

Education Revolution

THE MAGAZINE OF EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

Fall 2008, Issue #54

Volume 20, Number 3

Reports from the 2008 AERO Conference
“From Ideas to Passion”



INSIDE:

Exemplary Learning Models • Historical Context of Educational Alternatives
International News, Conferences, and Books



A Stirring Manifesto for the Education Revolution

Ron Miller's newest book (Fall, 2008)

"marvelously lucid and thought-provoking"

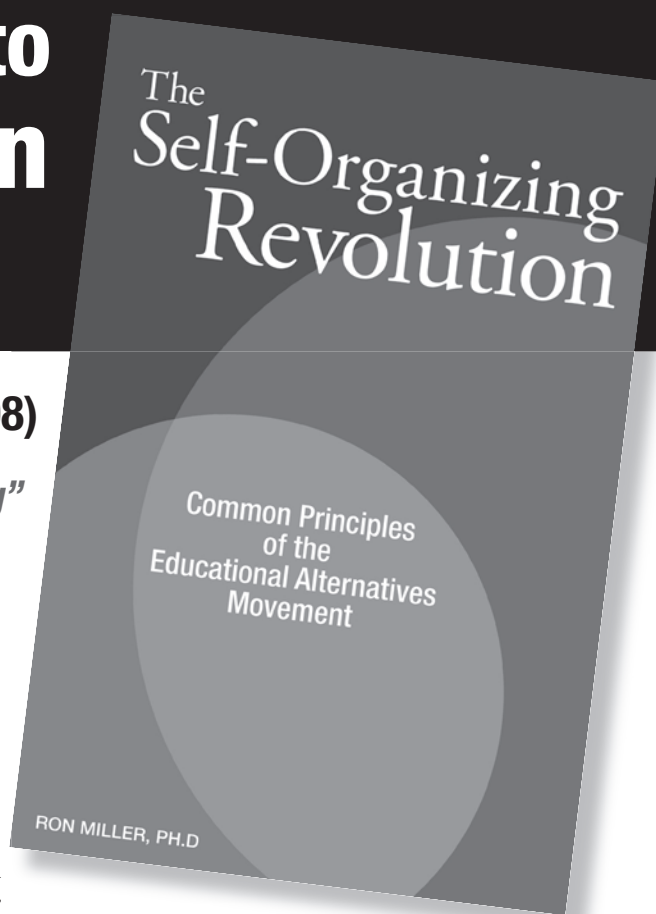
The Self-Organizing Revolution provides the clearest and most perceptive description of alternative education movements I have read. Drawing on the wisdom of the great educational pioneers of the past as well as the emerging paradigms of today, Miller suggests how a new consciousness can guide the liberation of children's potentials and the restoration of life on the planet. This is a marvelously lucid and thought-provoking book.

—WILLIAM CRAIN, author of *Reclaiming Childhood* and editor of *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*

"essential reading"

For any one who cares about the future of education, Miller is essential reading. With fluid prose and a personal style, he lays out the imperative to revolutionize our industrial-age educational system to align with the needs of our children and the transformational nature of our times. What makes this book so hopeful is that Miller shows we don't have to start from scratch to invent an educational system appropriate to the 21st century. We simply need to recognize that our society's current mania for tests and standards is the last gasp of an outmoded system and welcome the revolution already underway in our diverse, holistic, alternative systems flourishing across the nation.

—FRAN KORTEN, Publisher, *YES! Magazine*



"brilliant synthesis"

In this bold vision of educational possibilities, Ron Miller brings his clear thinking and historical insight to the vexing problem of how to transform education so that it might align with the emerging holistic world-view and dynamic, "deeply democratic," decentralized culture. Miller's gift to us is the brilliant synthesis of contemporary intellectual currents in such a way as to bring the ideal into reach. His challenge to us is to transcend the current boundaries and limitations in our thinking and embrace the possibilities.

—KATHLEEN KESSON, Professor of Teaching and Learning at the Brooklyn Campus of Long Island University, co-author of *Curriculum Wisdom: Educational Decisions in Democratic Societies and Defending Public Schools: Teaching for a Democratic Society*

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Education Revolution

THE MAGAZINE OF EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

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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Cover photo of homeschooler Zoe Greenhouse at the 2008 AERO conference. Photo by Calvin Haley.

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Being There

WITH JERRY MINTZ

International Democratic Education Conference 2008

The International Democratic Education Conference in Vancouver, Canada took place from August 11th to 18th. This was the latest in a remarkable series of such gatherings. These meetings have led to changes, sometimes revolutionary, to the educational climate in the areas where they have been held.

First I should explain that the IDEC is not an official organization. It started as a meeting of a dozen people, organized in Israel in 1993 by Yacov Hecht after a broader conference on multi-cultural education. Yacov, who had founded the Democratic School of Hadera a few years earlier, decided to pull together just those who were involved with democratic schools. We toured his school, discussed the possible future of democratic education and went home. Little did we know that we had sparked a movement that continues to grow and flourish.

The next year David Gribble, who had founded the democratic Sands School in Devon, England, organized a second meeting at his school. I didn't go to that, not realizing its significance. David also kept the spark kindled by putting out a newsletter. When I realized there would be a third meeting of democratic schools in 1995 in Austria, I was determined to go. Now there were perhaps a hundred of us from many countries. The group didn't really have a name yet and was just referred to as the Hadera conference, after our first meeting place.

Shortly thereafter we set up a list-serve for the participants and those who were interested. Most of the subsequent discussion and organization has been through that list-serve, which has about 350 subscribers around the world. The meeting in 1996 was again in Israel, much larger and with the support of the Ministry of Education.



The 1997 meeting was probably our most important. It was completely organized by students from the Sands School. I remember unsuccessfully trying to find out the schedule and calling the director of Sands to ask about it. He said, "Yes, it's frustrating! I don't know what they are planning!" So I was amazed the find that it really was totally being organized by students!

The students named it the International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC). They moved it to the summer so they could extend the time to ten days! They felt it needed to be more of a community than a conference and decided that there would be NO preplanned workshops. They wanted everyone to be there first so that the students would be totally involved in the scheduling of events and it would not be just a series of talking head workshops by adults. It was an early practice of open scheduling. It was brilliant! It not only had intellectual workshops, but also caving, hiking, games, arts and crafts, music, field trips and sports.

Since that time I have been to almost all of the IDEC meetings, including the next one, hosted by the Stork Family School in Ukraine in 1998, and the 1999 IDEC at Summerhill School in England as they were successfully taking the English education department to court for trying to close them. In fact the IDEC has often met at a site to support a beleaguered school. When we met at Stork, the school was being charged 80% taxes by the Ukraine government!

Since then IDECs have gathered in Japan, New Zealand, India, Germany, Australia, and Brazil. We organized the only one in the United States in 2003. We had 650 people from 28 countries, including 100 people from third world countries. We raised \$65,000 so they could come.

This year's IDEC was one of my favorites. As usual, it was organized from scratch by a grassroots group who had never done it before. The group is called SANE, the Society for the Advancement of Noncoercive Education, and it is connected to Windsor House School, a democratic public alternative in North Vancouver that was founded in 1971 by Helen Hughes. A highlight of the conference was Helen's concluding keynote celebrating her 50 years in education. Windsor House has had its own battles in recent years, being forced to move to a smaller building, having an outside principal forced on them, etc. But they have successfully persevered, and hosting this IDEC will undoubtedly help them.

The biggest group of attendees this year was from Korea, which will host next year's IDEC. It included 27 people, mostly students. The organizer of that group, Tae Wook Ha, has been involved with AERO and the IDEC for over ten years, starting as a graduate student in England.

I arrived in Vancouver with my heavy bags at 5 a.m. after a sleepless flight from New York. The conference was held at the University of British Columbia. The floor of my dorm was full of ultimate frisbee players from Australia who had just competed in a world championship there, coming in second to Japan.

On Sunday the Windsor House School and SANE people arrived in force, unloading a big truck with materials taken from their school. In a brilliant move, they recreated

FROM THE Editor's Desk

BY RON MILLER

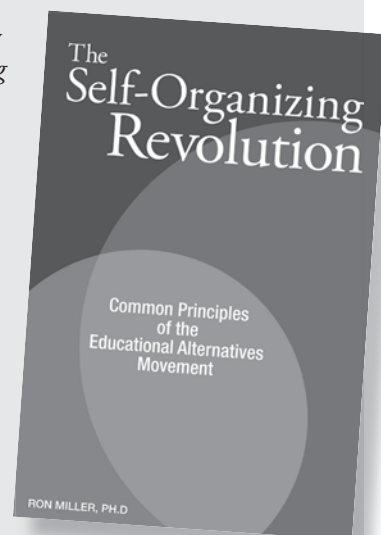
It was great to meet many of you at the AERO conference this summer. I continue to be inspired and encouraged by the energy, idealism, and commitment that is so apparent there every year. It's very clear to me that a grassroots movement for educational alternatives is thriving under the radar of the mass media and popular culture. And, significantly, this movement is becoming increasingly conscious of its relevance and connection to other emerging transformations in the larger culture. There is a growing emphasis on ecological sustainability, human rights, social justice, and a more democratic economic system.

In this issue, we bring you several firsthand reports from the conference. They capture the spirit of the gathering as well as the ideals of the movement. The education revolution is certainly happening, and you can experience it in Troy, New York every June. Make plans now to join us at the 2009 AERO conference.

Other excellent writings have come to my desk in time to be included in this issue, and I think this is one of our best. Let's keep the momentum going: The invitation is always open to you, ED REV readers, to send me your essays, profiles, reminiscences, news reports, or other writings about educational alternatives. This is *your* magazine. Share your successes, frustrations, and visions with the growing community of parents, teachers and learners who are your colleagues and allies. Send photos, too! You can reach me at holistic@gmavt.net.

I also want to invite you to check out my new book, *The Self-Organizing Revolution*, which should be out around mid-October. You can order it from the AERO online bookstore: www.edrev.org/products.html or directly from the publisher at (800) 639-4122. I'll very gladly send a free review copy to anyone who's interested in writing a review for other publications or considering adopting it for a course.

Enjoy the magazine, and please let us know what you think. ●





At the 2008 IDEC in Vancouver

their school on the UBC campus, to run a Windsor House Live throughout the conference, complete with voluntary classes and activities and a daily democratic meeting. The site was lovely, with nearby mountains and a beach below.

