and communities should be involved in all attempts to improve public schools; The work of education for democratic citizenship is not only the responsibility of the public schools, but is shared by other cultural institutions and should be supported by them as well. For more information see www.forumforeducation.org/index.php

Wisconsin Teacher Protests No Child Law, by *Ryan J. Foley, AP*: A middle school teacher who refused to administer the first part of a federally required standardized test because of moral objections was reluctantly at his desk for the second round Thursday to save his job. David Wasserman had sat in the teachers' lounge Tuesday, leaving his colleagues to oversee the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam. The test is used to measure whether schools are meeting annual benchmarks under the No Child Left Behind law, President Bush's signature education policy. Schools that do not meet goals can face sanctions. Like many teachers, he said he believes the test is a poor way to measure student progress, takes up too much class time and is used unfairly to punish schools. So after years of growing frustration, he said he decided to be a "conscientious objector" this year. Wasserman had planned to resume his protest for five more days of testing. But he said district officials warned he would be fired from Sennett Middle School if he did. On Thursday, he was allowed to sit at his desk for 90 minutes but still have two other teachers oversee the test for his 30 eighth-grade students.

He said he planned a similar routine during the final four days of testing next week. FairTest, a national group that opposes the overuse of standardized tests, said it was unaware of

any other similar actions by teachers protesting the law. Wasserman said teachers and parents bombarded him with phone calls and e-mail messages Thursday after news of his protest spread nationwide. He said that some critics have falsely accused him of not caring about his students but that the vast majority of messages have been supportive.

From **Charles Murray, Erstwhile Champion of the SAT, Has Changed His Mind about the Test and Says It's Time to Scrap It**, by *Christopher Shea*: The author of the controversial 1994 book "The Bell Curve" and champion of IQ tests might be the last person in the world you'd expect to object to a test that boils academic aptitude down to a couple of numbers burned into students' memories for life. Yet Murray has just invigorated the anti-SAT cause with a manifesto titled "Abolish the SAT" in *The American*, a magazine published by the American Enterprise Institute, where he's a senior scholar. He's convinced that the SAT provides little information about high school students not already provided by their grades and scores on so-called achievement tests, exams that are tied to specific academic subjects. And dumping the SAT would have numerous benefits: scuttling what he sees as a deceptive test-prep industry, undercutting the unproductive smugness that comes from thinking one's high SAT score reflects personal glory (he views it as the luck of the genetic draw), and short-circuiting the contention that the SAT amounts to a conspiracy against low-income students. There have long been complaints about the test, but Murray's turnabout coincides with a surge in criticism of the SAT and its use by colleges. A University of California researcher, on whose earlier work Murray draws, released a study in June affirming that the SAT provides little additional information in California's admissions process. Meanwhile, an article in the newest *American Sociological Review* argues that admissions officers – despite some assertions to the contrary – are putting more weight on the SAT than ever. Murray's intervention could make a difference, given his reputation and his status in some conservative circles. In 2001, the UC researchers found that achievement tests and high school GPA were powerful predictors of freshman-year college performance at even the weakest California high schools – which sealed the deal for Murray. Last month, Saul Geiser and co-author Maria Veronica Santelices released a follow-up report showing that the 2001 findings were confirmed by the students' grades throughout their college

years. Is this a never-ending debate? Maybe not, Murray said: If Harvard dropped the test, “the SAT would disappear almost instantly.” The Boston Globe.