Right next to all this activity they put a ping-pong table on which I could teach. At the AERO conference I ordinarily don't have much time for this, but here I was able to teach about 50 people over the 7 days of the conference. I love doing this, as it gives students confidence in their ability to learn in a non-academic setting. Since my teacher is a former world champion, I am able to help people get that "Wow! I don't believe I just did that!" moment in almost every lesson. It also enabled the Korean students to connect with the Canadian, American and other students and adult participants through the common language of table tennis.

One of my first tasks was to attempt to convince Canadian embassies to approve the visas for the Russian and Nepalese groups. In the Russian case, a group of 10 from the Moscow International Film School was stranded. David Gagnon, tireless IDEC 2008 coordinator, told me he had no idea how to reach them and had not been able to get through to the embassy. Through a typical event of synchronicity, as I went into my room, from three doors down the hall I heard "Jeereey! Jeereey!" It was Alla Kerzina, founder of MIFS, who had immigrated to Canada! She had the cellphone number of the Russian group leader. I called on SKYPE, reached her and the group at the embassy, got the name and e mail address of the person in charge and fired off a quick note to him, vouching for the group. They got their visas and arrived at the conference 1 1/2 days later! Although I did reach the equivalent person in India to plead for the Nepalese group, there I was unsuccessful, the one sad note for the conference. I am continuing however to see if we can arrange for them to visit the United States.

There is so much else to report on, I simply can't go into detail or even list them. For example:

- Henrik Ebenbeck reported on the recent European Regional IDEC in Germany with 380 attendees.
- People attended from many other countries including England, Israel, Palestinian Territory, Japan, Peru, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, India, and South Africa, some with foundation funds raised for the purpose.
- A group from Summerhill School came and showed the drama about their successful battle with the English government having just been seen by millions on BBC.
- There were exciting panels of teenage students and younger students, moderated by our own Isaac Graves. When one questioner asked a student what he wanted to do later in life, a 12 year old replied "Why do you need to know? You'll see what we can do!"
- I did a benefit auction that raised \$1000 to support the conference group.
- There were dozens of workshops every day, trips to the mountains, to the beaches, Korean drumming and a dance at the end.
- Brent Cameron told me how he has an online unschooling program for 700 students in BC, using special software that creates a virtual school that has gathering places, choices of teachers and libraries. The government is paying \$3500 a student, and does so because the tracking software is so good. He plans to expand this year to 200 outside of BC.
- Keynote speakers included Don Four Arrows, a Native American speaker and writer, and Mimsy Sadofsky, a founder and teacher at Sudbury Valley School.

Some presentations received standing ovations, such as the one by Yacov Hecht. Among other things, he told us that the city of Jerusalem wants him to help them democratize their schools. Not only has he helped start 26 democratic schools in Israel, but, "I was looking for a crazy guy and someone found him for me!" He was the mayor of a poor, run down city in Israel who asked Yacov to help him democratize the schools in his city. Once that had happened, people flocked to the city, new buildings were built, green belts were created and the city thrived. Now other cities want his help, the latest being Jerusalem! In the Jewish religion there is a saying, "Next year, Jerusalem!" Perhaps after that, many more democratic schools around the world! Next year Korea! ●

AERO Conference: A Renewal of Passions

BY REGINA B. JENSEN, PH.D.

In the midst of summer, after much preparation and organization, people from all over the country - or more accurately, the whole world - gathered at Russell Sage College in Troy, New York for the 5th Annual Conference of the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO). Teachers, parents of homeschoolers, students, heads of schools, writers, psychologists, therapists, children . . . it seemed as if life *in toto* was represented.

There was no doubt about the care with which the large selection of classes and seminars seemed to have been chosen. As far as this writer could tell, somehow each of these groups of attendees and their varied needs had been considered. Most impressive was the lengthy list of names of educational approaches and preferences which were addressed and discussed in various settings. If there was not a keynote speaker presenting on an important topic, there were single presentations or a series of seminars available. If there were no seminars planned for a certain issue at hand, there was open space for anyone so inclined to offer up their ideas or start a discussion or dialogue.

Tangible in the air was a pleasant “laissez-faire air” attending the days devoted to the conference, while yet an admirable adherence to a tight and demanding schedule was observed. If the thought occurred that directing and coordinating such paradoxes would demand the skills of

an “artist of life,” most likely an “un-schooled” or “freely schooled” person, then the guess was right.

The hundreds of participants did indeed find themselves at the receiving end, as it were, of someone’s successful educational experience: Isaac Graves, the ever-present

And there, during those more informal meetings, the most profound discovery was evident for me: a keen hope and passion, unexpectedly alive and well, for the co-creation of a new world.

host and organizer for AERO, educated away from the rigidities of traditional schooling, somehow managed to successfully combine art, organization, love and disciplined structure into several days of rich experience for everyone. Jerry Mintz and a devoted flock of assistants certainly contributed untold hours of planning, but it was Isaac who had steadily taken the pre-conference calls, had patiently returned endless e-mails while pre-planning and coordinating speakers, and who now was introducing presenters, organizing discussion-groups, finding lost pillows and fielding complaints about midnight noise-makers.

The large bookstore which had clearly been considered, and set up, with great care was in and of itself worth the trouble of travel. Over one hundred titles relevant to most participants’ varied curiosities were there to enjoy or purchase, along with sticky muffins and other delectables.

But furthermore, and to the amazement of this observer, who merely came to orient herself to the newest ideas in the vast field of alternative education, there were individuals present which few people would have expected at such a gathering. Although Matt Hern, who teaches at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, is also known for his work and writing on Deschooling (*Deschooling Our Lives* and *Getting Society Out of School*) he actually shared his passions and excitement for city rejuvenation in his keynote address. Or what about the group presenting on their experiences with eco-village living? And there were many



Keynote speaker Mary Leue with her longtime friend Doc. PHOTO BY KELLY TAYLOR.

people present with similar passions, such as bio-dynamic gardening and permaculture, including a lovely woman who worked for a non-profit organization which, for several decades, has grown and provided seedlings for food-plants to ultimately serve the needy and hungry.

Did you want to start a school? There was the three-part “New School Starters” workshop series. No one needs to suffer from the same costly mistakes those early pioneers made. Open-minded, generous and funny, here was all the good advice, including caveats, anyone would need to succeed with a new school. Did you want to discover how important free education and “free thought” are to the health and viability of our entire social and democratic system? Well, if you didn’t join a discussion group with Ron Miller on the inspiring thought of an “Educational Rights Movement,” or Charles Eisenstein with his work on the “Ascent of Humanity,” which touches upon the history and future of civilization, and if you couldn’t attend any of the inspiring keynote addresses - maybe because you were not even at the conference - you can take heart. All the rich information was recorded for posterity and you can still “participate.” Who would not want to enjoy these presenters and their profound ideas many times over? That’s why I’m already standing in line for Ron Miller’s new book, slated for release in October. Who would not want to find out more about “The Self-Organizing Revolution”?



PHOTO BY CALVIN HALEY.

Tea-times, talent-shows, exhibits, documentaries to sample—there was not a moment to be sad or sorry. And there, during those more informal meetings, the most profound discovery was evident for me: a keen hope and passion, unexpectedly alive and well, for the co-creation of a new world. For many participants, such an all-pervasive “upliftment” is not so tangible back home, more or less alone and facing a world where there is too much cynicism, chauvinism, materialism and very little hope for the kind of world we all want: full of joy, sharing and natural simplicity and far away from deadening bureaucracies and the insanities of “one hundred year” wars.

If there were any doubts left about whether this kind of commitment to freedom and joy in education can ultimately lead to a free and joyful life, here was Mary Leue, giving her keynote address, youthful as ever after decades of struggling for, and celebrating, this very approach to creating a better world. When did she start with all that? Way back, at an age when most people settle in with the excuse that they are “too old now”, she created the still flourishing Albany Free School in New York “to help out her son”, with a humble financial inheritance and a lot of *hutzpah*. Too old for what? Too old for Love, too old for Hope—too old for Joy? Not for this young “icon” which brought her audience to their feet, even though the cat had carried off her hearing aid and sent her mistress to the conference so hard of hearing that she called herself “deaf”. Nor did age seem to have reduced the passion of any other iconic old-timers present, ready and standing by, inspired as ever, to pass on the happy but challenging baton to the next generation of educational miracle-workers. “Moving from Ideas to Practice” was the theme of the conference. For me, it was “Moving from Ideas to Passion.” I can still feel it now—that air vibrating with promise for a sane and healing world.

Regina Jensen is a writer, psychotherapist, executive coach and consultant to the entertainment industry. You can reach her at: fullyalivewellnesscenter.com ●

AERO Conferences: Democratic Education in Action

BY KIRK CUNNINGHAM

There are “preachers” and there are “teachers,” particularly in the realm of teacher professional development. “Preachers” speak to educators from the illusory ivory towers of academia or from behind an administrative desk. I attended AERO 2007 as a researcher and AERO 2008 as a workshop facilitator. At both, professional development was facilitated by “teachers”; experiences were shared. Attendees were offered, rather than prescribed, methodology. The distinctions between preachers and teachers for educators echo the distinctions between traditional and democratic schools for students.

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issues, not confined by my predetermined
list of discussion questions, facilitated
the group’s learning, including my own.**

As a researcher, I explored the question: What do democratic schools have as common themes, which offer alternatives to traditional schools in student school to work and lifelong satisfaction transitions? The spark that ignited my passion to research democratic schools was reading *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* by A.S. Neill. As a young teacher, I struggled with turning Neill’s words into reality. One means of achieving harmony was to attend professional development, yearning for the keys to turn theory into practice. I have come to the realization that nearly all of these workshops are based on a false paradigm, the “all knowing teacher” teaching an entire class simultaneously, a class of divergent students with divergent interests. My research confirmed that what was needed both in my own classroom, and remains needed in school districts throughout the nation, is a choice, a real choice for every student, between a traditional school and a democratic one.

AERO provided a broad pallet of extraordinarily divergent philosophies from which to paint. Both in my qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys the parallel themes of democratic schools led to the finding that democratic

schools provide a distinct potential for positively facilitating school to work transitions and lifelong satisfaction. In contrast to the Harris Poll’s finding that 81% of teachers in high-poverty schools and 56% in low-poverty schools were unhappy with the quality of education, students and teachers at Summerhill report 100% happiness; 100% of the students in any noncompulsory class at any time want to be there. These findings support my contention that all students should have a democratic school option.