From **Encouraging Teachers to Teach off the Script and Embrace Spontaneity:** To the dismay of many educators throughout the country, the popularity of scripted curricula has spread to many public schools, especially those serving poor communities. In response to the widespread belief that high-stakes testing will improve the nation’s schools, teachers are pressured to teach to standardized tests and not waste time on lessons or activities that won’t be on one of these tests. Even if there is a major event the children are eager to discuss – a presidential election, an eclipse, the collapse of a freeway, or an earthquake – many teachers fear spending precious class time on anything that won’t be on the end-of-the-year standardized test. And in many districts, especially those that serve children from the poorest families, teachers are handed scripts and ordered to follow them to the letter. The companies that produce these programs point to studies demonstrating that adhering to the scripts will pay off in higher test scores. While they may in fact raise scores somewhat, scripted lesson plans can be deadly to children eager to learn more than what is covered on the test for their grade level. These schools can be even more mind-numbing for teachers who have been attracted to the profession by a desire to engender in their students a passion for learning. While some new teachers may welcome a script that spells out what to do with most of the school day, veteran teachers and dynamic, creative young teachers are more likely than ever to leave the profession, disgusted by the tedium of drill-and-kill and saddened by the lack of time or freedom to engage their students in the excitement of learning interesting stuff. The idea of using high-stakes testing to improve schools may stem from a genuine desire to offer all children a high-quality education, writes Nancy Ginsburg Gill in Education Week. But if higher test scores are achieved by mandating that teachers follow a script and eschew spontaneity and passion, we will find few great teachers left in the classroom. In fact, we might as well save money on salaries and benefits and employ robots to run the drills. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/07/18/43gill.h26.html>

Reducing H.S. Dropout Rates Through Smaller Learning Communities, by *Carmen Bellefont and Tonjuna Iverson:* Increasing dropout rates are problematic for many school districts. Metro Schools’ leaders developed a new program they believe will keep students on track and in school. They’ve started what they’re calling “Small Learning Communities,” which focus on helping students when they first enter high school. The idea is to encourage freshmen to be focused right away and to provide the support they need to produce early and long-term high school success. “They’re in a concentrated area where they get to really know their teachers so they have

people they can connect with,” said Carmen Bellefont, a first-year English teacher at Hillwood High School. The program is a fresh approach to teaching and involves every freshman in the school district. “What we’re doing is trying to personalize and individualize each student’s learning,” said Tonjuna Iverson, who coordinates the program at Hillwood High School. Incoming high school students receive extra academic and personal support as part of an effort to decrease dropout rates and ensure academic success. The program is designed to have students stick together and receive specialized tutoring. Hillwood students have their own wing. Teachers believe the program will acclimate students to high school life. “They are in a more nurturing environment,” Iverson said. Bellefont said she plans to push her students by setting the bar pretty high. “I want them to exceed their own expectations of what they thought they could do and I want to help them reach that,” she said. Metro plans to track student success every year to monitor how the program is working. Hillwood has more than 300 freshmen and administrators hope in four years there is the same number of graduating seniors. Several schools in the Knoxville area have been using this program for quite some time. The head of Hillwood’s program started it in Arkansas before moving to Middle Tennessee.

From **Private Companies Move into Special Ed,** by *Will York, AP:* Mark Claypool founded Educational Services of America in Nashville in 1999 as one of the few companies even attempting to make money by running special education private schools. With programs in 16 states, ESA owns and operates more than 120 private and charter schools. It hires the teachers and sets up the curriculum for about 7,800 students with learning, developmental or behavioral problems. Only about 2 percent of all special education students – about 100,000 – are taught in private schools set up exclusively for special education, according to recent data from the U.S. Department of Education. And there are only about 125 private special education programs that are trying to make a profit, said Sherry L. Kolbe, executive director of the National Association of Private Special Education Centers. Claypool said none among that small group can match what ESA is doing: Providing nationwide service in alternative education, special education and college prep. ESA schools offer instruction for students with many kinds of disabilities, from mental retardation to high-functioning autism. One of its rapidly growing programs helps high school special education graduates who want college degrees. “The idea was that there are a lot of young adults with learning disabilities, and the expectation wasn’t there that they were going to go to college,” Claypool said. “And it should have been, because they’re often quite bright.” The College Living Experience, which soon will have six campuses nationwide, allows students to live in their own apartments while teaching them how to shop for groceries, eat at restaurants and dress appropriately. The company gets some

National

money from tuition, but also through vouchers and contracts with states and school districts, which have drawn the ire of some education advocates who say private businesses should not be getting tax dollars.

From **National Companies Cash in with Charters Where the Kids Learn at Home**, by *Emily Richmond, Las Vegas Sun*:

The jury is still out on the effectiveness of so-called distance learning – interactive classes that are accessed by home computer – and virtual schools. But there are plenty of Clark County parents who want their kids out of brick-and-mortar public schools and see virtual charters as safe, viable alternatives. And they are being courted by for-profit companies that see Nevada as their next market.

Nevada’s charter schools are supposed to be homegrown efforts, driven by bold parents and educators thinking outside of the box but operating on the same shoestring budget as a conventional public school. Considering the money charter schools can make for private companies able to recruit the support of parents, it isn’t surprising to find competing firms rushing to fill the void. The number of students in Nevada enrolled full time in virtual schools is approaching 10 percent and is growing. That fact isn’t lost on the two companies that want a piece of the action and are establishing footholds in Nevada – Connections Academy LLC, headquartered in Baltimore, and K12 Inc., a subsidiary of a holding company headquar-

tered in Herndon, Va. The state Board of Education approved both Nevada Connections Academy and Nevada Virtual Academy (affiliated with K12) in March, despite a negative recommendation from the board’s charter schools subcommittee. Although acknowledging they profit by their involvement in charter schools, representatives of both companies are quick to point out that the local charter school board retains full control over daily operations and can sever ties with the companies at any time. The new academies are competing against existing charter schools, including one virtual program already operating in Clark County. Both academies use licensed teachers to monitor students’ work, which is completed with the help of online materials and traditional textbooks. Both organize field trips and optional get-togethers for their classes. It remains to be seen how profitable it is for K12 and Connections to be in the charter school business in Nevada. The two new virtual schools will have to file financial statements no later than July showing how much money was received from public and private sources, and how it was spent. Cindy Reid, a member of the state Board of Education and chairwoman of the charter schools subcommittee, said the two new virtual charter schools are tantamount to state-subsidized home-school programs, in violation of state law. Nevada Virtual Academy and Nevada Connections Academy contend they are not home-schooling programs, because they – and not the parents – are ultimately held accountable for the students’ performance.

International

GERMANY

German ‘Ghost School’ Uncovered After 30 Years, by *Kate Connolly, The Guardian*: A secret school that was run for almost 30 years by parents disgruntled by the state education system has been discovered in the north German city of Bremen. Several hundred children are believed to have passed through the unregistered alternative primary school, and the authorities claim not to have been aware of its existence. The “ghost school” began as a project by leftwing, mainly academic parents, who set it up in a villa in the district of Steintor, wanting to create an alternative to the rigid pedagogical practices of the state system. Lessons were open-ended, the emphasis was on making learning fun, and children of varying ages were taught in the same classroom in a relaxed atmosphere or in separate classes of boys and girls. The pupils, aged four to 10, were subsequently sent to secondary schools, often with forged documents, and for almost three decades suspicion was apparently never raised. The education minister for the state of Bremen, Renate Jürgens-Pieper, a Social Democrat, this week accused the parents of deceiving the authori-

ties. Rainer Metze, whose children, now adults, went to the school, said he believed the reason the whistle had been blown now was purely political. “The authorities surely knew of the existence of the school for years - it was even raided years ago by the police - but chose to ignore it.” Ronja Wöstheinrich, 17, said she could not understand the fuss about her former school, which she attended between 1994 and 2001. “I could not have imagined a better school,” she said. “I completely support the concept.” The discovery of the school, which is without precedent in Germany, has highlighted an issue of concern that spreads beyond Bremen about the general level of education. Increasing numbers of those who can afford it are sending their children to private schools in Britain and America, believing that they will get a better education there. Over the past decade the number of pupils attending private schools has increased by 61%. But parents who have tried to home-school their children have been blocked from doing so by the “school obligation” law, which requires all children to physically attend an institution.

International.....

UNITED KINGDOM

No More School as Council Opens 'Learning Centres' *by Richard Garner:* In the words of rock legend Alice Cooper's most famous song, "school's out forever". Knowsley Council in Merseyside, which - for years - has languished near or at the bottom of exam league tables, has abolished the use of the word to describe secondary education in the borough. It is taking the dramatic step of closing all of its eleven existing secondary schools by 2009. As part of a £150m government-backed rebuilding programme, they will reopen as seven state-of-the-art, round-the-clock, learning centres with the aid of Microsoft - which has already developed links with one school in the borough, Bowring. The style of learning will be completely different. Youngsters will not be taught in formal classes, nor will they stick to a rigid timetable; instead they will work online at their own speeds on programmes that are tailor-made to match their interests. The 21,000 youngsters of secondary education age in Knowsley will also be able to access their learning programmes from home. The philosophy behind the shake-up, as spelt out in the council document, is "to establish a culture in which it is understood that 'these children can' instead of 'these children can't'," it says. "Too many in secondary schooling expected little or nothing of local children and this had to be addressed." At Bowring, the "can do" approach is already emphasised through encouraging the teaching of skills - such as problem solving and creative thinking - which will be valued by employer. The Knowsley experiment has attracted interest from other councils in the UK as well as from further afield, including Tasmania and the US. <http://education.independent.co.uk/news/article2539348.ece>