My interviews revealed how democratic schools are truly different. Steve commented that “The underlying premise is that we are all learners, that is our nature. You don’t have to motivate a toddler to get up in the morning and start exploring their world. They do that naturally.” Karl aspires to leave his students with life lessons, “an understanding of themselves. An awareness of others. The ability to know how to learn when they want to. The rest they can look up on Google!”

Professional development workshops that I have recently attended began and ended with a focus on “engaging students.” The result was advice on how to spend large segments of a “best practices” hour with students engaging them in the lesson. Democratic schools solve this engagement issue before the students step into the classroom; students have the freedom to not attend; therefore, all students in the classroom are motivated to learn and eager to engage in the lesson. Freedom negates the need for engagement; if they needed to be motivated to be engaged they wouldn’t be there! The result is 100% class time spent on subject matter and higher-level critical thinking skills. Classroom management, another “hot topic” of professional development is another moot point within democratic schools. Students have the freedom to leave class, as easily as enter it; and if they choose to disrupt, there is always the Weekly Meeting to immediately and effectively deal with behavior that transgressed others’ right to learn, no class time is wasted. Is it any wonder that democratic school students routinely achieve what takes traditional schools six years of teaching in six months?

It seemed only fair to offer AERO attendees an opportunity to hear and respond to my findings; my workshop at AERO 2008 was born. I presented my view that it is time to open up public education to democratic alternatives for the purpose of positively impacting both school to work and lifelong satisfaction transitions by all our students. Discussion began and ended without utilizing a single prepared prompt. Conversation centered around why it has been so

challenging to implement at least a major transition to individualized student centered learning in traditional schools. Teachers full of good intentions tend to get bogged down in the myriad of traditional school demands, i.e. teaching to the standardized test.

The discussion process was illuminating. Free flowing discussion of relevant issues, not confined by my predetermined list of discussion questions, facilitated the group's learning, including my own. It was a classic example of the potential power of democratic schools. Had the traditional pedagogy been followed, that of insisting upon staying focused on teacher created questions, the breadth of the discussion would have been lost. Furthermore, the fact that the discussion took on a path of its own revealed in the value of the relevancy of the discussion. This mirrored my research; students who are given the freedom to engage in topics that they are interested in learn more. Engagement is elevated without the teacher 3-ring circus act that is often advocated by teacher professional development, and since student chosen topics are relevant to their lives, they promote application, a form of high level, critical thinking learning, which is a buzzword of professional development.

The grandiose step of opening up public school systems to democratic schools must first transgress the opening of minds, the understanding that traditional schools often performed magnificently in the 20th century industrial economy. Times and jobs have changed. A revolution in education is needed on the scale of its predecessor, the 19th century transition from agrarian schools to today's traditional schools. This transition met the challenge of the economic upheaval in the country as the U.S. revolutionized its economy from an agrarian base to the world's largest industrial economy. This level of transition is required again today, as the 20th century industrial economy has given way to the 21st century post-industrial global economy. The reasonable conclusion is that we are best advised to assist our students in exploring their interests and aptitudes, the definition of democratic schools.

The bottom line of the democratic school philosophy is to offer a more enjoyable, successful education experience for students. Undoubtedly there are students who love traditional school; the two should both be offered as options for all students. Beauty is assuredly in the eye of the beholder. Those who look at schools as a training ground or lab may continue to be content with the results of traditional education. Those who look at students holistically, or as future employees of unforeseen post-industrial age, 21st century jobs may continue to be assured that democratic schools provide an opportunity for many students to be far more successful than in the traditional setting.

My research gave me the necessary confidence to give up on a hybrid class and finally go for it! I have been extremely pleased with my students' progress, now that my own classroom has finally been completely transformed into a democratic class. To truly teach, allow students the freedom and responsibilities innate in our democracy. To truly teach, allow students the freedom and responsibility to follow



PHOTO BY KELLY TAYLOR.

their innate curiosities. This was the magic of my workshop; individuals allowed to intercede relevant discussion brought exponential learning to the fore. As "The Man in the Yellow Hat" in *Curious George* puts it, "Anyone can memorize facts and figures, but the real way to learn anything is to go out and experience it, let your curiosity lead you! So who's ready to learn?"

Kirk Cunningham is a 10-year public school teacher at urban & suburban schools in the southern & mid-western U.S., currently teaching at a Milwaukee alternative school. He received his Master's Degree from Carroll University, thesis: A Study of Democratic School Philosophy Alternatives to the Typical/Traditional Classroom. He was a workshop facilitator at AERO 2008. Kirk aspires to continue research and invite discussion of democratic education as a post-secondary professor, and open the dialogue with all stake-holders in public education. For discussion, or a copy of the study in its entirety, e-mail: swimcoach99@aol.com ●

Learning from AERO '08

BY KELLY B. TAYLOR

Imagine the look of dawning joy spreading across the face of a grey-haired woman learning to hula-hoop for the first time in her life. The five-minute process of “Hey, that looks neat. I want to try. How do I do it? Like this? Oh, no... How about this? Oh, hey—HEY!” is miraculous to behold, whether the learner is 5 or 55. This spectacle was one of many that defined my fantastic experience at the 2008 AERO conference, “Moving from Ideas to Practices.” It was my first AERO conference, but will definitely not be my last.

There were many opportunities to see our various ideas being put into practice every day, from a number of perspectives. Not every practice we implement matches our ideals, as we learned from Charles Eisenstein’s presentation on Deschooling Ourselves, but as long as we pay attention, we can always learn from our experiences. The AERO conference was chock-full of learning experiences, but the most important lessons I learned were (either physically or metaphysically) outside of the workshops.

I learned, for example, how to cooperate with other strong-willed and opinionated adults in order to navigate a large bockety-wheeled dolly, loaded with teetering piles of stuff, from one side of campus to another and set up a drink table. I learned that my opinion of how the tea should be arranged versus Nancy Gill’s idea was not an important struggle to hold onto—a lesson which was reinforced when I returned an hour later and the entire table had been rearranged yet again.



PHOTO BY KELLY TAYLOR.

I also learned that although one hour is not enough time to get into the meat of a complex topic with more than 20 intelligent, articulate, enthusiastic people, it’s plenty of time to figure out who is interested in general introductions and

nuts-and-bolts information-sharing, and who is interested in vigorous debate on broader subjects. While both of these methods of idea exchange are valuable, I learned that I prefer one in academic settings, and the other down at the pub.

If we are really to be able to put our ideas into meaningful practice, we also need to move our own learning methods (and teaching) further into the alternative realm, take the opportunity to experiment, play, try out our ideas on each other.

Most importantly, I learned that we have not yet finished deschooling ourselves, which is reflected in the basic structure of the conference itself. The conference was about taking our ideas of “alternative” education (and I’ve started to see just how many there are!) and putting them into the practices of starting schools, implementing various paradigms, and using certain techniques in our existing classrooms, yet the daily conference schedule was much like a “typical” American school day: After staying up too late (come on, you know you did!), we dragged ourselves to breakfast and tried to figure out what we were doing for the day. After announcements or a keynote were workshops: one hour blocks that ended just as they started getting to the best part.

This structure then presented each of us with a predicament after every workshop or event: play hooky from our next class or activity so we could continue talking to our new friends and debate partners? Or move on to the next topic and hope to find those people later? When the next scheduled event was a tea-time or meal, the choice was simple, but if you were really looking forward to the next speaker or presenter, well... it was a tough call. I wanted there to be more examples of teaching through putting our alternative ideals into educational practices within the workshops. I saw a few, and I know at least one was entirely inadvertent. I and my roommate, Casandra Tanenbaum, just wanted to hula. Casandra had the cash and the burning desire to make hoops and teach hooping to anyone who wanted to learn, I had the know-how and a car. We played hooky from an afternoon workshop and went on a mission to get supplies from some rather mystified hardware store employees. We came

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VISION Home and Community: An Evolution in Public Education

BY CARRIE LERNER



Participants in the VISION Home and Community Program.

As Mohandas Gandhi said: "There is no way to peace. Peace is the way." Many of us may agree there is no way to freedom and self-direction. Freedom and self-direction are the way.

It seems that education is for more education in a manner that training is not for more training. In Delta County, on the Western Slope of Colorado, surrounded by hills orchards, farms and coalmines, a large forward step has been taken toward an exciting new form of public education. Since the year 2000, The Vision Home and Community Program, has become "the best kept secret in education." The Vision Home and Community Program is a public school of choice, and, as far as I know, the only one of its kind. Families in the Delta County School District have been given the option to be in control of what, how, where and with whom their children learn. Vision focuses on individuals, on creating the best learning opportunities for each person and empowering kids to take control of their lives and education. It also provides the financial resources, community networking, and one-on-one support to make this happen.

Vision learners are getting ready for the start of the new academic year before it even begins. They are thinking about a learning plan, which details activities and subject matter the learner will pursue, the educators who will be involved, the resources that will be used, the amount it will cost and how it will be documented. A learning plan grows and changes with the learner. It is continually reflected on throughout the year.

Each learner is required to do 720 hours of documented learning a year. At least 180 of these must occur with an educator outside of one's home. Vision provides a networking system for our community. Anyone who would like to offer a class, upon passing a background check, can. We publish a *Guide To*

Learning Opportunities each year that covers a wide array of subjects from which learners choose many of their classes. A consistently growing number of learners depend on our community for their education. All learners are encouraged and supported to follow their interests while also staying on top of the basic academics. All of our learners must take state standardized tests. Prep classes are available but we do not require them.

The graduation process entails quite a bit of thought and work, beginning with the formation of a graduation committee which meets for at least nine months to support and help the learners in their transition out of school. Each graduating learner writes a personal manifesto in which he or she addresses what we call "core qualities." These are qualities like integrity, trust, passion, teamwork and more that each learner feels is most important in his or her life. Learners also do a final presentation to our community. We have had many different forms of presentations including art shows, radio shows on our local public radio, discussions led by learners on a specific topic, slide shows, feasts, fashion shows and flight demonstrations. Many of our graduates have gone on to a college of their choice, received scholarships and have provided a basis of proof that our program does instill in kids a love of learning.

The Vision Home and Community Program is part of Delta County's VISION Coalition that functions thanks to waivers awarded by the Colorado State Board of Education. There are three different Home and Community Programs. The Three HCP's operate out of physical buildings located in Delta, Paoonia (North Fork), and Cedaredge (Surface Creek). Each branch controls its own budget and is independently operated by a "director" and on site-staff. The three programs are under the leadership and oversight of a Board of Stewards. Each Vision Home and Community Program receives 83% of the district per pupil operating revenue. Half of this money then goes to the learners to support them in their educational needs; the other half goes to the program. Resource consultants, "Highly Qualified" Educator Consultants and our financial administrator over see the spending of this money. All funding must be directly related to the learning plan. Resource consultants work closely with the learner and family and provide them with support in reaching their educational goals. This relationship is very important to the success of our learners and the program.

This new system of public education that Delta County bravely created is one that benefits all involved. The District is receiving money for kids that otherwise would be home-schoolers. Public money is going back into the community by supporting the large group of people who have talents and skills

to share with the youth. Parents are given some control of the rearing of their children and have a closer equal opportunity to be part of their kids' education. Most profoundly, kids are given choice in directing their own lives and learning and learn to trust themselves, to think for themselves and to follow their passions and interests. They learn to communicate, to act in integrity and to be a part of a dynamic community. The ultimate goal is to create life-long learners who are contributing and confident members of their communities and the world.

Carrie Lerner has been a resource consultant for the North Fork Vision Home and Community Program for seven years. She is also the Librarian and Coordinator of their new Community Learning Center. Carrie is proud to be working to create an engaging and inspiring educational program of choice for her community. If you would like to learn more about Vision, CarrieLerner@selfdesign.org ●

Learning from AERO '08

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PHOTO BY CALVIN HALEY.

back and started making hoops in the quad outside the dining hall. Eventually about two dozen adults and children learned to make, tape, and hula their hoops!

Before we knew it, we'd created a hands-on, learner-centric, entirely voluntary, drop-in-drop-out, non-hierarchical hula hooping workshop—all without any intention of it being anything other than fun. There were no introductions, no official starting time, no one teacher. The beauty of such a simple project is that it's instantly transferable: once I showed Cassandra how to make a hoop, she could show another, who could then turn around and immediately pass the information on to the next person, and so on, until there was 5-year-old Noah showing a public school administrator how to stick the two ends of the tube together. Who is teacher and who is student? Does it matter?

To create an organic, fun, educational experience that people wanted to join as soon as they saw it, we had to break the "rules" of the conference, buck the system, pay out of our own pockets, run with an inspiration and step away once the project had taken on a life of its own.

Obviously that wasn't the only example of direct experience of alternative education at the conference. Equally obvious is the fact that there is a need for structured workshops planned in advance with specific themes and topics at an adult conference geared toward acquisition of specific, complex pieces of

knowledge. Many of the '08 AERO workshop topics couldn't have been conveyed or discussed in any way other than a traditional-classroom style lecture or presentation. But if we are really to be able to put our ideas into meaningful practice, we also need to move our own learning methods (and teaching) further into the alternative realm, take the opportunity to experiment, play, try out our ideas on each other. We can really take advantage of the fact that we have an audience/learner group that is self aware and can self-analyze to provide useful feedback on the subjects, techniques, and methods we're interested in pursuing. If we really want to put ideas into practice, we need to do it all the time, in every situation we encounter in our lives, because most of us believe that learning never stops, that "life is learning."

Kelly Taylor has a BA from alternative Hampshire College, and is passionate about creating educational alternatives for anyone and everyone, not just those who can afford it. She lives in southern NH with her partner, two kids, a cat, a dog and a snake. ninjagoggles@gmail.com ●

HOW TO MAKE A HULA HOOP

You will need from your hardware store (prices approximate):

- 7-12' of 3/4" 160psi black flexible PVC irrigation tubing per hoop (enough to make a circle that comes to between your chin & nose when standing; smaller=harder!) (\$0.20/foot)
- one 3/4" insert connector from the plumbing section (approx \$0.70/ea)
- a ratchet cutter (if you plan on making a bunch, it's well worth the \$12)
- tape in fun colors! (totally not necessary, and the most expensive part!)

Coil the tubing into a circle & get it to the right height & cut it. Warm up the ends of the tubing with your hands, hot water or a hairdryer & insert the connector into both ends. Push together. Wrap hoop with tape starting at the connector in patterns & designs! Tada!

Innovations in Thai Schools: Promises and Challenges

BY KRISTAN MORRISON

As *Education Revolution* readers well know, educational alternatives are on the rise throughout the world. This past winter and early spring, I had the opportunity to study a school in Thailand that is leading the way in rethinking how schools should be structured and run. The Darunsik-khalai School for Innovative Learning (hereafter DSIL) in Bangkok is working hard to break away from the status quo educational system in Thailand, in which there is a top-down bureaucracy and classrooms characterized by high teacher-student ratios (40-60 students per class), a great deal of teacher transmission of information, emphasis on student silence, and rote learning of a highly-detailed, standardized national curriculum. The school's efforts have tremendous potential for modeling change for the whole of Thai society, but they are being met with equally tremendous obstacles.

The DSIL is the flagship school for an innovative pilot education program in Thailand called the "Lighthouse Project." This project was started by various Thai foundations in conjunction with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab to reform Thai schools by providing learners with a "Constructionist" educational environment (constructionism is MIT Professor Seymour Papert's learner-centered, project-based, technology-rich learning methodology) and by providing all organization members with voice and power in school management and governance (following Peter Senge's Learning Organization ideas). The DSIL's end goals have been to show that a school which recognizes the dignity of each individual child by allowing him/her to choose subjects of study, and which places a special emphasis on technology, English, morality, personal development, and Buddhist mindfulness meditation will ultimately help create quality citizens who are life-long learners, economically competitive, globally-oriented, and peaceful.

CURRICULUM / SCHEDULING

While some aspects of the school day and curriculum are reminiscent of conventional education (e.g. having distinct math, foreign language, Thai, art, physical education, and club classes scheduled weekly in 45-75 minute increments), DSIL's innovations surfaced most clearly during "project time," which was the focus of most of each day (learners were in projects for 2-3 hours per day), and was where Papert's constructionism was most evident. For projects, the approximately 55 learners were divided into three houses based mainly on age. Prior to one trimester's end, learners were asked what they would like to study during the next trimester. A few topics were decided

per house and learners then were subdivided based upon which topic they wanted to study. Children created mind maps around that topic, listing what they already knew as well as what they wanted to know. Between trimesters, while learners were on break, facilitators took the mind maps, combined them, connected the topic and its subtopics to the Thai national curriculum where possible (unfortunately, students at the school still take the triannual national tests), and added in field trip activities, possible expert speakers, etc. From there, facilitators roughly sketched a trimester plan.

DSIL has identified itself as a "Learning Organization," a term coined by Peter Senge to describe an organization where individual members feel a sense of ownership, and where a democratic management system is in place to encourage an optimal degree of member participation.

While planning, facilitators kept in mind Brain Compatible Learning approaches as well as different learning styles, brought in technology wherever possible, integrated traditionally separated subjects, and connected topics to children's lived experiences (e.g. to answer such questions as: why learn this? What's its relevance to my life?). When learners returned from break, facilitators shared their plans and children were encouraged to add or delete things. Once the trimester began, facilitators guided learners in their understanding of concepts by engaging them in active, hands-on work, but kids were always free to object or suggest changes to lessons at hand.

ASSESSMENT

DSIL has adopted innovative means of assessing children's learning, straying away from the normally ubiquitous paper-and-pencil tests. Learners were encouraged to engage in daily self-assessment of activities and personal interactions. At trimester's end, children created portfolios of their work in all classes and wrote summative project reports in which they identified ideas learned and relevance to their lives. They also created Exhibitions of their work, which included demonstrations,

plays/oral presentations, and visual displays. On a weekly basis, facilitators sent home observation reports on each child. While learners were still expected to take and pass Thailand's official national test exams at certain grades, DSIL tried to avoid a great deal of test preparation and hoped that its innovative approach to teaching and learning would provide that preparation.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

DSIL has identified itself as a "Learning Organization," a term coined by Peter Senge to describe an organization where individual members feel a sense of ownership, and where a democratic management system is in place to encourage an optimal degree of member participation. While there was a management team in place to coordinate and implement decisions, parents and facilitators had a strong voice in school governance. For example, facilitators had a weekly meeting not only to discuss "housekeeping details" (e.g. hear announcements, coordinate physical space usage, etc.) but also to hash out organizational and philosophical concepts (e.g. should the school divide children by houses?, What does personal development look like?, etc.). Learners had their voices heard on curricular and assessment matters as discussed above, and the school management has indicated that as students get older, representatives will be invited to take spots on the Leadership Committee.

IMPACT ON OTHER THAI SCHOOLS

The educational approaches the DSIL has been employing have "caught on" to a degree in Thailand. More and more parents are expressing an interest in the school and are enrolling their children. The school knows it cannot enroll everyone, so its leaders work diligently to support schools throughout Thailand in implementing similar constructionist and Learning Organization changes.

The DSIL staff are clearly "proselytizers" of alternative approaches to education and their following is growing. In fact, in late March the Ministry of Education announced that it would allow a two track system of education—conventional and unconventional—and has asked the DSIL to serve as the key model and leader of the unconventional track. The results of this decision for a two-track system are unclear at this time, but I was truly amazed that the official school governance for the whole country acknowledged the value of different approaches to thinking about education. I don't believe a similar announcement has ever come from the United States Department of Education!

CHALLENGES TO THE SCHOOL'S INNOVATIONS

All is not rosy, though, at the DSIL. They still face some significant challenges to their new ways of thinking about education. Constructionism and Learning Organizations are complex ideas that run counter to established educational and organizational paradigms. Very few people worldwide have first-hand experience with operationalizing these ideas, and so getting every school member on the same page is a daunting task. The Thai cultural tradition of deference to authority and worldwide educational systems dominated by knowledge

transmission and teacher control further complicate matters as many Thai facilitators, parents, and students might be unwilling to speak out against management team member opinions, and Thai and non-Thai facilitators might be unclear on how much power of voice and choice to permit learners because they never experienced much freedom in their own education. If DSIL members don't have a rich understanding of school philosophy themselves, can they truly help learners meet school goals? Or will they just be "going through the motions"? Interviews with some facilitators and management revealed suspicions that the latter was occurring. They feared that what looked on the surface like children getting voice in matters was, on closer inspection, just kids taking the easiest way out, thereby not becoming life-long learners able to overcome adversity. Or, they feared that while self reflection and alternative assessments were in place, they were frequently carried out in haphazard, rushed ways.