Teachers Call for Smaller Schools, *BBC News:* 'Super-size' secondary schools should be broken up into smaller units, says a report from a charity that fast-tracks graduates into teaching. The views are based on a survey of 1,000 teachers in challenging schools. The number of small secondary schools in England, with fewer than 500 pupils, has fallen by 43% since 1995. The report, *Lessons from the Front: 1,000 New Teachers Speak Up*, has been published by Teach First, which recruits high-flying graduates or business employees for teaching in inner-city schools. These "front-line" opinions from young teachers in tough schools include the view that big schools should be re-designed to give them the "characteristics of smallness", which will improve behaviour and allow earlier intervention. The report also calls for more collaboration between urban schools, suggesting that three or four schools could become partners and share teaching expertise. The idea that learning is more effective in smaller school settings has been championed in the United States with the "small schools movement". But there have also been warnings from the United States about problems raised from creating smaller schools. Smaller schools operating on the same big campus,

might not achieve a new identity, say critics, and smaller schools can have problems providing specialist secondary teaching.

The report from Teach First argues that the key element of scale is the size of the individual, distinctive "learning community" within a school - the school within a school - rather than the size of the entire campus population.

"It is not the size of the school, but the size of the learning communities within them," concludes the report.

Morag Aitkenhead, Born: 28 October 1911. Died: 21 September 2007. With the death of Morag Aitkenhead aged 95 on September 21st at Kilquhanity House, Kirkpartick Durham, Galloway, an era in British education has truly ended. Although not a teacher, she played a pivotal role within the 'progressive school' movement that spanned the 20th century alongside her husband John Marjoribanks Aitkenhead (obituary August 1998) at Kilquhanity House School founded by themselves in 1940. They remained the guiding hands at Kilquhanity until its closure in 1997. John, a teacher, was troubled by Scottish education. Two events determined him to open his own school. The first was a meeting with fellow Scot A.S. Neill headmaster of: "the freest school in the world," Summerhill. The Second World War the other. Both were pacifists and members of the Peace Pledge Union. A community experiment; property was owned in common, while goods such as cigarettes were drawn from a communal pool. Staff received 10 shillings (50p) a week. He faced five tribunals to defend his conscientious objection. "We were against war, violence, corporal punishment, uniforms," he recalled. "In fact we were against the government." The school motto was: "Liberty, Equality and Inefficiency." ●

Correspondence

Dear Editor:

You may not be aware of my involvement, in the last 14 years setting up 'Kumbham' a potter's initiative at Nilambur, Kerala. From 1989 onwards I have been working, researching, learning from the artisan communities. I have tried to address several issues—cultural, spiritual, socio political and economical in these interactions.

As a designer I have been working as an active collaborator with artisans, helping them conceive new design possibilities and extend their design and product vocabulary. It is crucial to me that they don't become mere laborers, instead use their imagination freely and retaining their creativity and self respect. Practically it means opening up avenues for craft usage in daily life.

Kumbham at Aruvacode, Nilambur, Kerala is a unique example in reviving an almost wiped out pottery tradition. I began in 1993, worked with over 150 artisans and in the course of 13 years developed over 500 designs/ products, using a novel way of initiating creativity among artisans. A fundamental premise of the training interventions at Aruvacode is the cultural, aesthetic and creative superiority of the trainees, compared to the 'developed' mainstream of Indian society. Thus the basic attempt at the training programmes is to help the individuals regain their wisdom and confidence which lies embedded within their own communities and culture. For detailed study see the web site www.kumbham.in.