While DSIL is responding to these internal challenges connected to its innovations, it faces even stronger trials in the greater society. The mandatory existence of national examinations causes many parents and potential school members, even those who philosophically reject the status quo educational system, to question whether DSIL can truly prepare their children for existing society's educational and economic demands. If these tests continue to be mandatory for the unconventional track of schools and if institutions of higher education don't alter their admissions requirements will people in the society really be able to redefine what "success" means and what sorts of education lead to success?

As Seymour Papert argues in *The Children's Machine*, schools like DSIL are trying to represent a fundamental rethinking of what education is, what it is for, and how it is done – they seek a complete paradigm shift. They are not offering an alternative way for students to learn the same list of items of knowledge; rather, they value a different way of thinking about everything in education. Ultimately, this will be the test of the DSIL's efforts – are they able to help the country call everything about education into question and re-examination, or not?

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Kristan Morrison is an Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations at Radford University in Radford, VA. Her main field of research is qualitative studies of alternative/unconventional schools in the United States and worldwide. Her book *Free School Teaching* about the Albany Free School can be ordered through the online AERO bookstore. She can be reached at kmorrison12@radford.edu ●

Sustainable Education: Reinventing the University

A Model for a Free Self-Sustaining University

BY STEPHEN GRETTEMBERG

INTRODUCTION

If one searches for MSW or Green MBA programs, you can find some interesting and varying options. Unfortunately these programs often come with high price tags that result in many participants owing substantial sums of money. In order for these graduates to pay off their student loans they must steer away from some of the organizations that could really benefit from their expertise but can't afford them, particularly in developing countries. Out of necessity both current students and recent graduates in these programs often take jobs in businesses having nothing to do with their major or education.

What if a university was run as self-sustaining? Not a place to run away from the world, but one that embraced communication, ideas, and a practical approach to solid business principles in a non-profit? The students coming out of such a school would have practical skills in communication, business, planning, budgeting, and organizing to go with their social skills and sustainability practices.

This paper will explore the ideas inherent in a model for a work college, where students would work at the business of running the college as a non-profit sustainable business.

MISSION

The primary goal is to create a free, self-sustainable university model, providing its participants with a solid background in the arts, sciences, humanities, and communication while earning practical degrees in areas such as sustainable business, alternative power, sustainable building, environmentalism, organic farming, and social work that can help benefit the greater society. The University would ask of its participants five years of hard work, offering in turn an environment to stimulate and expand their horizons with a balance of theory, practice, vision, and perspective. The guiding principle is to provide an example to the rest of the planet of a system of learning that promotes harmony with the earth, social awareness and diversity, practical skills, and a well rounded education that includes an understanding of representative works of Art, Culture, History, Science, and Literature in the broadest sense from our collective world culture. Ideally this would be an accredited university.

TWO DEFINING PRINCIPLES

The program must be as free as possible. Free is not defined as getting something for nothing. Each participant in this

model school is expected to come and share his or her vision and co-create a strong learning experience for everyone. For the University to be self-sustainable everyone must work together. As students learn and become upperclassmen their training gets more specialized, and they will take charge of projects in their fifth year. Participants would work in areas of their concentration gaining practical experience as well as contributing to the whole community. Ideally students accepted into the program would not need to pay room, board, or tuition, so they will not accrue debts while at the University. Students would grow organic food, build passive solar and alternative structures for use and sale, build websites, obtain genuine industry computer & communication industry certifications, learn accounting and fund raising principles, and have a realistic and grounded approach to running and working in a non-profit environment following sound business principles.

This is not a unique concept. There are a number of work colleges where students work to mitigate or pay tuition and room/board and a consortium, www.workcolleges.org, has a website describing several successful institutions that operate on these principles. The difference is that our proposed model has at its core learning about sustainability, grounded in practical and applicable sound green business principles.

The second principle is sustainability.

■ **Financially**—After an initial five-year period the goal of the University is to provide as much of its own services and goods as possible, making the University have minimal expenses. In addition it would create books, videos, training materials, websites, and other materials of interest on issues relevant to the universities principles, as well as works of art. It is the role of the business students to help find ways that each division's course of study provides not only something of substance to the community, but to help fund the University as a whole. The University model is one of theory married with real practical solutions. It starts with adherence to sound fiscal responsibility. By not relying on fickle and inconsistent government spending or leveraged corporate financial interests the University is less compromised in its mission. Although it is a non-profit enterprise, there are certainly expenses that would need to be offset, and where possible income generation is one of the goals.

■ **Energy Consumption**—All buildings are to be built using passive solar and other natural forms of energy conservation built in. The University should look to natural renewable

forms of energy generation, maintained by the participants in engineering and the sciences. Possible sources of energy include solar, wind, hydro electric (to include ocean turbines), and geo-thermal power. This can be stored in Hydrogen Fuel Cells, and any excess can be sold back to the grid. While potentially expensive, this point is critical to the overall principles of this University model. Except for transportation in fuel cell driven vehicles (buses and construction vehicles), bicycle and foot traffic are the primary forms of locomotion on campus and in the surrounding community.

■ **Food**—The University would maintain its own farm running on sustainable agricultural principles. This provides healthy organic food to both the University and the surrounding community. Every student would be required to take a course/work study in “Field Ecology & Sustainable Agriculture”, by which you can infer “they’d have to shovel a little shit to eat”.

The guiding principle is to provide an example to the rest of the planet of a system of learning that promotes harmony with the earth, social awareness and diversity, practical skills, and a well rounded education.

■ **Building Materials**—Ideally a building should fit with its environment. By using local materials as the primary building blocks for a structure, there is less fuel waste, and more attention and concern will be made in making sure that the use is sustainable. The best materials will vary from site to site, but could include mud or clay bricks, wood, stone, straw bales, sod, and earth. Care should be taken to replant trees, care for potential erosion, and plan for future sustained use.

■ **Waste**—Despite all the best intentions, there is bound to be some consumable waste. Human, animal, and vegetable waste can be composted, and would be carefully treated by the environmental engineering students and their staff mentors. Recyclables would be processed accordingly. Ideally few materials that do not break down readily in a landfill, toxic chemicals, or nuclear waste would be allowed at the University or in the surrounding community.

BASIC PREMISE

Each and every student would graduate with marketable skills and a portfolio in their specialized field; an understanding and appreciation for the great works of our collective world culture; a strong foundation of morals based on tolerance, sexual equality, cultural/spiritual diversity, and logic; a liberation from the constraints of a closed world view, including previous economic or social status, and the confidence to think on their collective and individual feet.

This balanced educational approach would incorporate certain ideals into its worldview:

■ Agriculture should be sustainable, as should the use of all natural resources. The concept here is that we should consider how our actions could affect our children over the next seven generations, from the Native American model.

■ An educated aesthetic appreciation of the great works of humanity promotes balanced thinking and better citizens.

■ The amazing cultural diversity and varied heritage of all the planet’s peoples should be studied, honored, celebrated, and preserved.

■ Everyone, regardless of age, race, economic status, religion, nationality, should be an honored member of society to be welcomed into the University.

■ The college would naturally attract the students that would gain the most from this model of education. Other models should and would exist in the world, for not everyone shares the same worldviews, learning styles, and interests.

■ The college would recruit students from places/backgrounds/ethnicities that are usually underrepresented in sustainable fields.

METHODOLOGY

One approach is for courses to come in pairs – one course providing theory, the other on practical application useful in life and/or a chosen profession. Initially this might seem strange or unwarranted by many, but it would help retain the economic independence of the college, and provide everyone with an understanding and appreciation for a diverse range of thought & experience. Examples could include a “Biology & Ecology” course with a practicum of “Organic Farming”; and a “Math & Engineering” course paired with a practicum in “Alternative Building & Construction.”

Like many of the experimental colleges and universities founded in the 1960’s or highly influenced by them, there would be an emphasis on written evaluations over grades, and the building of a strong portfolio and/or body of work to represent the students growing abilities. Examples of this approach to academics with good reputations include Reed College and UC Santa Cruz.

Obviously it would be useful to bring together resources from many sources to get a sustainable university going. When I originated the plan I considered cases like the former Goddard College in Vermont, which had a lot of facilities that were no longer fully in use. If an existing college wanted to implement these concepts it would be ideal, for they would likely have a leg up on all appropriate accreditation. This sort of college would be new, and might attract interested parties from diverse areas, with the potential for a strong donor program.

Stephen Grettenberg currently works as a technical director for a small division running RIO programs at the University of California at Berkeley. He is currently involved in several projects related to sustainability and education and is interested in collaborating on projects. He may be reached at his email: stephen@earthrenaissance.org ●

The Historical Context of Educational Alternatives

BY RON MILLER

We've been asking readers what topics you would like to see addressed in Education Revolution. A number of you have expressed interest in learning more about the history of the educational alternatives movement. So, here is the first of what may become an occasional series. Let us know if you'd like to read more.

Schooling as we know it is a creature of the Industrial Age, and this fact is the starting point for understanding the emergence of educational alternatives. Education in pre-industrial societies (that is, before the early 1800s in western Europe and North America) was a rather simple affair. Children took part in the daily activities and chores of their homesteads and local communities, and became organically integrated into the rhythms of life. Basic reading and math skills were taught at home, for the most part, for practical purposes; a small number of young people living in privileged circumstances received private tutoring to prepare for advanced studies in law, theology, or medicine, but formal education was not considered necessary for the vast majority.

Mass education began to take place in state-provided school systems only when the rise of a manufacturing economy required hordes of workers and a more exclusive tier of managers. Industrialization caused a major social and cultural upheaval; it not only introduced machines but mechanization. Impersonal institutions began to promote specialization, professionalism, and the cult of expertise, replacing small scale craftsmanship. An engineering mentality, valuing measurement, standardization, and precise control over variety and spontaneity, began to permeate society. Commercial relationships replaced communal networks of mutual support. Consumerism replaced resourcefulness and self-sufficiency. Charles Eisenstein (a popular AERO conference presenter) has analyzed these trends in his brilliant book *The Ascent of Humanity*.

The 1830s were a fascinating and pivotal time in American history—a choice point where society had alternative paths it might have followed. On one side were the promoters of industrialization: entrepreneurs, inventors, speculators, investors, and those who envisioned the “manifest destiny” of a great economic empire. On the other side were romantics and visionaries of many stripes: Transcendentalists, communarians, abolitionists, pacifists, advocates of gender equality and sexual freedom, poets and artists, and even a few visionary entrepreneurs who proposed a more egalitarian form of capitalism. The first group was represented by Horace Mann, a moralistic, pro-industry politician who established the tem-

plate for state-controlled schooling. The second was embodied by Bronson Alcott, who sought to promote what he called “human culture”—the development of latent wisdom and spirituality—through the intimate person-centered education he practiced in his independent school.

Mann's approach became the cultural norm, the mainstream, while Alcott's was treated from the start as a marginalized alternative. Those who held economic and political power gave decisive support to Mann's program; the public viewed Alcott as a dreamy radical who took children's experiences seriously and had the audacity to include a black child in his school. When Alcott offered to speak at one of Mann's institutes for public school teachers, Mann dismissed him because he considered Alcott's views “hostile to the existence of the state.” It was clear from the start whose interests would be served by the emerging system of public schooling.

Alcott's successors—the romantics, anarchists, spiritual seekers and social critics who experimented with educational alternatives in subsequent generations—started with these questions and sought to reclaim what is organic, natural, latent in human nature. They sought to reclaim communal democracy, self-sufficiency, and inner wisdom.

Perhaps industrialization and empire-building were historically inevitable; the lure of wealth, power, and technological wizardry were just too dazzling to resist. But what was sacrificed in the pursuit of industrial development? What human qualities were diminished when culture became mechanized, commercialized, and standardized? The empire builders were not worried by such questions; the new economic order was an end in itself that justified the means used to achieve it. However, Alcott's successors—the romantics, anarchists, spiritual seekers and social critics who experimented with educational alternatives in subsequent generations—started with these questions and sought to reclaim what is organic, natural, latent in human nature. They sought to reclaim

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Networking the Networks

News from the world of educational alternatives

New Alternative Education Association in Turkey is seeking writers for its magazine

We are a group of people who got together after the 1st Alternative Education Symposium in Turkey in 2005. This group assembled with “what we can do?” question in the light of discussions around the introduced radical viewpoints and movements on the whole education history when compulsory mass education became public appearance. Our Association is based in Istanbul.

In our group, we have people who are mothers, fathers, children, teachers, institutions implementing alternative education, people from different occupation groups and diverse business fields who are approaching, living and wanting to learn, to teach alternative education's various aspects. Also those who are trying and struggling to implement different methods in Turkey. And when education is concerned, these people among us would say and remark that “it cannot be like this, there must be something wrong, there must be a different way” and yet they are searching for proper ways, paths and some time they manage to find the proper way.

Our objective is to learn and discuss the various alternative education models that are implemented and practiced for many years around the world. And we would like to share what we found and learned and so we can meet at similar solutions.

We would like to get your contribution for our effort. Your support and contribution can be fulfilled by contacting us when you come to Turkey, sending books and magazine for the library we want to develop and establish. Our address is Kalyoncukulluk Cad. No: 111 Kat: 1 Tarlabasi Istanbul Turkey.

We want to publish a book-magazine which will be twice in a year. Half of the articles will be from different alternative education authors from different countries and the other half from Turkish authors. We thought that the first issue should consist of general alternative education. With the second issue onwards we think special topic for each issue. We would be very happy if you support our magazine.

The length of the article will be max. 15,000 character. The deadline for first issue is 15th of October and you can send the writings to bilgi@alternatifegitimdernegi.org.tr eylemkorkmaz@hotmail.com or bulentakdag@hotmail.com.

We think the future will be better as long as we question, to link and associate our efforts with our belief in human and humanly feelings. We strongly believe in this! We hope to hear from you and collaborate with you.

Best Regards,

Alternative Education Association Turkey

Curriculum Resources for Educational Alternatives

BY RAY MORLEY

The Iowa Association of Alternative Education (IAAE) supports a web site (www.iaae.net) devoted to assisting anyone to develop alternative schools and programs. The primary message of the organization is that “Alternative education serves to ensure that every young person may find a pathway to the education goals of the community.” The web site helps individuals to acquire information about different types of alternatives, issues related to alternative education, and resources to assist individuals to develop and maintain schools and programs. Curriculum resources are identified under the menu “Resources.”

IAAE would like anyone interested to access and contribute curriculum ideas and information to assist in making the web site a major source of assistance to anyone wanting to develop or improve an alternative school or program anywhere in the world. Ideas can be sent to raymondmorl@gmail.com.

IAAE has identified “curriculum” as a major issue among public school alternative educators. Three primary goals of the schools and programs include personal/social development, career development and academic development. Alternative educators consistently ask for materials and ideas that will assist them to address the primary goals. The resources being organized via the IAAE web site are intended to serve as a means to address the questions being asked about curriculum. A world-wide sharing system for curriculum (curriki) is already included on the web site along with an extensive number of resources on personal/social, career and academic development.

IAAE recognizes that private as well as public schools utilize printed information and teaching techniques to manage learning. The printed information and techniques are not and do not need to be held unique to public or private educators. Open sharing is being encouraged as the best approach for the future of our children and youth.

Building Excellent Schools

Building Excellent Schools is guided by a *set of core beliefs* in its pursuit of excellent urban charter schools. BES believes that the greatest value for urban communities, desperately in need of strong educational options for their children, should be determined by student academic performance. School safety is critical, but it is not enough. Parental satisfaction is important, but it is not the bellwether of exemplary education. The most important question to ask in striving for academic excellence is: “How are students performing?”

In more than a decade of experience with the charter school movement, Building Excellent Schools has identified and worked with those urban charter schools that have set the bar by dramatically outperforming their peers. Along with the nation’s highest-performing urban charter schools, BES believes that urban families have the right to choose an excellent public charter school.

As a leader in the charter school landscape, the organization was well-positioned to launch the Building Excellent Schools Fellowship in 2001. The Fellowship – an aggregation

of lessons learned in the movement – raises the quality of urban charter schools in the United States by helping entrepreneurial individuals design, build and maintain excellent schools in underserved communities while building partnerships and networks of support. The Building Excellent Schools Fellowship is a rigorous, year-long training program in general charter school management, which in some ways places it in parallel with programs offered at graduate schools of business and education. However, instead of its participants being students that come to the program with myriad interests that they pay the university to help develop and refine, Building Excellent Schools Fellows are carefully selected leaders-in-training who come already focused on one goal, founding and operating a Fellowship school, and instead of paying BES for its training, recipients **are paid by BES** a generous professional stipend of **\$80,000** for their year’s work in the program. ●

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Historical Context of Educational Alternatives

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communal democracy, self-sufficiency, and inner wisdom. That is the underlying historical/cultural meaning of the educational alternatives movement.

Fast forward to the 1960s (we’ll go into the interim details in later articles); by then the industrial empire had developed into such a powerful, all-consuming system that sensitive people started to rebel against what they began to perceive as “technocracy.” Inspired by the courage of African Americans struggling for equal rights and human dignity, young people began asking tough questions about the dominant culture and began to experiment with alternatives. They sought existential freedom, authentic spirituality, and participatory democracy, and quickly realized that their education did not lead to these. So they questioned their universities, and then the schools that fed into them.

Alcott’s descendents in the 1960s included radical educators like A.S. Neill and John Holt, and social critics like Paul Goodman and Ivan Illich, all of whose writings inspired thousands of parents, teachers and young people to abandon the school system and create organic “free schools” instead. When this movement became difficult to sustain during the conservative restoration that began in the 1970s, educational dissent found an outlet in homeschooling, while some visionaries made heroic efforts to introduce authentic democracy into public schooling. It is the movement launched by this ferment in the 1960s and 1970s that came to be known explicitly as “alternative” education. While the term was new, we have seen here that the principles reflect a cultural struggle that began 130 years earlier. It is a struggle that continues today.

Ron Miller, editor of *Education Revolution*, received his Ph.D. in American Studies from Boston University; his research focused on educational alternatives and he has been writing and teaching about this subject for 25 years. He currently teaches courses on American history and globalization at Champlain College in Vermont. He can be reached at holistic@gmavt.net ●



Ron Miller (left) with Dave Lehman at the 2008 AERO conference. PHOTO BY CALVIN HALEY.

News & Communications

COMPILED BY CAROL MORLEY AND RON MILLER

National.....

Massachusetts governor proposes community-run schools, by Tania deLuzuriaga and Matt Viser *Boston Globe* June 11, 2008. Governor Deval Patrick, in a potential break with the teachers unions that helped elect him, is set to propose a new form of public school that would assume unprecedented control over matters ranging from curriculum and hiring decisions to policies on school uniforms and the length of the school year. The governor's proposal for "readiness schools," a key element of his sweeping 10-year education plan, aims to combine features of the state's charter schools and Boston's experimental pilot schools. Governed by local boards and freed from many constraints imposed by unions, school districts, and the state, the readiness schools would adapt to community needs and offer new alternatives in school systems across the state, administration officials said.

Bronx 8th-graders Boycott Practice Exam but Teacher May Get Ax, by Juan Gonzalez, *NY Daily News*: Students at a South Bronx middle school have pulled off a stunning boycott against standardized testing. More than 160 students in six different classes at Intermediate School 318 in the South Bronx - virtually the entire eighth grade - refused to take a three-hour practice exam for the statewide social studies test. Instead, the students handed in blank exams. Then they submitted signed petitions with a list of grievances to school Principal Maria Lopez and the Department of Education. According to the petition, they are sick and tired of the "constant, excessive and stressful testing" that causes them to "lose valuable instructional time with our teachers." School administrators blamed the boycott on a 30-year-old probationary social studies teacher, Douglas Avella. The afternoon of the protest, the principal ordered Avella out of the classroom, reassigned him to an empty room in the school and ordered him to have no further contact with students. A few days later, in a reprimand letter, Lopez accused Avella of initiating the boycott and taking "actions [that] caused a riot at the school." The students say their protest was entirely peaceful. In only one class, they say, was there some loud clapping after one exam proctor reacted angrily to their boycott. Avella denied that he urged the students to boycott tests.

From **Homeschooling Gets Green Light from Court; Reverses Ruling that Parents had no Right to Teach Children**, by Bob Unruh, *WorldNetDaily*: An appeals court in California has ruled that state law does permit homeschool-

ing "as a species of private school education" but that statutory permission for parents to teach their own children could be "overridden in order to protect the safety of a child who has been declared dependent." The long-awaited case resolves many of the questions that had developed in homeschooling circles across the nation when the same court earlier found that parents had no such rights - statutorily or constitutionally - in California. "This is a great victory for homeschool freedom," said Michael Farris, who is chairman of the Home School Legal Defense Association and was one of the attorneys who had argued the case. "I have never seen such an impressive array of people and organizations coming to the defense of homeschooling. . . . Tens of thousands of California parents teaching over 166,000 homeschooled children are now breathing easier," he said. The opinion said the judges were not deciding whether homeschool should be allowed. "That job is for the Legislature," they said.