In continuation with my work with potters and addressing various issues (common to all crafts) I feel one of the most important is the future of craft as their children are not taking up craft. The present context that is visible to the children are not promising. But the reality is that there is a big demand for crafts as it is being felt in the urban spaces which is invisible to the artisans especially in the rural areas. This work has led me to explore an essential aspect of all crafts- that of enabling the artisan's children to take forward their skills as a viable livelihood option.

As a logical step I am planning to do learning activities with 10 potters' children of the age group 18 to 24. What I mean by education is an over all exposure/training to obtain the skills/abilities needed to pursue pottery in the present context. The estimated time frame is about one and half to two years. The participants will be given exposure to the pottery especially to the present interest among the urban population as well as its role in the coming ecologically sensitive era, modern ways of marketing, internet and web, design intervention etc. The whole process will be hands on. Then they will develop new products, hold exhibitions to get feed back.

The participants will be selected from various parts of the country- Orissa, Kerala, and Tamilnadu etc especially from

work areas with which I am familiar. The participants will be provided with tools and equipments that are necessary in the present context like digital camera, computer etc. I will also have to construct or hire minimum facilities for working staying etc. The outcome of the project apart from equipping the potters children with an ability to pursue pottery would be

[1] About 500 new products

[2] Documentation of the process which can be good reference

[3] The process could also be used for other crafts and for developing institution for enabling the Artisans.

You would have guessed this will require quite a lot of money. As an individual proposing to do such a project I foresee difficulties in obtaining funding from regular channels. I am sending this in the hope that a completely new way of supporting socially relevant issues will take shape. I am going to post this as a blog and let as many people know and I would like to open up this project for suggestions, collaborations etc.

Interested people can contribute with their time, money, donation of equipments- digital camera, computer etc or even hosting the team when we travel. Please visit <http://my.opera.com/enableartisan/blog/>

Jinan

Dear Editor:

Enhancing the ``Widening the Circle`` theme of AERO, conference director Isaac Graves began talking to me about a concern regarding the involvement of so-called minorities in AERO. We decided try and answer the question: Why are there no free or democratic schools started and administered by African American parents or community with predominately African American children attending?

I worked on a presentation that would give viewers both an historical and personal response to the issue with some recommendation. Several people attend the presentation and later some met to further discuss the concern. Those presently involved are: Diana Bethel, David Easton, Jerry Mintz, Trudi Forrestal, Ken Jacobson, Moya Khabel, Isaac Graves, Arnie Langberg, Lily Mercogliano, Khalif Williams, Ron Miller, W. Miner, Ellen Raider, Krenie Stowe, Deborah Thomas, Ben Williams, and Leo Fahey.

If you want a copy of the power point presentation e-mail me johnharrisloflin@yahoo.com

The cost is free, but please send your critique.

John Loflin

2008 REGISTRATION FORM

Correspondence (continued)

Dear Colleagues:

I am pleased to invite submissions for the next issue of the online peer-reviewed publication, the Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning (JUAL), to be published as papers become accepted. Authors of original research interested in submitting manuscripts to be considered for publication in JUAL should review the JUAL home page (<http://www.nipissingu.ca/jual/index.asp>), and the Submissions for detailed information on submission requirements. 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.

JUAL understands learner centered democratic education as individuals deciding their own curriculum, and participating in the governance of their school—if they are in one. Some examples of learner centered democratic possibilities are unschooling, Sudbury Valley, Fairhaven, the Albany Free School, and the Beach School in Toronto. In terms of unschooling, we view it as a self-directed learning approach to learning outside of the mainstream education rather than homeschooling, which reproduces the learning structures

of school in the home. It will offer readers relevant theoretical discussions and act as a catalyst for expanding existing knowledge in specific areas of practice and/or research on learning relevant to the journals mandate. The journal will be available at <http://www.nipissingu.ca/jual/index.asp> as a free publication containing material written in French or English. JUAL will initially be published as articles become accepted for publication. When enough articles to make an issue are available, we will publish them as an issue.

I invite you to circulate this announcement to colleagues, graduate students, researchers and/or organizations who may be interested in submitting a manuscript to JUAL for consideration. Questions can be addressed to the editors of JUAL by contacting me at the address below.

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