From **"Two Million Minutes" Suggests It's Time to Improve U.S. Education**, by Mitchell Landsberg, *LA Times*: A Memphis entrepreneur's documentary compares high-achieving students from India, China and America. It has drawn mixed reactions from academics. As both an entrepreneur and the father of 14- and 16-year-old girls, Bob Compton wanted to know what schools in other countries were doing that American schools weren't, and why the United States performed so miserably on international student comparisons. The result was "Two Million Minutes," a one-hour documentary comparing the educational experiences of six students: two Americans, two Indians and two Chinese. It focuses on high-achieving students from top schools in Bangalore, Shanghai and Carmel, Ind., a suburb of Indianapolis. All are impressive, but the American students come across as slackers by comparison. The clear message is that the Indian and Chinese students work a lot harder. The movie doesn't spend much time on curriculum or "rigor and relevance," the kinds of issues that dominate U.S. education discussions. Tony Wagner, a Harvard education professor, was among those who watched Compton's film at its Cambridge screening and one of the few whose reaction was positive. Wagner studies innovation in U.S. education and has written a book due out this summer called "The Global Achievement Gap." Wagner said Compton hit a nerve at Harvard because he was confronting an implacable divide between the American business community and the education establishment.

National.....

From **2 School Entrepreneurs Lead the Way on Change**, by Sam Dillon, *NY Times*: Teach for America, founded in 1989 by Wendy Kopp, has 14,000 alumni, some of whom have founded charter schools and other educational start-ups, or are rising leaders in school systems nationwide. Ms. Kopp describes Teach for America as a social movement to improve education for the poor. And she has big ambitions; she is urging alumni to run for public office, aiming to see 100 elected by 2010. Ms. Kopp has built her group into a powerhouse, with an annual budget of \$120 million, a national staff of 835, and partnerships with Goldman Sachs, Google and other blue-chip names. This spring, she presided over its most successful campus recruiting campaign, and made *Time* magazine's list of the world's 100 most influential people. In the early years of Teach for America, Ms. Kopp's husband, Richard Barth, was one of her closest aides. Today he runs the Knowledge Is Power Program, or KIPP, a charter school network that has won praise for turning low-achieving poor children into solid students. At KIPP, Mr. Barth is leading a closely watched effort to build a network of 65 charter schools into a much larger organization that can enroll a significant share of public school students in Houston, New Orleans, Washington and elsewhere. Over the years, Teach for America has attracted significant numbers of highly qualified recruits to long-term careers in education. A third of its alumni have stayed in the classroom, and many others have become principals or educational entrepreneurs. Since 2000, Doris and Donald Fisher, founders of the Gap clothing chain, have given \$75 million to KIPP and Teach for America, encouraging cooperation. Today 60 percent of KIPP's principals are Teach for America alumni. The relationship tightened in 2005, when Mr. Barth became chief executive of KIPP's national nonprofit organization.

From **Parents Teaching 'Old Math' on the Sly**, By Jocelyn Noveck, AP: On an occasional evening at the kitchen table in Brooklyn, N.Y., Victoria Morey has been known to sit down with her 9-year-old son and do something she's not supposed to. "I am a rebel," confesses this mother of two. And just what is this subversive act in which Morey engages — with a child, yet? Long division. As many parents across the country know, this and some other familiar formulas have been supplanted, in an increasing number of schools, by concept-based curricula aiming to teach the ideas behind mathematics rather than rote procedures. They call it the Math Wars: The debate, at times acrimonious, over which way is best to teach kids math. In its most black-and-white form, it pits schools hoping to prepare kids for a new world against reluctant parents, who feel the traditional way is best and their kids are being shortchanged. Pat Cooney, math coordinator for six public schools in Ridgefield, which over the last two years have implemented the Growing in Math curriculum, has seen a lot of angry parents. One problem, Cooney says, is that parents remember math as offering only one way to solve a problem. "We're saying that there's more than one way," Cooney says. "The outcome will be the same, but how we get there will be different." Thus, when a parent is asked to multiply 88 by 5, we'll do it with pen and paper, multiplying 8 by 5 and carrying over the 4, etc. But a child today might reason that 5 is half of 10, and 88 times 10 is 880, so 88 times 5 is half of that, 440 — poof, no pen, no paper. "The traditional way is really a shortcut," Cooney says. "We want kids to be so confident with numbers that it becomes intuitive." The "Math Wars" have been playing out since at least 1989, when the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics issued a document recommending concept-based teaching — which was, the group says, distorted by critics and "exaggerated in every direction."

International.....

KENYA

Cabinet Gives Nod to Caning, by Stephen Munyiri and Miki Mwaniki, *The Daily Nation*: The Cabinet has approved the re-introduction of caning in schools, Energy minister Kiraitu Murungi has announced. The cane would be brought back due to the escalating cases of unrest in schools, he said. Mr. Murungi attributed the current unrest in schools to what he called "too much democracy," which degenerated into chaos. "We met as Cabinet last week and what we observed is that there is too much democracy that is quickly descending into anarchy. There is too much freedom in this country and what we are witnessing in schools is just a reflection of the larger society," he said. "The Cabinet has decided and teachers should listen to this: Let us not have child kings and queens in our schools, you spare the rod and spoil the child. If a child does something wrong, he or she must be caned. As a Government we have said discipline has to be enforced in our schools." Mr. Murungi said another

cause of indiscipline in schools could be the "mass action" culture, which he said had been introduced in the country by some politicians. The Children's Legal Action Network executive director Tom Chavangi said he was appalled by calls by some leaders for the re-introduction of corporal punishment in schools. Parliament banned caning in schools through the Children's Act, which came into force in 2001. The recent wave of school unrest has led to calls for the ban to be reversed, resulting in a debate over the issue.

TURKEY

From **Another Failed Test for the East** by Mustafa Oguz, & Safak Timur, *Turkish Daily News*: Children from Turkey's eastern provinces are again the losers in the country's education system where jungle rules prevail. It is sometimes packed classrooms, ever-changing teachers, a desolate social life, or sheer

International.....

indifference that eliminate students in the survival of the fittest game. The economic and social plight of Turkey's eastern provinces manifested itself once again in the results of the country's latest high school entrance exam, with students from less fortunate backgrounds crowding the lowest ranks. Within a system that gets more competitive each year, the High School Entrance Exam, or OKS, is increasingly burdensome for students and parents to take on, faced with mounting pressure to take private courses given the deficient educational infrastructure. Some schools in Turkey's eastern region might struggle with financial and social abandonment, but students from every part of society are also beset with a deficient education system that many hope will improve with a new curriculum. Tens of thousands of elementary school graduates were dismayed by the results of the OKS, another slap in the face of authorities in the Turkish education system. More than 30,000 students scored points "not worth calculating." Associate professor Ömer Kutlu of Ankara University's education faculty said poor results stem from a lack of capacity to understand what is heard or read on the part of many students. "Turkey scores very low in international studies on literary effectiveness," he said and added that the system pushes students toward greater competition in test taking skills. An Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2006 report revealed that 40 percent of Turkish 15-year-old students scored one on a scale of six on tests that measure text comprehension skills. "The problem lies with the teachers, who sometimes lack enough skills," Kutlu said and added that the whole system is oriented toward making children able to solve tests, not preparing them for life.

UNITED KINGDOM

From Schools Used for 'Social Engineering', Claims Headteacher, by Graeme Paton, *Telegraph UK*: A leading headmaster who is leaving one of the most popular schools in the state system to work in the private sector has accused the Government of turning teachers into "social workers and surrogate parents." Rod MacKinnon, the head of Bexley Grammar School, said schools were being forced to shun traditional lessons as ministers manipulated the education system for the purposes of "social engineering." He said schools "cannot solve all of society's ills" and should be left to teach. His comments came just days after ministers published new guidance requiring schools to monitor obesity rates, drug taking and teenage pregnancy as part of a new duty to promote pupil "wellbeing." Writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, he insisted that ministers maintained "unrealistic expectations" of what schools could achieve – pushing children towards educational "failure. . . There are those who wish to use children and schools as social engineers with a view to creating a different society but we should not even be trying to do such things," he said. "Children need to be nurtured, educated and cared for, not thrown into the frontline of social reform. Muddled thinking is guaranteeing failure for the noble aspirations we all commonly hold for the education

of the young." He insisted that good schools had to focus on "learning, achievement and values," but were increasingly being asked to do parents' jobs. It follows claims this week from Bernice McCabe, the headmistress of the independent North London Collegiate School, that the education system was leading to the "cultural and intellectual impoverishment" of a generation of children as ministers focus on "woolly" goals.

From Attenborough Alarmed as Children are Left Flummoxed by Test on the Natural World, by Sarah Cassidy, *The Independent*: Children have lost touch with the natural world and are unable to identify common animals and plants, according to a survey. The study also found that playing in the countryside was children's least popular way of spending their spare time, and that they would rather see friends or play on their computer than go for a walk or play outdoors. Sir David Attenborough warned that children who lack any understanding of the natural world would not grow into adults who cared about the environment. "The wild world is becoming so remote to children that they miss out," he said, "and an interest in the natural world doesn't grow as it should. Nobody is going to be able to protect the natural world unless they understand it." Experts blamed the widening gulf between children and nature on over-protective parents and the hostility to children among some conservationists, who fear that they will damage the environment. They said that this lack of exposure to outdoor play in natural environments was vital for children's social and emotional development. Dr Martin Maudsley, play development officer for Playwork Partnerships, at the University of Gloucestershire, said that adults had become too protective of wild places: "Environmental sensitivities should not be prioritised over children. Play is the primary mechanism through which children engage and connect with the world, and natural environments are particularly attractive, inspiring and satisfying for kids. Something magical occurs when children and wild spaces mix."

SWEDEN

Sweden lets school choice take root by Malin Rising / Associated Press, July 28, 2008. Schools run by private enterprise? Free iPods and laptop computers to attract students? It may sound out of place in Sweden, that paragon of taxpayer-funded cradle-to-grave welfare. But a sweeping reform of the school system has survived the critics and 16 years later is spreading and attracting interest abroad. "I think most people, parents and children, appreciate the choice," said Bertil Östberg, from the Ministry of Education. "You can decide what school you want to attend and that appeals to people." Since the change was introduced in 1992 by a center-right government that briefly replaced the long-governing Social Democrats, the numbers have shot up. In 1992, 1.7 percent of high schoolers and 1 percent of elementary schoolchildren were privately educated. Now the figures are 17 percent and 9 percent.

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Before the reform, most families depended on state-run schools following a uniform national curriculum. Now they can turn to the “friskolor,” or “independent schools,” which choose their own teaching methods and staff, and manage their own buildings. They remain completely government-financed and are not allowed to charge tuition fees. The difference is that their government funding goes to private companies which then try to run the schools more cost-effectively and keep whatever taxpayer money they save.

Despite initially being labeled elitist, the new system has gradually gained support and is being recognized as a success story. Michael Fallon, who served in Britain’s former Conserva-

tive government, said his party is working on a similar plan to be implemented if it defeats the ruling Labour party in the next election. “It is a model that is clearly working and we need to learn from that,” said Fallon, who visited Sweden in May.

Some Swedes say the private system drains funds from public education, but officials say independent schools have forced public schools to raise their own standards and improve efficiency. “Today, I think we have at least as good quality if not better than some independent schools because we have really joined the battle and use our money in a much better way,” said Eva-Lotta Kastenholt, who is in charge of public schools in Sollentuna, a suburb of Stockholm. ●

Conferences and other Resources

PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM

October 23-25, 2008

Goddard College

www.goddard.edu/symposium

The Progressive Education Symposium, October 23-25 at Goddard College, will bring together activists, educators, and scholars to explore our shared vocation and our vision of the future of progressive education.

This symposium is designed for a wide range of progressive educators, higher education, members of grassroots organizations and non-profits with educational missions, Pre K to 12 schools, holistic and integral educators. We encourage the participation of younger and culturally diverse persons.

Working groups will design processes to produce proposals regarding such issues as preserving our legacy; forming alliances with grassroots and other change organizations; how activist training programs might dovetail with service learning and internships/practica in degree programs; making progressive education more accessible financially and culturally to disadvantaged or marginal populations; designing doctoral programs; bridging the gap between politics and spirituality in our programs.

FIRST NATIONAL GREEN CHARTER SCHOOLS CONFERENCE

November 7-9, 2008

Madison, Wisconsin

The conference is presented by the Green Charter Schools Network – www.greencharterschools.org, UW-Madison’s Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies – <http://www.nelson.wisc.edu> – and many partnering educational and environmental organizations. The Green Charter Schools Network, a new national non-profit organization, was launched in February 2008. With a vision of every person being environmentally literate and practicing sustainability in their community, the Network supports the establishment, enhancement and advancement of public charter schools with environment-focused educational programs and practices. Numerous and diverse workshop sessions are planned.

For more information contact Senn Brown: 608-238-7491 senn@greencharterschools.org

Disregarded: Transforming the School and Workplace Through Deep Respect and Courage by Jack H. Bender, is a highly acclaimed book about transforming organizational dynamics. Teachers and school administrators have found it to be a valuable resource. See www.inner-work.com/index.html

Book Reviews

THE HUMAN ODYSSEY: NAVIGATING THE TWELVE STAGES OF LIFE by Thomas Armstrong

REVIEWED BY DAVID MARSHAK
PROFESSOR EMERITUS, SEATTLE UNIVERSITY, AU-
THOR OF *THE COMMON VISION: PARENTING
AND EDUCATING FOR WHOLENESS*

Thomas Armstrong's *The Human Odyssey: Navigating the Twelve Stages of Life* (Sterling Publishing Co., New York: 2007) may well be the first truly integral exploration of the human life cycle in terms of chronicling the journey of life from prebirth to death and beyond. In this intriguing and illuminating book, Armstrong weaves together the lenses of mythology, biology, psychology—developmental and transpersonal—spirituality, anthropology, biography, and autobiography into a complex yet readily accessible narrative.

The Human Odyssey identifies two developmental lines that govern human development: *adaptation*, the process of coming up from the body; and *remembering*, the process of coming down from the spirit. All stage theories in developmental psychology, including those of Piaget, Freud, and Erikson, are “mainly stories about adaptation.” Remembering is about “our essence as nonmaterial beings” and includes experiences from mythology and folklore, transpersonal psychology, consciousness studies, spirituality, and the arts. Armstrong points out that: “Everyone has some combination of the *adapter* and the *rememberer* in them.”

Armstrong includes a great deal of contemporary scientific knowledge, but he reaches beyond the wall of scientism to name twelve stages in the life cycle and consider the qualities of adaptation and remembering in each stage of life.

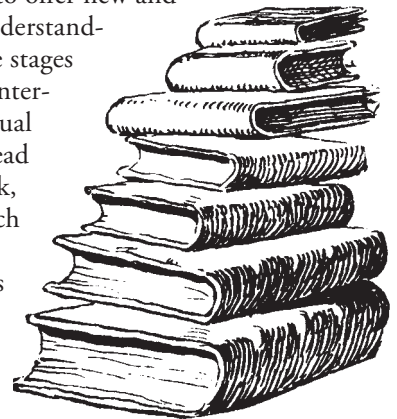
These twelve stages are prebirth, birth, infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, late childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, midlife, mature adulthood, late adulthood, and death and dying. He also includes a chapter entitled “Beyond Death: Travel to Other Lands.”

The book provides a discussion of each stage in human life from an integral perspective. For example, the chapter on late childhood presents a recitation of a fairy tale from the Brothers Grimm and a reflection on the mythic insight it reveals about this stage; a discussion of *adrenarche*—a critical development in the maturation of the adrenal glands at this stage—and of the biological and psychosocial impacts of this adrenal maturation on the child; a description of various brain development phenomena and other biochemical changes at this age and their apparent effects on identity; pertinent stories from the lives of Annie Dillard, Benjamin Franklin, and Carl Jung about this age; the implications

of various developments in late childhood for schooling and for peer relations; and the notion that the gift of this particular stage that is available for development at any age is *ingenuity*. Armstrong integrates all of these various modes of knowing and relates them with engaging and enlightening prose.

The Human Odyssey is an aptly titled book. It is the story of a long and complex journey, told in a comfortable, trustworthy voice by a man who has devoted several decades to gaining the wisdom required to tell this story with the wide-ranging knowledge and integral insight that it deserves. The book is an excellent read for anyone interested in her or his own life story—or in the story of the life cycle of contemporary homo sapiens. It's also a book that ought to become required reading in the human development courses that young people take in college, because it will give them a far more integral and wisdom-based portrait of human development than what any traditional text might offer.

Homeschoolers and alternative educators will find particular value in Armstrong's chapters on infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, late childhood, and adolescence, which are likely to offer new and creative insights and understandings about each of these stages of life. Anyone who is interested in children's spiritual lives will also want to read Armstrong's earlier book, *The Radiant Child*, which is a classic and brilliant exploration of children's spiritual and nonordinary consciousness and experiences. ●



Correspondence

I arrived in Troy NY for the AERO Conference on a hunch and with no expectations. My desire was to connect NAREN, a non-profit, non-affiliated educational organization that supports alternative teachers in the public schools systems, with another well-known organization serving the needs of youth outside the mainstream.

It was a wonderful experience. I met so many people, lovely people, and made several, I hope, lifetime friends.

Having been in this endeavor called “education” since I was four years old in one capacity or another, I wonder a lot about it still. What are we doing?

Public schools are meant to do many many things. Often, it seems they forget that the schools are filled with individually different children, in function and needs. If they did not do this, there would be no need for alternative education! So, it is obvious to me that the public school system *creates* alternative education by ignoring the needs of children.

This, then, is what makes alternative education different and needed. *Some children* need their needs met OR they become damaged. These are basal needs, such as affection, affinity, safety, and, in some cases, nutrition. These are things a family should provide for any child born into it.

I watched a man yesterday angrily slug his (approximately 12 year-old) daughter in the back in a parking lot. I yelled at him as he kept on storming down the aisle looking for his automobile while the daughter, crying and hurting, was left with the mother scurrying to catch up with the storming man. I asked the mother what was wrong with the man. She pointed at the daughter and said, “She is the one who started it with her complaining.” (I obviously had a few things to say on this, but I would be digressing.)

What is pertinent here is that this became a viral event in my mind. My main thought was ‘What is it like in that home?’ It could have been an isolated incident. I doubt it, tho. If a man cannot control himself in public when he is apparent to anyone, what goes on behind closed doors in the home? It still hurts to think about it.

People get angry because either their needs are not met or something is taken away from them that they need. A needs-based school should be low in anger. A school where a child needs are not met and a home where the child’s needs are also not met is a setup for an angry frustrated population. What happens if a kid goes to a school where there is no anger and graduates into a society filled with people who are?

We need to prepare children to deal with ANYTHING. Sure as sunrise whatever they are not prepared for will eventually be their crucible. A public school is aimed at “a balanced citizenry” and they do part of that very well

on average. On average. (Who wants average? Only Joe Walsh!) They learn a bit of math, and science, and social studies, etc. and then go out into the world totally unprepared (by the school) in money-handling, love, spirituality, sex, imagination, practical problem-solving, higher level decision-making, and a few other unnecessary skill/knowledge areas. They rely on the family to do that part.

What if the family doesn’t? Alternative education is positioned to pick up the slack. I think this is a target area that I did not get to see at the AERO Conference. Surely someone presented on needs fulfillment, but I was only able to attend 3 or 4 breakouts, so I would not know.

I would like to see a lot of concentrated attention and discussion paid to needs-based education.

Some questions to answer/discuss:

- How do we assess children’s needs in our school?
- How do we plan to meet children’s needs in our school environment?
- How do we know needs have been met?
- How can we relate and collaborate with the parents, or significant others, in the child’s life to get their needs met?

As I am also a professor of an online at-risk education Masters program, I work with teachers who have many needs themselves trying to meet children’s needs at the same time. This becomes a large discussion in our program: How do the faculty/adults get their needs met in the school/program?

We do this so our teacher-students do not project their needs onto the children who do not need a needy adult professional working with them.

I am open to discussion on this topic. No right answers, just a needed vehicle for making it an obvious area of concern.

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*What makes the names in the larger font size unique one might ask?
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Wesley Clark (right), a student at the Harriet Tubman Free School in Albany, gave an inspiring keynote presentation at the 2008 AERO conference. Meanwhile, the younger kids (above) found their own sources of inspiration!



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